

What Is Critical Theory? Once You See it, You'll See it Everywhere.

Written for Family First by Rodney Lake

THE GROUND IS SHIFTING.

ARE YOU READY?

While the cultural heat rises around us, we sit like a frog in the pot not noticing the rising temperature. Despite an ever deepening appreciation for social justice; we see racial, ethnic, class and gender divisions growing bigger. Despite widespread acceptance of the bi-cultural beauty of Aotearoa, New Zealand, and the increasing use of Te Reo Māori; racial hostility and tribalism continue to increase. Terms like "Systemic racism", "White guilt" and "White privilege" are being enthusiastically embraced by schools, organisations, and governments – yet do we even understand what they mean?

"We are going through a great crowd derangement. In public and private, both online and off, people are behaving in ways that are increasingly irrational, feverish, herd-like and simply unpleasant. The daily news cycle is filled with the consequences. Yet while we see the symptoms everywhere, we do not see the causes."

Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds*

There is a cause, and it's a radical and dangerous new way of thinking about human identity and value, and how it presumably plays out with power, privilege, oppression and justice.

KNOWN BY MANY NAMES

Like a mist constantly changing, it goes by many names including:

- **Critical Theory** or **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**: CRT is a sub-set of Critical Theory focused on race.
- **Anti-Racism**: The term used to avoid using Critical Race Theory.
- **Identity Politics**: An older term used outside of academic circles.
- **Cultural Marxism, Neo-Marxism** and **Intersectionality**: The more formal academic terms you may hear from time to time.

These may sound daunting and complex, but don't be intimidated. The ideas behind these terms are actually quite simple and can be recognised easily, once you know what to look for. We will use the term **Critical Theory** in this Fact Sheet since this has become the most commonly used term.

WHAT'S "CRITICAL"

ABOUT THIS THEORY?

The term **Critical Theory** refers to a way of seeing and thinking about the world around us in a "critical" way; that is to look critically for ways in which people are being unjustly oppressed. It wants to deconstruct all traditional systems, structures and institutions, particularly when they are being used to impose social, political or economic power by one group over another.



Like so many dangerous ideas, there is a kernel of truth to its core assumption: **That racism, sexism and discrimination are ever-present.** Prejudice against people who are different from us is a sad reality of the human heart, and one which we constantly need to fight if we are to have the just and fair society we desire.

But unfortunately, **Critical Theory** goes far beyond rightly identifying this universal problem, and proposes a cure which is far worse than the disease. Ironically, the theory itself is not being “critically” examined for flaws by those who promote it, so we have identified the following eight assumptions it makes so you can recognise it when you see it.

ASSUMPTION #1

All minority groups are oppressed

This assumption is based on the belief that **your group identity is the most important thing.** Critical Theory views people, not in terms of behaviour, values or achievements, but in terms of your **group membership.** These groups are grounded in mostly unchangeable traits such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion or abilities/disabilities and more. The individual no longer matters, only your group. Character, skills, experience, beliefs, achievements and environment are discarded in favour of your group identity.

HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: This assumption becomes apparent when merit and accomplishment is downplayed in favour of race, ethnicity, gender, LGBTQ identity or some other minority identity.

ASSUMPTION #2

Groups are either *Oppressed* or *Oppressors*

Critical Theory then divides the world into **oppressed groups** or **oppressor groups.** Whether you belong to an oppressed or oppressor group is determined by any power you have, as a member of a dominant group, to shape wider culture and values. It cynically assumes that if you have that power, then you will always use it to serve your own groups interests; defending it – even subconsciously – with every decision you make.

The result is a rigged system, where those who are oppressors (eg: white, male, straight, Christian) engineer society in their favour to entrench their social, economic and political control over minority groups (eg: black, women, LGBTQ-identified, Muslim) which are always a threat to that power and so need to be oppressed. On this view, all human behaviour has been cynically reduced to nothing more than power plays between these groups. Thus its roots in Marxism, which believes everything is about class struggle.

