

the rise and influence of

CRITICAL THEORY

AND A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Der Religion...ist der Opium des Volkes.
(Religion...is the opium of the people.)

—Karl Marx

Evil men do not understand justice,
but those who seek the LORD understand it completely.

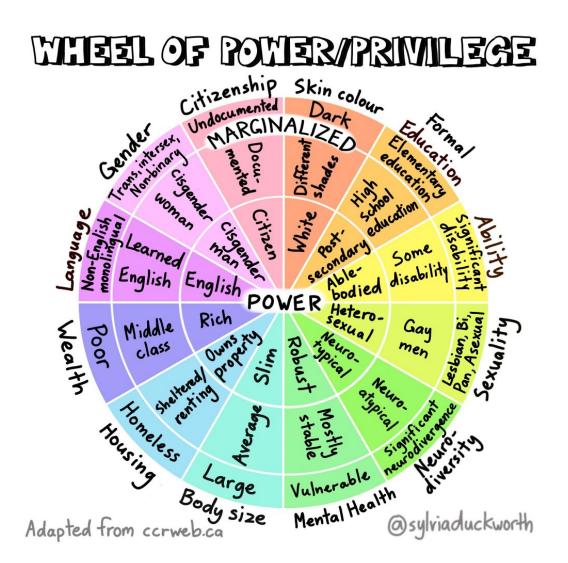
—Proverbs 28:5

CRITICAL THEORY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

An Illustration

We now live in a world where these 2 graphics are viewed as offering profound insight into who we are, what is wrong with the world, and by implication, what must be done about it:

Privilege—a system of "automatic advantages and unearned assets available only to dominant groups of people" (McIntosh)



TALKING ABOUT RACE been normalized over time and are now considered standard practices in the United States. And since white people still hold most of the institutional power in America, we have all internalized some aspects of white culture — including people of color. • The individual is the primary unit • Self-reliance • Independence & autonomy highly valued + rewarded Individuals assumed to be in control of their environment, "You get what you deserve" • The nuclear family: father, mother, 2.3 children is the ideal social unit Family • Husband is breadwinner and head of household Structure · Wife is homemaker and subordinate to the husband Children should have own rooms, be independent · Objective, rational linear thinking **Emphasis on** • Cause and effect relationships
• Quantitative emphasis • Based on Northern European immigrants' experience in the United States • Heavy focus on the British Empire • The primacy of Western (Greek, Roman) and Judeo-Christian tradition • Hard work is the key to success **Protestant** Work before play **Work Ethic** "If you didn't meet your goals, you didn't work hard enough" Christianity is the norm • Anything other than Judeo – Christian tradition is foreign Religion No tolerance for deviation from single god concept Wealth = worth Status, Power Your job is who you are & Authority Respect authority Heavy value on ownership of goods, space, property Plan for future Future • Delayed gratification • Follow rigid time schedules Orientation • Progress is always best Time viewed as a commodity "Tomorrow will be better" Based on European culture
 Steak and potatoes; "bland is best" Aesthetics Woman's beauty based on blonde, thin – "Barbie" • Man's attractiveness based on economic status, power, intellect Holidays • Based on Christian religions • Based on white history & male leaders Justice Based on English common law Protect property & entitlements Competition Intent counts Be #1 Win at all costs Winner/loser dichotomy Action Orientation Master and control nature • Must always "do something" about a situation Aggressiveness and Extroversion Decision-Making Majority rules (when Whites have power) Communication "The King's English" rules Written tradition Avoid conflict, intimacy Don't show emotion

Don't discuss personal life

Be polite

Aims

We are seeking to answer three questions as Christians:

- 1. What is (are) Critical Theory(-ies)?
- 2. How has Critical Theory affected our world?
- 3. How do we engage in a Critical Theory world?

1 What is Critical Theory?

The need for, and challenge of, definition

Not oversimplifying history

The presence of Theories

The fundamentally negative nature of the project

Critical Theory is fundamentally a method of social critique meant to achieve societal liberation via education in new sociological views.

