

13 Reasons Why Wokeness is Problematic

by [Lee Douglass](#) (September 2020)



Fighting Without a Cause, Evgeniy Monahov, 2017

A common and popular platitude one often hears from a variety of mediums is “to care for the oppressed is to fight against systemic racism.” For anyone seeking virtue, the creed behind such a statement sounds noble. However, the popular trope is the visible matter and tip of the Critical Theory (CT) iceberg and there is much more concealed below the water line as will soon be shown.

CT is critical of the way knowledge is formed and thus

claims that, since knowledge is power, knowledge can be used to liberate or oppress. Postmodernism is one of the foundations on which CRT is built and suggests that knowledge is subjective: since knowledge comes from history—and because history is interpreted and told through a cultural lens—it informs and shapes one's biases. Furthermore, we use our ways of knowing to gain power and the struggle for power is at the center of all behavioral motivation, conflict, disparities, and oppression. Because people are biased towards their own way of knowing and are vying for power using this bias, "positivism" or objectivism cannot be attained by anyone. CRT uses this framework and adds another foundation which is "Marx's Conflict Theory." Conflict Theory posits that society is made of two groups: the oppressed (which in CRT are people of color), and the oppressors (whites and white culture), and claims that the oppressors are inherently biased against the minority and, therefore, are racist. CRT further asserts that racism is caused by implicit bias (when people will unconsciously discriminate against and stereotype those who are not like them) in the white majority group, which leads to disparities and inequities. The combination of implicit bias and the majority white culture creates systemic racism and a white supremacist society which gives privilege to the majority called "white privilege." The profound unacceptability of this creates those who follow and impose CRT, or "woke" people, who must "self-reflect" for any signs of bigotry and/or biases within themselves, profess their sins and biases which includes admitting their privilege. Woke people must reach "critical consciousness" by reading and listening to people of color (POC), and become activists which means they are fighting for the oppressed and making progress which may include making public statements, posts, shaming others, canceling all ideas that are counter to CRT, deplatforming, and calling others out. Such action is done in the name of compassion for the oppressed. To be silent in one's support of CRT is to be complicit in oppression and white supremacy. Any belief or use of facts, data, or

statistics that runs contrary to CRT is said to be because one is trying to preserve their privilege and power or are too fragile to cope with their privilege being challenged. This is called "white fragility." The following deconstruction of CT and its more popular form CRT and is presented in the form of a list which will identify the shortcomings and holes within the philosophy of CT and CRT.

1. The Implicit Bias Problem: At first, implicit bias seems like a reasonable notion from which to work. However, the theory of implicit bias is used by CRT to explain how the world and its systems work. According to CRT, because of implicit bias, the world works against people of color and is the reason for disparities. [The problem](#) with [implicit bias studies](#) is that they cannot be replicated. The subject can easily skew the results based on their answer making these studies un-scientific. Also, there is no replicable data that proves that bias will influence behavior. No study has successfully predicted behavior based on perceived biases. This calls into question the theory of implicit bias yet an entire system and philosophy of thought (CRT) is predicated on this idea being true.

2. Absolutism: Some of the ideas put forth in CRT are not hard to accept but, as CRT evolves, one is taught not to question CRT for fear of undesired labels which makes CRT an absolutist philosophy. If you do question CRT, or try to make room for nuance, regardless of your race, you will be labeled a racist and part of the problem. For example, one must accept that the reason for disparities in white vs black median income is racism and a white supremacist society even though, when one controls for education, education of parents, households with two parental figures, gender, or black subgroups (blacks immigrants from the West Indies and Nigeria have a higher [median income](#) than African Americans and the average American), the data dramatically changes and might cause one to question how the lone variable of racism can explain what

should be a multivariate problem. One can never question the amount of privilege whiteness provides different individuals from different backgrounds and must accept that privilege is absolute and is the reason for disparities. Followers of CRT will dismiss any contrary data with the defense that doubters are racist and need to listen and read more. Data is rarely used in CRT analysis. Most of the time the citations in CT or CRT papers, journals, law reviews, and books are citations to another critical theorist's assertion or just an anecdote. Interestingly because of its roots in postmodernism, CRT rejects objectivity, and asserts that there is no truth, however, CRT asserts its claims as absolute and as an objective truth. In essence, CRT claims there is no truth while claiming that their philosophy is truth and must not be questioned.