So for example, Māori (16% of the population) are a minority group in New Zealand. According to Critical Race Theory, they are therefore automatically being oppressed by Pakeha (72% of the population)¹ who use their demographic dominance to exert social, cultural and economic dominance. “White privilege” is subconsciously used by Pakeha to oppress Māori and deny them opportunities to get ahead, and Māori are victims of this built-in (systemic, or system-wide) racism. Any racial disparities you can identify (for example the disproportionately higher ratio of Māori to Pakeha in prison) is evidence that proves this oppression is systemic (or system-wide).

HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: Be on the lookout for key words and terms such as: “White privilege”, “Inequity”, “Oppression”, “Decolonization”, “Critical consciousness”, “Colonial legacy”, “Systemic racism”, “Toxic masculinity” and the big three: “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion”.

An example of this language can be found in the Ministry of Education Te Hurihanganui policy, which was created to “Address racism and inequity... throughout the education system”²:

Te Hurihanganui Pou

Together, through the principles of Te Hurihanganui we will:

- Strengthen **kaupapa Māori** to support a cultural shift in the education system – Strengthening kaupapa Māori means recognising the validity and legitimacy of Māori language, culture, philosophy and principles. It means thinking critically and developing a critique of non-Māori constructions and definitions of Māori and affirming the importance of Māori self-definitions and self-valuations.
- Build **critical consciousness** to support a structural shift in the education system – Building critical consciousness means reflecting critically on the imbalance of power and resources in society, and taking anti-oppressive action to do something about it for the better. It means recognising white privilege, understanding racism, inequity faced by Māori and disrupting that status quo to strengthen equity.

For more information see the Te Hurihanganui Blueprint

SOURCE: Ministry of Education – “Te Hurihanganui: A Blueprint for Transformative Shift”

ASSUMPTION #3

All suffering of someone in a minority group is evidence of oppression

Oppression is traditionally seen as *cruel or unjust coercion, treatment or control*; An action which clearly violates someone else's rights or autonomy. But through a Critical Theory lens, if you belong to a minority or oppressed group, then **any** suffering, discomfort or unequal outcome can be used as evidence of your oppression. Personal responsibility and consequences for poor decisions can be ignored in favour of claiming a victim status which aligns with the new Critical Theory narrative.

For example: We don't want to ignore or downplay the real suffering of those living on or below the poverty line in New Zealand. But when looking at poverty through a Critical Theory lens, "racism" becomes the automatic cause of poverty for anyone belonging to a non-white ethnic group. Personal factors (such as poor decisions, dropping out of school) or environmental factors (such as dysfunctional family & upbringing, or a lack of job opportunities) are ignored. As is the existence of poor and disadvantaged Pakeha who might face the same personal and environmental factors.

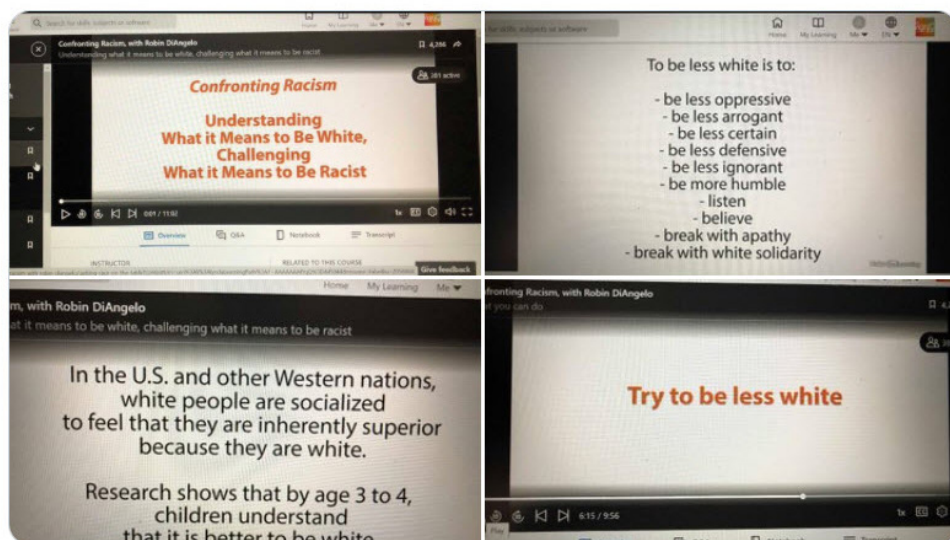
HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: An entitlement mindset which oversimplifies the cause of suffering (e.g., everything becomes racist), while downplaying personal responsibility and environmental factors.