Sociology—the study of human society

A rejection of existing authorities in favor of autonomy, esp. politically

Numbers 16—Korah (esp. v. 3)

"Critical theory refuses to identify freedom with any institutional arrangement or fixed system of thought. It questions the hidden assumptions and purposes of competing theories and existing forms of practice."¹

"A critical theory is chiefly concerned with revealing hidden biases and underexamined assumptions, usually by pointing out what have been termed 'problematics' which are ways in which society and the systems that it operates upon are going wrong."2

4 Aspects of Religion: god, man, sin, salvation

History

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Focused on economic conditions of (material) oppression, class struggle Esp. factories, mining, including child labor

Overcoming the 'false consciousness' of the proletariat, by which we are socialized into submission/oppression by bourgeois values

¹ Stephen Eric Bronner, Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 1.

² Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020), 13-14.

Offered liberation via revolution

"Workers of the world UNITE! You have nothing to lose but your chains."

Abolition of private property → liberation

Private property → theft, murder, war, etc

Need for revolt

"There is only one way in which the murderous death agonies of the old society and the bloody birth throes of the new society can be shortened, simplified and concentrated, and that way is revolutionary terror."

The Communist Manifesto (1848) with Friedrich Engels

Communist = common ownership of the means of production; free access to consumables; classless, stateless, moneyless (and godless)

"From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!"

Enacted in Russia (1917) with the Bolshevik (peasant) overthrow of Czar Nicolas cf. China (1949) by Mao Zedong

Spread to Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia, Burma, the Congo, Zimbabwe,

E. Germany, N. Korea, and Venezuela

Everywhere enacted, the results have been brutal

Widespread famine, oppression, and totalitarianism

Frankfurt School (Institut für Sozialforschung) (founded 1923)

Established by concerned Marxists

Critiqued Marxism for its narrow focus and ineffectiveness

"Critical theory was conceived within the intellectual crucible of Marxism. But its leading representatives were from the start dismissive of economic determinism, the stage theory of history, and any fatalistic belief in the 'inevitable triumph' of socialism. They were concerned less with what Marx called the economic 'base' than the political and cultural 'superstructure' of society. Their Marxism was of a different variety."

Hence, Cultural (neo-)Marxism

Key Figures

Max Horkheimer

Theodor Adorno—The Authoritarian Personality

Erich Fromm

Herbert Marcuse—Eros and Civilization

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)

The Prison Notebooks, translated and spread in 1950s-70s

Reversed Marx—economics are downstream of culture

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³ Karl Marx, "The Victory of the Counter-Revolution in Vienna," *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* 136 (Nov 1848), https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/11/06.htm.

⁴ Bronner, Critical Theory, 2.

"Hegemonic power"—a complex interlocking of political, social, and cultural forces in order to impose one group's norms/values on society Culture must be deChristianized, and then decapitalized "Socialism is precisely the religion that must kill Christianity. [It is a] religion

in the sense that it too is a faith...[and] because it has substituted for the consciousness of the transcendental God of the Catholics, trust in man and his best strengths as the sole spiritual reality."⁵

Left Germany as Hitler rose to power; moved to Columbia Univ. (NYC) in 1935 Rudi Dutschke—"the long march through the institutions."

1960s radicals became the professors, lawyers, journalists, etc of the cultural revolution

Contemporary Expressions

Peggy McIntosh

"White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Peace and Freedom 49 (July/August 1989): 10-12.

Robin DiAngelo

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva

Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.

Judith Butler

Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex. New York: Routledge, 1993. Kimberlé Crenshaw

"Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989, no. 1 (1989): Article 8.

Ibram X. Kendi

How to Be An Antiracist. New York: One World, 2019.

Paulo Freire

Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Penguin Books, 2017.

Key Terms

Oppression

Hegemony

Hierarchy

Patriarchy

⁵ Antonio Gramsci, "Audacia e Fede," Avanti, 22 May 1916. Translated by Robert S. Smith; cf. his Themelios article below.