The absolutism in CRT makes it an authoritarian philosophy. By nature, authoritarian philosophies cannot afford to be questioned because the philosophy requires conformity to work and dissent would expose the fragility of the foundation on which such a philosophy was built. For such philosophies to work, everyone must buy in. If most people do not believe that systemic racism is the reason for all disparities (and a good number of people still believe in meritocracy), the ends (such as replacing the infected system such as capitalism, or installing racial quotas) will not be reached. For such an end to be reached, there must be absolute conformity which can only be reached through force. In CRT, the authoritarian force is labeling anyone who disagrees a racist, creating a realistic fear of being canceled.

3. Identity and Stereotypes: CT only identifies a limited part of one's identity, i.e. sex, race, and gender, making CT and CRT oversimplistic and imprecise about the individual. Other factors contributing to one's identity in a range of measures are age, regional location, religion, socioeconomic status, level of education, height, attractiveness, intelligence,

native language, marital status, impairments, birth order, body image, ideology, etc. Once one accounts for all the other ways in which people construct identity, a person is left with only one individual whose experience cannot be stereotyped. Because CT and CRT rely on stereotypes about sex, race and gender from which to classify people into groups for the purposes of constructing identity, they inevitably use a method called stereotyping from categorization. Stereotyping people by placing them in categories is what CT fights against, yet to fight this CT must first use stereotypes to make the groups or categories. CT does what it says it wants to stop.

4. The Individual: CT and CRT assert that because individuals only see generalized groups and will respond using implicit bias, there is no individual. The only value that people can have is their "lived experience" and one's value is found in their group's identity. The profound idea of "the individual" is seen as racist because the individual is said to be a white construct and because this idea came from Western Enlightenment thought. If the individual existed then societal problems could be fixed by fixing individuals, but CRT wants to change society so the problems must come from the system for the idea of CRT to work. Because of this, CRT must prioritize social progress over the individual, marking the individual as benign and only as important as the social/political capital one captures, making canceling others a logical end. If in fact the individual does not exist, then the development of personal character and responsibility for personal gain would seem moot. Consequently, any act by an individual would only be performative which we can see from the expectations for and by woke people. Since CRT literature is written to individuals to train them to think as a group, CRT must fundamentally recognize the existence of the individual first to make its pitch that there is no individual. This is counterintuitive. Moreover, CRT claims that there is no truth and the only "truth" is a person's

“lived experiences.” How can CRT deny the existence of the individual while at the same time asserting that truth can only be found through the lived experiences of an individual? It would seem that CRT haphazardly places high value on the individual which it says does not exist. The greatest flourishing in human history, the countries that have progressed the most, and the fall in human to human oppression came when we started to value the individual as sovereign instead of valuing tribal and group identities.

5. “Whiteness” and the Asian/Jewish Paradox: In CRT there are subcategories of whiteness to fulfill CRT’s definition of whiteness. One sub category to whiteness is “talking white” and comes from how one speaks due to accents, dialects, and registers. Another sub category to whiteness is not feeling like one must leave the culture to assimilate and succeed. However, when comparing different groups of whites (suburban whites vs whites in Appalachia) these subcategories of whiteness are not recognized, only skin color, since whites from Appalachia would not fit the definition of whiteness in the two subcategories described above.

Asians and Jews are two groups that succeed beyond whites economically and educationally and thus do not fit into the intersectional narrative. Jews, historically and presently, are one group that has suffered much discrimination in our country and around the world, yet some critical race theorists have called for an end to “Jewish privilege” to hide the Jewish paradox in the CRT philosophy. Jews are referred to as “white passing” or “white adjacent” so that Jews can be categorized with whites which then explains the success of Jews. Both Jews and Asians perform better than whites in merit-based acceptance programs in education like the SAT. However, CRT calls for an end to merit-based programs, labeling them racist, since other minority groups do not do as well as whites. CRT will never contend with and will always overlook the paradox that minority groups like Jews and Asians

out perform all groups on “racist” tests or the fact that making acceptance into college more subjective will hurt Jews and Asians as their numbers into elite colleges will have to decrease to allow for the acceptance numbers for other minority groups to increase.