ASSUMPTION #4

You can be *guilty* of a crime based on your group identity

Critical Theory allows an individual to be guilty of a crime (such as racism), not because of the individual actions of the person, but because of their group identity.

For example, a Pakeha could be accused of being "racist" without ever having committed a single racist act themselves. Simply being a member of the dominant ethnic group means they are implicitly racist without even knowing it. Critical Race



3:42 AM · Feb 20, 2021

SOURCE: Seminar entitled 'Facing Racism', given by Robin DiAngelo, presented through LinkedIn Education. (These images are from an internal whistleblower of a major international company)

Theory believes a white person will always serve their own racial agenda and promote their dominant position. They are subconsciously racist; they simply can't help it. Therefore, they can be called "racist" *despite having never consciously or intentionally committed a single racist act!*

HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: People being judged guilty of racism based on their ethnicity, rather than on any actual racist acts they have committed, e.g., white guilt. Or accused of sexism simply by being male, not because they have committed a sexist act.

ASSUMPTION #5

You can be *innocent* of a crime based on your group identity

In addition, real crimes and injustices are not being called out for fear of been seen as contributing to the oppression disadvantaged minorities are under. Such minorities are sometimes given a free pass when committing actual violent, racist or sexist acts.

For example, the violent riots in the U.S. (not the protests, but the riots) – where real harm was done through looting, violence and businesses being burnt down – have being excused as merely blacks living out their oppression³. Rather than calling them what they are: violent crimes being committed by violent people who should be brought to justice regardless of their race.

"Have we reached the ultimate stage of absurdity when some people are held responsible for things that happened before they were born, while other people are not held responsible for what they themselves are doing today?"

Thomas Sowell

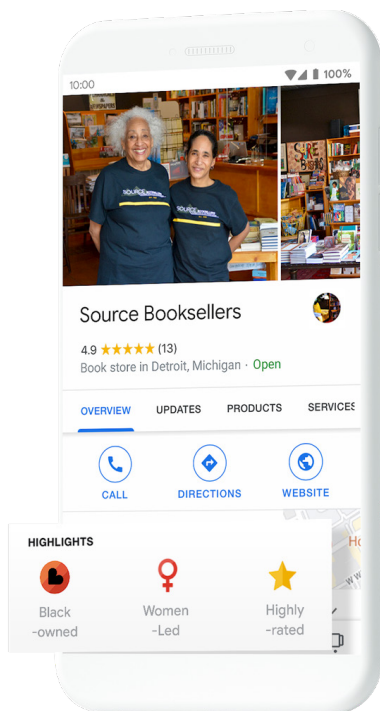
Critical Race Theory discards this idea in favour of a view of humanity where the colour of your skin- and therefore your group identity- is paramount in determining your moral and social standing within society. *The content of an individual's character no longer counts because individuals no longer count, only the group you belong to.*

HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: Look out for excusing behaviour and attitudes which would be unacceptable if you reversed the race/gender/sexuality of those committing the acts.

ASSUMPTION #6

Active discrimination is acceptable against "privileged" groups

Critical Theory allows the awarding of merit and reward, not because of your character, skills or expertise – but because of your race, ethnicity or gender. For example, its acceptable to suggest a political candidate should be supported because they are a woman or black. Yet to suggest support for a candidate because he is male or white would be an egregious example of sexism or racism. Same behaviour – different group identity.



Imagine the uproar if they provided the opposite! These double standards of fighting racism with racism, are quite acceptable when viewed through a Critical Theory lens.

HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: Prejudiced behaviour which when you swap Black for White, Māori for Pakeha, Woman for Man, Muslim for Christian, Straight for Gay, etc, are instantly recognisable as offensive and immoral.

We are not advocating for a homogeneous society where there aren't cultural spaces or policies set aside to promote and protect unique cultures and celebrate their differences. Or that affirmative action policies are not occasionally, and temporarily, justifiable. Or that female-only spaces shouldn't be protected.