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Heteronormativity
    Cisgender
        The Q—liberation from normal
        "The incoherence of queer Theory is an intentional feature, not a bug."
    Hence, DEI
Anthropology
    Primarily group identity
        Minimizes or denies both the individual and the whole
            "The individual in applied postmodernism is something like the sum total
            of the identity groups to which the person in question simultaneously
            belongs."<sup>7</sup>
       The dilemma of the T
Liberation
    "Social Justice" — liberation of the oppressed
    Celebrate diversity
   Multicultural relativism
Justice
   John Rawls (1921-2002), philosopher
       justice as fairness
       original position
            equitable outcomes via equal beginnings
        A Theory of Justice (1971)
        Political Liberalism (1993)
    Essentially, the struggle for power
        Kendi, How to Be Antiracist
        Department of Antiracism—unelected, plenipotentiary, experts
            Screening for potential inequities; punishing existing ones
   "Basic Tenets of Anti-racist Education" (DiAngelo)<sup>8</sup>
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- Racism exists today, in both traditional and modern forms.
- All members of this society have been socialized to participate in it.
- All white people benefit from racism, regardless of intentions; intentions are irrelevant.
- No one here chose to be socialized into racism (so no one is "bad'). But no one is neutral - to not act against racism is to support racism.

⁶ Pluckrose and Lindsay, Cynical Theories, 95.

⁷ Pluckrose and Lindsay, Cynical Theories, 61.

⁸ https://robindiangelo.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Anti-racism-handout-1-page-2016.pdf. Accessed January 10, 2023.

Power Dynamics

"Any system that gives one group power over another group dehumanizes both those with too much power and those without enough power."9

Intersectionality—sanctified victimhood

Necessary vs. Sufficient conditions

On Projection

Epistemology

Standpoint Theory¹⁰

- 1. People who occupy the same social position/identity will have the same experiences of dominance and oppression and will—understood correctly—interpret them the same ways.
- 2. One's relative position within a social power dynamic dictations what one can and cannot know. The privileged are blinded to their privilege; an the oppressed possess a kind of double sight: understanding both the oppressor's position and their own experience of oppression.

"Lived experience"

Gnosticism

Why is it appealing?

The weaknesses of PoMo (rejecting metanarratives) and secular 'classic liberalism' Simple

Clear

Reflexive

Antinomian

Gnostic

2 How has Critical Theory affected our world?

Eight Effects

Division

Dehumanization and Oppression

Partiality/Envy

Celebrating evil

Suspicion of authority

Isolation and Loneliness

Superiority over the past (Progress)

HOPELESS—no substantive positive vision

"intentionally destructive and accidentally constructive." ¹¹

Critical Theory Seminar 9

⁹ Ellen Pence and Michael Paymar, Education Groups for Men Who Batter: The Duluth Model (New York: Springer Publishing, 1993), 180.

¹⁰ Pluckrose and Lindsay, Cynical Theories, 194.

¹¹ Smith, "Cultural Marxism," 454.

3 How do we engage in a Critical Theory world?

Faith and Love

Recognize its pervasive influence, and evil intentions

Paganism

"What is often not seen in the debate on sexuality is that we are also in the presence of two "gospels": the one, pagan, preaches redemption as liberation from the Creator and repudiation of creation's structures; the other, Christian, proclaims redemption as reconciliation with the Creator, and the proclamation of creation's goodness. In a pagan world, a truncated gospel of personal salvation will no longer do. Sexuality within the context of creation must be announced as an essential part of the Christian message of reconciliation with God and glad submission to his good will."12

Egalitarianism

Takes part of Christian teaching and totalizes it

Recognize the fuel for envy (and need for gratitude)

Power-over vs. power-under (Boyd)

"Jesus used power not to rule but to influence, to invite, to welcome, and to transform."13

The ideal of servant-leadership?

Instead, power as positive good Not whether, but which?

Prov 20:29 "The glory of young men is their strength"; Deut 31:6 "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you"; 1 Sam 2:10 "The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed"; 1 Chron 19:13 "Be strong, and let us use our strength for our people and for the cities of our God, and may the LORD do what seems good to him"; Ps 29:11 "May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!"; Lk 2:52 "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor

¹² Peter Jones, "Androgyny: The Pagan Sexual Ideal," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 43, no 3 (September 2000): 468. By "sexuality," Jones is referring especially to the distinction of the two sexes (male-female), while also including the implications and applications of those distinctions in the created world. See esp. his The Other Worldview: Exposing Christianity's Greatest Threat (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2015).