6. Soft Bigotry: Whiteness and white supremacy are used as a foil for culture, family, and individual agency in CRT. The dominant narrative is that whiteness is the problem and it is this point of view which takes away the agency of black Americans. How can blacks feel agency when they are told their futures depend on white people who are said to be the racists? As a result, an obvious savior complex therefore manifests in white people about POC which is beneficial in that woke white people can now claim moral authority and still keep their power that their white privilege might otherwise erase. As an educator I have seen “racially conscious” teachers make excuses for and alter expectations for students because of skin color. I have seen an entire district instruct deans not to have too many suspensions of students of color, mainly black students, because it might show that the school or district has racist policies (never mind what the student actually did). Inevitably this excuses bad behavior, ruining the learning for all other students in the classroom, and hurts students who will lack the ability to cope with boundaries and rules later in life. Educators call for affirmative action and racial quotas thinking that without them, students of color will not make it on merit alone. Students are taught that white supremacy is the problem instead of being taught how to deal with and navigate around or through injustices. By expecting less of these students, the soft bigotry immerses limiting students of color creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Black students are taught that they are victims and are not taught that as early as 1980, black college-educated couples were [out earning](#) whites. This should be celebrated to show people can overcome oppression. The soft bigotry of low expectations is rampant and students

of color need to be held to the same standards as everyone else. If they are not, the so-called liberators are the perpetrators of discrimination which will work against students eventually.

7. Tribalism: Because CRT focuses on group identity and because they do not value dissenting opinions, CRT creates in-groups and out-groups against which it professes to fight creating polarization and tribalism. Out-groups are labeled oppressors (this idea comes from Marx's Conflict Theory) due to their contrary beliefs and, if they speak out, they are committing "violence" on the oppressed giving rise to the idea that "speech is violence." Woke people therefore feel the right to cancel people, de-platform and shout down speakers, and commit violence in defense of the oppressed giving rise to the idea that "silence is violence." Consequently, the values that used to bind Americans creating social fabric and civility are now being called into question. Free speech is devalued, grace is not given and cannot be found from others, and inclusivity is scarce and binary due to the fatal choice of only two sides. Within this competition, woke individuals are trained to only see the ugliness and differences in society by finding a common enemy everywhere. Jonathan Haidt contends that finding commonality creates community but, unfortunately in CRT, commonality, gratitude, forgiveness, patience, and grace are all forsaken. [In a recent study](#), giving people grace is one of very few ways to get people to change their minds about their tribe and/or ideology, change their opinions of others, and change behavior. CRT does not help people build community by finding commonality between individuals, its goal is to tear down and find the differences between people.

8. Dualistic Thinking: Dualism, or dualistic thinking, is sacrosanct in CRT because issues are over simplified and broken down by race, sex, or gender with two sides contending: the oppressors and the oppressed. Dualistic thinking is

thinking through the lens of in-group out-group membership, black and white thinking, us vs them structures, and uses no nuance in identifying behaviors and motivations. Dualistic thinking is a lower level of executive function and, according to psychologists, it is also a “cognitive distortion.” Psychologists use Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) to help patients with cognitive distortions, since cognitive distortions reinforce negative thinking causing one to feel bad, overly simplify, have to inaccurate thoughts, and can lead to depression in some. CRT encourages the use of cognitive distortions.

9. Woke as a Religion: According to David Foster Wallace, everybody worships. [Many critics](#) of CRT have compared it to a fundamentalist religion which tends to focus mostly on unquestioning belief, the sins of others, the intolerance of and opposition to other beliefs, the purification of culture, and the anointing of their own philosophy. Other parallels to the structure of religion are as follows. “Original sin” was slavery and there are the in-groups (the “saved” or woke) and out-groups (sinners or oppressors). If you reject CRT, you are participating in white supremacist culture or are “sinning” and any dissent contrary to CRT is considered blasphemy. To be saved or redeemed when one commits blasphemy, one must repent and engage in penance or atonement which is usually some form of public and social self-flagellation. To engage in atonement, or purification, one must denounce their privilege and must confess how they participated in white supremacy and promise to learn more about other groups. If you do not repent you will be punished or canceled, have your reputation destroyed, you may be fired from your job, ostracized by friends and groups, you might be mobbed on social media, and called a racist or phobic (“sinner”). There is no grace or forgiveness for sinners unless they confess which makes CRT or wokeness rigid, unbending, judgmental, and a totalitarian ideology that requires complete obedience and sacrifice for membership, similar to a fundamentalist religion. To show your