There are often good reasons for such distinctions. Rather, we are highlighting the double standard where race, ethnicity or gender is used as justification for active prejudice and discrimination against others. **It is one thing to provide wheelchair ramps into buildings for those who need them, but active discrimination is like demanding even able-bodied people must use wheelchairs to get into buildings, in the name of equality.**

ASSUMPTION #7

Someone's "Lived Experience" of oppression must not be questioned

Critical Theory states that if you belong to an oppressed group, your personal experience of oppression automatically contains special moral knowledge which is inaccessible to others outside of your group. To question someone's lived experience is to "invalidate their identity", and it is impossible to understand social justice issues without hearing their story.

In 2020 the Human Rights Commission launched its nationwide "Give Nothing to Racism" campaign to help Kiwis "understand what prejudice sounds and feels like from those who face it". It does this through its <https://voiceofracism.co.nz> website where you can hear many personal stories of racism. While many involve genuinely painful acts of racism committed by ignorant or evil people, the boundaries of what is deemed "racist" is very much seen through a Critical Race Theory lens.



Source: <https://voiceofracism.co.nz>

Justice demands such stories of reported prejudice and discrimination be heard and considered. However, automatically presuming racist intent when interpreting someone else's behaviour is irresponsible at best. Our memory and interpretation of past events doesn't always track with reality, and we cannot know the intent of someone's actions without more context than just one person's account.

Stories of poor treatment should also be approached with a level of scepticism in an environment where victimhood is worn as a fashion accessory and can be used to manipulate and control others through shame and guilt.

HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: People who wear their victim status as a fashion accessory and claim special moral authority because of their "lived experience". Eg: Any time someone starts a sentence with "Speaking as a (insert oppressed group identity)..."

ASSUMPTION #8

Equity and Freedom can coexist

It's important to define one of the new words being used: **Equity**, which is distinct from **Equality**. **Equality** means "equality of opportunity". A concept which has tragically been denied to some groups through historical injustices. It has been hard-fought for, and won, by civil rights and woman's suffrage struggles.

However **Equity** means "equality of outcome". While the first (**Equality**) means everyone starts a race on the starting line at the same time, the second (**Equity**) would require everyone to cross the finish line at the same time. Equity is an idealistically hopeful concept that seems on first glance to be a worthy goal, especially with so much inequality in the world.

But this is a naive and dangerous Marxist idea. Human capabilities, such as strength, IQ, interests, competencies, persistence, and talent, are never equal and therefore cannot produce equal outcomes.

Any attempt to create equality of outcome will necessarily require the forced suppression of people that have natural advantages over others.

It's impossible to have equality of opportunity AND equality of outcome at the same time. If we want to enforce equality of outcome (crossing the finish line together), we have to

suppress people's natural gifts and abilities to force them to start their race in different places, or to run with unfair handicaps – suppressing effort and natural talents. "Equality of outcome" comes from an entitlement mentality and when enforced (as in Socialist countries), results in the opposite of justice.

"Free people make free choices. Free choices mean you get unequal outcomes. You can have freedom, or you can have equal outcomes. You can't have both."

Naval Ravikant

HOW TO RECOGNISE IT: When someone is promoting equality, ask them if they mean "equality of opportunity" or "equality of outcome". Point out the more you have of one, the less you have of the other. Which is more just?

INTIMIDATION AND CENSORSHIP

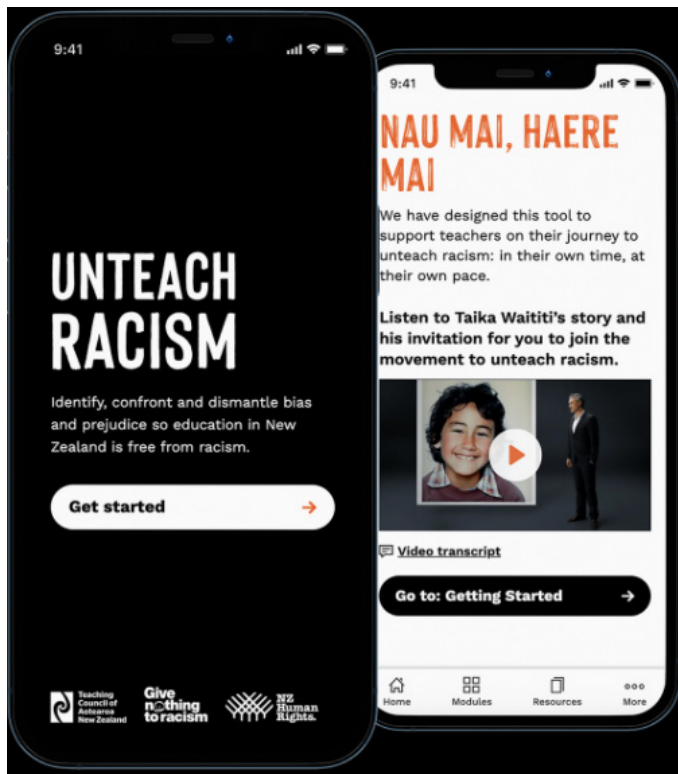
In the past, these obscure ideas may have been debated in the halls of academia. But now they are infiltrating every part of culture; from media, to corporate offices, schools and government departments. There is no shortage of examples and **you'll see it everywhere once you are equipped to recognise it.**