¹³ Diane Langberg, Redeeming Power, 177.

with God and man"; Mk 12:30 "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength"; Eph 6:10 "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might"; 1 Pet 4:11 "... whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies..."; 1 Cor 16:13 "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong."

Feminism

In M-F relations

Justice

Institutional leadership

Deconstruction

Act Justly

Micah 6:8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

What is Justice?

Deuteronomy 32:4 "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. Oxford English Dictionary "The quality of being (morally) just or righteous; the principle of just dealing; the exhibition of this quality or principle in action; just conduct; integrity, rectitude" (VIII: 326).

Aquinas "Justice is a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant and perpetual will."14

An everyday, all-the-time, consideration

The importance of Due Process

Authorities

Jurisdiction

Witnesses

Impartiality

Consequences

Affirm Power and Authority

GRATITUDE

Faith, both in exercising authority and in submitting to it

Romans 14:23b For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae: Secunda Secundae, 8 vols, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, O.P., ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute, 2012) 58, A1, 535.

Creation

Genesis 1:26–28 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him;

male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Genesis 2:18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Psalm 8:6 You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet

Psalm 115:16 The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man.

Family

Ephesians 5:22–6:9 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first

commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Church

Acts 20:28–31 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

1 Peter 5:1–5 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Civil Government

Romans 13:1–7 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your

good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

2 Samuel 23:3–4 The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

Protection

Psalm 72:1–4, 12-14 Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the royal son! May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice! Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor!

For he delivers the needy when he calls, the poor and him who has no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life, and precious is their blood in his sight.

Proverbs 31:8–9 Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Rosaria Butterfield "One of the fair criticisms of my choosing the role of a submitted wife over and against returning to Syracuse to serve as an English professor is that in doing so, I am showing my support of biblical patriarchy. Guilty as charged. But let's be clear; I do not support biblical patriarchy because of the belief that men are good. I embrace biblical patriarchy because men are not good (Jer 17:9). Because men are not good, I am grateful to encourage and stand behind a godly redeemed man who defends and protects the church and his family against ravaging wolves."15

Resistance

Deuteronomy 22:22–27 If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the

¹⁵ Rosaria Butterfield, "Leading With Who You Are: The Misunderstood Calling of the Submitted Wife," Eikon 4, no. 2 (Fall 2022): 89.

woman. So you shall purge the evil from Israel. If there is a betrothed virgin, and a man meets her in the city and lies with her, then you shall bring them both out to the gate of that city, and you shall stone them to death with stones, the young woman because she did not cry for help though she was in the city, and the man because he violated his neighbor's wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. But if in the open country a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; she has committed no offense punishable by death. For this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor, because he met her in the open country, and though the betrothed young woman cried for help there was no one to rescue her.

Daniel 3:16-18 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

1 Peter 3:1–6 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Naboth—1 Kings 21:1-16

Abigail—1 Samuel 25

Act with Truthfulness and Integrity Ninth Commandment Reject unbiblical niceness/winsomeness Clear definition and practice

> Vainglory—sinful partiality toward 'us' Ex: Enmity—sinful hatred against 'them'

The 3 C's

Courage

Matthew 10:32–34 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Revelation 21:7-8 The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.

There will be a cost to being faithful, as Jesus promised (Matt 16:24; 2 Tim 3:12) Clarity

Justice

Authority

Hierarchy

Love

Identity

Conviction

No neutrality

No sinful anger

Loving, firm, strong, and persevering

Build your life on God's word

Oppose evil

Build and celebrate the good

Rejoice in God's goodness to you

Jesus has won, is winning, and will win

Matthew 16:18 "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Revelation 22:12-15 "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Q & A

Notes	

Free Resources

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- Baucham, Voddie. "Defining Social Justice." Sovereign Nations. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFNOP2IqwoY.
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- Schrock, David. Dividing the Faithful: How a Little book on Race Fractured a Movement Founded on Grace. Available as free ebook by subscribing to the newsletter at: https://christoverall.com/article/longform/introducing-dividing-the-faithful-by-davidschrock/.
- Shenvi, Neal and Pat Sawyer. Engaging Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement. Available as a free ebook at: https://ratiochristi.org/product/engaging-critical-theory-and-the-socialjustice-movement/.
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