group membership to CRT you must evangelize (engaging in activism) to purify the culture. There is no tolerance for dissent or you will be labeled as suffering from white fragility, privilege, or racist social constructs which is similar to being deceived by the devil. To decent is to be unclean and the purpose of the woke disciples is to purify the culture, similar to the Puritans. For religious Puritans who were authoritarian, if one was accused of being a witch, one could admit that she was one, and be punished. But, if one denied being a witch, it was proof of her guilt and were therefore punished, too. CRT is similar. If one is accused of some racist or phobic form of expression, one can admit that he is racist or phobic and be punished. However, if one refuses to admit he is racist or phobic, his refusal is proof that he is in fact racist or phobic because he is suffering from fragility or privilege and, of course, he must be punished. One must also believe in implicit bias and white privilege without question which is a sort of spiritual belief. Lastly, CRT offers no love, acceptance, or compassion as, ironically, the judging, shaming, and destruction is all done in the name of compassion and liberation for POC.

10. The Illiberalism of CRT: A foundational value on which much of liberalism rests is free speech. CRT has no tolerance for dissent or free expression and uses censorship often because the highest value in CRT is progress and liberation of the oppressed. Since oppression may manifest itself in the speech or expression, members of the woke are lauded when they cancel or de-platform dissenters. Many woke people have torn down statues, forced a cancelation of historical figures and ideas in curriculum, shouted down speakers, and have tried to cancel books they do not like. This is totalitarianism in its tactics and the thinking resembles the Chinese cultural revolution. If you did not actually take part in the revolution, you were part of the problem and thus had no value and were expendable to the point that you needed to suffer. There were struggle sessions in which an offender had to

publicly admit their error, promise to change, and commit to re-education just as in CRT. Because of this, many liberals find themselves at odds with CRT.

CRT also rejects science, the scientific method, and rationale and logic because they are considered to be a product of whiteness and of Western culture which support objectivity which cannot exist in CRT. As stated earlier, The Enlightenment and the idea of the individual on which liberalism is based is also rejected by CRT. The idea of the individual as sovereign helped end slavery and end the value of monarchy and blood lines. It sparked the idea of human rights, personal freedom, the idea of liberty, and capitalism, which has liberated more people out of poverty in half a century than any other system in all of human history. The shift in valuing the individual as sovereign governmentally, economically, and socially has led to the greatest amount of flourishing and the highest standard of living the world has ever seen.

11. Un-Scientific and Anti-Philosophical: Attempts of insulation against criticism is anti-philosophical and un-scientific as true philosophers and scientists attempt to discredit and disprove their own ideas to find the strength in a thesis. Critics of CRT often find themselves arguing against the same canned responses designed to insulate CRT against criticism due to its unsound philosophy. For example, if you disagree with white fragility, you are displaying white fragility. If you disagree that you perpetuate white supremacy, it is because you are trying to uphold your power and privilege in society which is the definition of white supremacy. CRT rejects old ideas and philosophies and only embraces novelty that separates us from the past while also being absolutist, which makes it anti-philosophical. Furthermore, CRT is not scientific. In any scientific theory, there would always be a theoretical idea that, if proven, would disprove or falsify a hypothesis. One cannot disprove

CRT as it has intentionally insulated itself against criticism and scientific scrutiny creating a falsifiability problem. The discipline of science is said to be racist by critical race theorists since again, science comes from the Enlightenment which is a Western way of thinking. Ironically, CRT uses the scientific method through its formulation of ideas using "claim, evidence, and reasoning," in much of its literature.