Businesses are adopting "Diversity & Inclusion Training" programs to brainwash their staff into accepting these assumptions without question. In this training you are told to "be less white" and "be less oppressive"⁵. In truly Orwellian fashion, "Equity and Inclusion" departments are springing up to serve as political offices to search for, stamp out and re-educate any dissenters.

Dare to question, and you will be called "racist", "sexist" or whatever-phobic. Everyone is walking on eggshells for fear of failing the "woke" purity test. The threat of "cancel culture" is an ever-present warning that your job, career and reputation are on the line.

WHAT IS WOKE? To be Woke is to have been "woken up" to the important social justice issues of the day and hold a more radical progressive view on issues of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality and identity. Under Critical Theory, to be Woke is to have one's eyes opened to the hidden power dynamics that are assumed to exist at all levels of society.

The Teaching Council of NZ, responsible for setting and maintaining professional standards for all teachers in New Zealand, have released their “Unteach Racism” resource to “Identify, confront and dismantle bias and prejudice so teaching is free from racism”⁶ The above assumptions are implicit in all of their material.



SOURCE: Unteach Racism website (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand)

WHAT ABOUT REAL HISTORIC RACIAL INJUSTICES?

It must be acknowledged there were many tragic injustices committed by European settlers on Māori in our past. Such injustices need to be put right where possible and it is right to highlight them as examples of true injustice and oppression.

We should trust the legal due-process within the Waitangi Tribunal and the wider judicial system to rightly investigate, address and take appropriate actions to put right these cases of injustice, as far as may be possible.

In calling out Critical Race Theory in this Fact Sheet, we are not suggesting historical injustices don't exist when they clearly do.

Rather, we are seeking to highlight the highly divisive nature of this ideology to in order to **prevent further divisions** between Pākehā and Māori (or any other ethnic groups) by making EVERYTHING about race through the eyes of Critical Race Theory.

WHAT ABOUT INEQUALITY TODAY?

We also want to acknowledge the existence of real poverty and hardship suffered disproportionately by some non-Pākehā ethnic groups today. Again, in calling out Critical Theory, we are not suggesting these entrenched and heart-breaking social issues are not important or don't need to be debated and urgently addressed through every tool available to us.

But these issues are highly complex. Critical Theory oversimplifies the problem by making everything about race, while ignoring the many other factors contributing to poverty and societal dysfunction – not least of which being family breakdown.

If you get the cause wrong, your solution will also be wrong, and the cure can become worse than the disease.

WHY IS CRITICAL THEORY DANGEROUS?

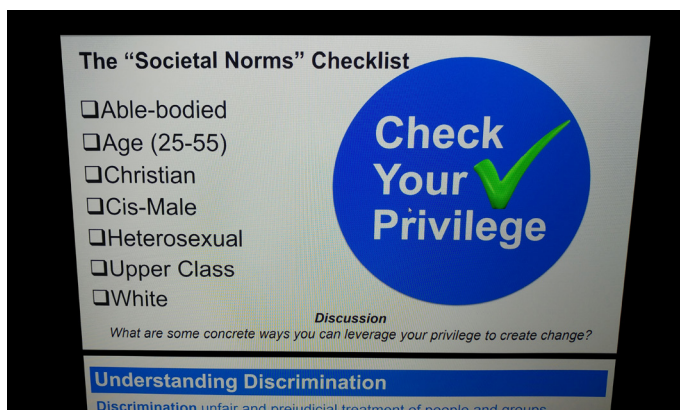
We all agree injustice exists and we must stand up for the oppressed. But writer Carmelo San Paolo identifies two distinct approaches to seeking justice:

