


Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement

Kimberlé Crenshaw (Editor) , Garry Peller (Editor) , Kendall Thomas (Editor) , Neil Gotanda

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In the past few years, a new generation of progressive intellectuals has dramatically transformed how law, race, and racial power are understood and discussed in America. Questioning the old assumptions of both liberals and conservatives with respect to the goals and the means of traditional civil rights reform, critical race theorists have presented new paradigms for understanding racial injustice and new ways of seeing the links between race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. This reader, edited by the principal founders and leading theoreticians of the critical race theory movement, gathers together for the first time the movement's most important essays.

Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement Details

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Author : Kimberlé Crenshaw (Editor) , Garry Peller (Editor) , Kendall Thomas (Editor) , Neil Gotanda

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From Reader Review Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement for online ebook

Jessica says

I read this in a political science course in college. The editors choose writings that force the reader to challenge her assumptions of the aims of affirmative action and desegregation while arming racial justice scholars and activists with a new language/theoretical framework for understanding race. There is just so much here.

Kathleen O'Neal says

This was a very interesting book and really gives the reader a good idea of the diversity of perspectives within critical race theory as well as a sense of what it is that unifies these diverse perspectives. One of my biggest criticisms of the book is that in its understandable focus on African-American issues, it didn't deal as much with issues involving American Indians, Hispanic Americans, and Asian-Americans. I would also have been interested in reading more about the laws surrounding interracial marriage and multiracial people in the book. That said, the book was still a worthwhile read and it truly helps the interested reader to separate the reality from the media panic surrounding critical race theory.

Liz Maas says

This book changed my life and radically altered my thoughts on the legacy of education litigation efforts. I was lead here after reading work by Derrick Bell.

Orlando Smart-Powell says

Much of it is soaked in legalese, but well, well worth the time.

Scott Jackson says

Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement is a phenomenal work. It is a compilation of some of the most important writings that formed and sustained the Critical Race Theory (“CRT”) movement. The book includes articles from Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Anthony Cook, Duncan Kennedy, Gary Peller, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and others. All of the articles add something to CRT, and read independently, add significant portions to the CRT movement.

The central thesis of the book can be found in the introduction, where it states that the purpose of CRT is to “examine the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination.” Or, otherwise stated, CRT seeks to offer the counter narrative to centuries of the narrative espoused in American legal thought.

Victor Caldwell, in a book review for the Columbia Law Review, sums up the impact of Critical Race Theory when he states, “Critical Race Theory marks a certain coming of age for this important movement. Through their choices of articles, the editors both tell the story of how CRT came to be and define its important characteristics.” Critical Race Theory brought many of the most important pieces in the CRT movement and cemented them to create a groundbreaking story of its own.

CRT plays such a significant role in race and American law because it is the American movement that focuses on applying Marxist concepts to reshaping American law to examine and correct racial inequalities. CRT focuses on correcting institutional racism, which in turn should correct individual racism.

While the editorial work is superb, perhaps the real genius of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, and Kendall Thomas is the way the writings are compiled to tell the story of CRT. Upon seeking approval of my book, my professor told me to read the piece in a way that that allowed me to understand an overarching counter narrative. I was confused by this statement. However, I read the book, starting at the beginning. It was not long before I realized that I was learning the story of CRT.

The entire first section, three articles, is devoted to explaining the narrative. After explaining the narrative, the editors construct the counter narrative. It is one of the most powerful recitations of the counter narrative to racial oppression. It is plain that there was clear racial oppression, and dictates further that something had to be done. The story is phenomenal. I would recommend that if you want a strong counter narrative for your paper you should read the first section of this book.

Derrick Bell, in the first section, argues that much of the Civil Rights movement did little to accomplish the desired goals. More importantly, he argues that CRT is necessary because the Civil Rights movement could not eradicate racism and racial injustice. In this first section Richard Delgado points out that an inner circle of white scholars were responsible for most scholarship on the Civil Rights movement. Therefore, CRT was needed—as a mechanism for the racial minorities to express their own voice.

I do have a couple criticisms though. Sometimes when we believe something so strongly we have a difficult time analyzing arguments against our point, and the articles contained in this book have that problem. The articles strongly advocate their points, as they should. However, there is very little reflection on opposing points of view. I wish there were a few more refuted counterpoints. Due to this deficiency, I make counterpoints myself and the author loses the chance to challenge them (refuting my points would probably be relatively easy).

There does seem to be a major contradiction between the pieces. Bell strongly argues that the civil rights movement was just a mere interest convergence, and it is not all it is cracked up to be. However, in the CLS portion of the book, CLS is criticized for taking this position. Why is it okay for a founder of CRT to take a position that is unacceptable for CLS to take? I am sure that there is a simple answer to this, but from my limited experience on the subject and a lack of explanation, I am left seeing a glaring contradiction in the book.

Finally, a critique that goes towards many critical studies—I do not believe that change occurs through the superstructure. Typical Marxist thinking is that the base needs be changed in order for change to occur. Instead, many critical scholars believe that the superstructure (law) needs to be changed in order for racism is to be excised. The problem with this approach is that change to both areas need to be made concurrently. To think that law individually can change people is silly. People make law, and so people must be remade. Once we learn that more progress will be attained legally. I do not believe that Critical Race Theorists completely disregard the base, but I do not believe that this book paid enough attention to changing the base.

In conclusion, I really enjoyed this book. Although there are a few flaws, the book advanced the field of CRT. The editors gave us a masterpiece in regards to counter narratives. The articles they chose addressed most of the issues surrounding CRT. The book stands independently as a great work too.

Avatara Smith carrington says

This seminal collection of work centering Critical Race Theory has not only proven to be personally revolutionary in how I both conceptualize and contextualize the nuanced interaction between race and law in this country and within the realm of academia but has also helped in rooting my understanding of jurisprudence in a manner that shifts my marginalized and disenfranchised identities from "object" to "subject". This has honestly proven to be a necessary facet in influencing the way that I envision liberation through the confines/practice of law.

Monica says

An excellent anthology of the seminal works around critical race theory- perfect for those who are interested in an introduction to CRT through multiple lenses.