12. A Lack of Principle: Anyone who rejects racism should also reject placing value on individuals based on their skin color, but this is what CRT does. For example, not all opinions are of equal value. The writings, opinions and experiences of a POC are valued more and carry more weight than opinions by a white person. A white person can be racist but a POC cannot. If an act of bigotry is bad to perpetuate one group, it is bad to perpetuate it on any group making it objectively bad. This is called a principle. Since principles by nature are objective, standards of principle purposefully fall by the wayside in CRT because it specifically rejects objectivism ([standpoint theory](#)) which is also why CRT is so complex. *CRT instead has rules*. A woke person must know the rules on what to think and how to act in every different situation because objectivity does not exist and the boundaries and rules for one group do not apply to another group. This is inconsistent, short sighted, narrow, unprincipled and impossible to follow as rules will eventually break down or change. Principles are stronger than rules and, when rules break down, principles guide people and tell them how to act towards each other because the principles are the same for everyone. Having subjective rules creates exclusion, inconsistencies, and double standards, which harms society by creating competition among groups for acceptance. This competition allows groups to act negatively to other groups and allows some to act in ways that, if displayed by other groups, would be considered harmful, oppressive, and racist. Nevertheless, CRT's highest value is conformity to reach progress toward liberation and, since the individual does not exist and has no value,

principles do not need to exist to keep civility among one another.

13. Teaching Safetyism and Victimhood: In Jonathan Haidt's book *The Coddling of the American Mind*, Haidt explains some of the reasons for the increases in depression and anxiety among young people. He attributes one large reason to what he calls "safetyism," whereby adults shield their children from threatening or uncomfortable situations. Instead of teaching children to cope with these situations, adults try to take the threat away completely by teaching children and students to rely on third parties for acceptable outcomes. [Haidt](#) instead wants students to be "antifragile" and sums up this idea by using an old saying: "prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child" (Haidt 23). CRT, on the other hand, teaches that at school there should be "safe spaces" and "trigger warnings" where all students should feel safe because feelings are truth and the violation of safety equals oppression. This environment has led students to think that they should never have to be made to feel uncomfortable and thus shield themselves from opinions they do not like and from conversations and speakers with which they disagree. Thus, teachers use "trigger warnings" to let students know when emotional comfortability might be violated because one's feelings are all that matter and the feeling of safety cannot be violated. This teaches students that they are fragile, that their opinions and feelings should not be questioned, and that anything they feel is truth. Safetyism undermines an individuals' courage and the skills required for students to cope with the world are not being taught. Safetyism leads to extreme negative threat bias whereby students look for ways to be offended and search for ways they feel oppressed which causes students—especially students of color—to see themselves as victims. CRT preaches that POC are victims in society. Life may be harder for some POC but to teach them that their lack of success is not their fault or that they may never be successful because of racism, is dangerous for development.

Seeing themselves as victims takes power away from them. If a speaker can victimize others, that speaker holds power over their feelings, emotions, and actions so they do not have to encounter threats. Once this happens, power in their lives will fall and students will find themselves and their feelings at the mercy of any given event that might present itself. Nothing good will come from thinking this way—only anxiety, as Haidt explains. Telling one’s self that he is a victim hands control over to others and one will feel as if they have no control in his life. As educators, we need to give students confidence to take risks and embrace responsibility in their lives so they may find success. The idea of personal responsibility cannot be found in CRT. In 2008, Barack Obama [said](#) that for African Americans to find success, they must embrace “the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past . . . it means taking full responsibility for our own lives . . . [children] must always believe that they can write their own destiny” (Obama “A More Perfect Union”). [In a study](#), the consistent perception of one’s self as a victim, or The Tendency for Interpersonal Victimhood (TIV), can lead to feelings of moral superiority, the desire for revenge, entitlement, negative interpretations of others’ motives, perceived offense, and a lack of trust or empathy. Safetyism is the antithesis of what psychologists use to combat trauma. Exposing one to the perceived threat, or exposure therapy, will help one not only identify threats, but figure out how to cope with their existence. Therefore, to teach CRT to students is harmful and can be destructive.

•••••

Taken only in parts, one can see why some have so adamantly allied themselves with the teachings of CRT. However, as one steps back and sees CRT as an epistemology in whole, it becomes problematic at best and destructive at worst. At risk is the idea of the sovereign individual, the progress of individual character and responsibility, and the idea that all

men are created equal because they are equally and individually divine. Separating people into groups with higher and lesser values has never ended well.

«[Previous Article](#) [Table of Contents](#) [Next Article](#)»

Lee Douglass is a pen name as the author wishes to remain anonymous. For the past 15 years, he has been a secondary educator in the discipline of English and Literature.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)