There is the inclusive, egalitarian, conciliatory approach that emphasizes liberal values like individual rights and equality, the importance of shared humanity, and the importance of love and forgiveness over resentment. This was the paradigm that drove the American Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., the Abolitionist movement in the U.S. and Great Britain, and the female suffrage movement in the early 20th century.

Then there is the divisive, vindictive approach that sees human relationships as a zero-sum game [of power-struggles]. It emphasizes equality of outcome (equity), the voicing of resentment, the redress of grievances, and the identification of people as belonging to either oppressed or oppressor categories. This paradigm drove movements like the Cultural Revolution in China, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Black Power movement in the 1960s in America.

Carmelo San Paolo⁷

Critical Theory is a divisive approach. It misunderstands human nature and cynically plays on human vices of greed, envy, revenge and power – making everything about **us-versus-them**. Such a mentality voraciously feeds the very things it claims to be fighting: Racism, prejudice, resentment and self-interest. Traditional values like reconciliation, love, forgiveness and colour-blindness have no place in a world gripped by Critical Theory.



SOURCE: Washington Examiner, March 19, 2021, "Cigna's critical race theory training: Don't say 'brown bag lunch' and be mindful of 'religious privilege'"

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

As human beings, we have always needed to work hard to tolerate and celebrate differences between us. For example, men and women need grace and understanding of each other's masculine and feminine strengths and weaknesses - and successful marriages show this is both possible, and deeply satisfying.

Likewise, Pakeha and Māori have made enormous strides over the last hundred years in gaining mutual understanding of their unique cultural strengths and weaknesses. The fruit of that reconciliatory work is the vibrant bi-cultural nation which is the envy of those working for indigenous reconciliation in other countries.

Yet all these gains are now at risk. Critical Theory thinking has infiltrated every part of society and **once you see it, you will see it EVERYWHERE.**

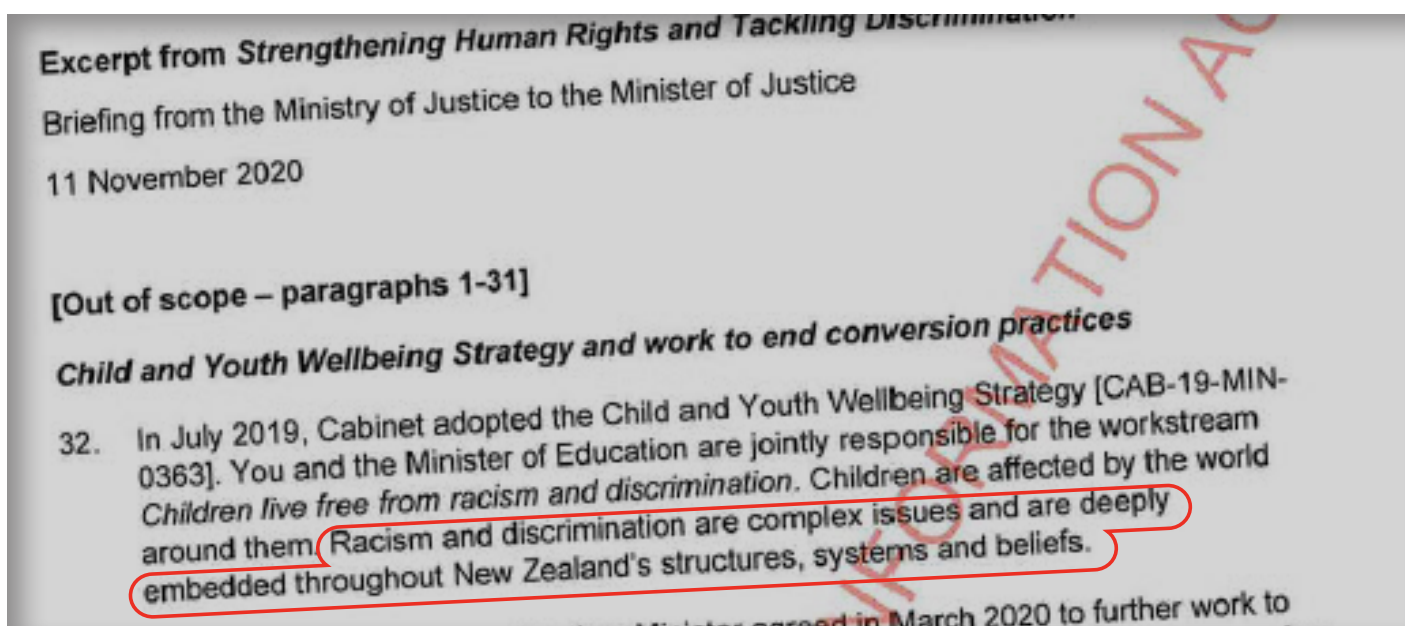
When everyone is a victim, and victimhood has become a virtue; the result is resentment, tribalism, division and constant battles for social and political power. We are now witnessing this social fallout, and if not stopped, this toxic mindset will tear our society apart – just as it did in China, France and Russia during their violent revolutions.

WHAT CAN I DO?

We must resist intimidation and censorship and loudly speak out. When doing so, use terms which highlight the true nature of these ideas. Call it **"State-sanctioned racism"** or **"HR-sanctioned racism"**, **"Racial engineering"**, **"Racist re-education programs"**, **"Dividing people by race"**. Point out the contradiction of **"fighting racism with racism"** and instead highlight the need to seek **"diversity without division"**.

When pushing back against this being taught in schools, say it's wrong to teach children **"to be defined by their race, rather than as individuals"**, **"as though they are only the colour of their skin, and that's all they will ever be"**. Point out that **"schools should be prioritising excellence, merit and personal achievement, to inspire people from all ethnic backgrounds and genders to achieve their potential"** and not **"teaching collective guilt and racial superiority theory"**.

Point out the practical negative consequences of these ideas. Wherever possible highlight stories of harm when hypersensitive race-based thinking has resulted in increased division and conflict. Remember "lived experience" stories hold significant power in this environment so use them whenever possible.



SOURCE: Official Information Act request received by Family First NZ from Hon Kris Faafoi Minister of Justice on an unrelated issue (June 2021)

Above all, we must have the courage to speak the truth and not be intimidated into silence by mob rule. When enough people speak up, truth and common sense do prevail.

It is easy to stop a lone dissenter; it's much harder to stop 20, 200 or 20,000 who speak up together to stand for true compassion and unity, when individual rights allow people to be their best with whatever they have – regardless of skin colour.

EDUCATE YOURSELF FURTHER

Read further material by **James Lindsay** from New Discourses⁸ – in particular his article '*Eight Big Reasons Critical Race Theory Is Terrible for Dealing with Racism*'⁹.

For an insightful Christian perspective see **Neil Shenvi** from Neil Shenvi Apologetics¹⁰ who has a lot of very accessible material on his website.

Finally, invite a New Zealand speaker such as the author of this paper to teach at your organisation, school or church on these issues.

A FINAL WARNING

Critical Theory gets one thing right: **Injustice is out there.** Power imbalances do exist and are sometimes abused. Please don't let this critique justify turning a blind eye towards those who are genuinely crying out for justice.

Fighting for true justice **includes** speaking out against Critical Theory – but it doesn't end there.

Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." Isaiah 1:17



ENDNOTES

1. 2018 Census data from Statistics New Zealand
2. <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/overall-strategies-and-policies/te-hurihanganui/>
3. <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/06/01/1967-protests-george-floyd>
4. <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/small-business/black-history-month-2021>
5. <https://www.foxbusiness.com/lifestyle/coca-cola-staff-online-training-seminar-be-less-white>
6. <https://www.unteachracism.nz/faq.html>
7. <https://carmieasauras.medium.com/what-is-woke-c0e4c3e0b9c0>
8. <https://newdiscourses.com>
9. <https://newdiscourses.com/2020/06/reasons-critical-race-theory-terrible-dealing-racism/>
10. <https://shenviapologetics.com>