

Some Hard-Hitting Questions for Proponents and Opponents of CRT

In America today, when it comes to the question of critical race theory (CRT), we are like ships—really, like battleships—passing each other in the night. One side shouts, “We’ve got to get CRT out of our schools! It is hurting our children!” The other side responds, “CRT is not being taught in our children’s schools! This is just a racist dog whistle!” Is there any way to bridge the divide?

To illustrate the depth of our divisions, an August 2021 article posted on the website stated, “Fox News has mentioned ‘critical race theory’ 1,300 times in less than four months. Why? Because critical race theory has become a new boogiemán for people unwilling to acknowledge our country’s racist history and how it impacts the present.”

That is quite a serious charge.

Is Fox really engaging in white supremacist fearmongering? Or are fair-minded parents across America genuinely concerned about a destructive educational agenda in their kids’ schools?

That’s why I said that, when it comes to CRT, we are like battleships passing each other in the night—and shooting at each other as we pass by.

Yet I do believe that some of these divisions are more artificial than real, with the first problem being one of definitions. When we speak of CRT, are we speaking about the same thing? Can we even define it in our own words?

If you say, “CRT is good” and I say, “CRT is bad,” do we mean the same thing by CRT?

If we want to move beyond the current impasse, our first question should be, "What, exactly, do you mean by CRT? Can you define it?"

A colleague of mine asked me these same questions, writing to me from the perspective of a God-fearing, Bible-believing, highly respected black educator.

This led to a fruitful and insightful discussion, through which we understood one another better and could better define where we agreed and disagreed.

But we can't debate CRT if we can't define it. So, let this be our starting point: What, exactly, do you mean by CRT?

This leads to the next: "Do you believe that CRT is being taught in our children's schools (meaning, K-12)?"

My colleague assured me that, in his state (Virginia), CRT was *not* being taught in the schools. Instead, he explained, CRT was an academic theory taught at college or grad school levels.

But when I asked him if classes were being taught *through the lens of CRT* or if teachers were being *informed by CRT*, he said that was a very different question. Yet that was the very thing I meant when I referred to CRT being taught in our schools. Our interaction brought this difference to the surface.

It is the viewpoint of the black civil rights leader Bob Woodson that CRT is "explicitly and implicitly a racist approach to education," and that approach is increasingly infiltrating our schools. That is what many parents are reacting to, and that's why children's education was such a hot topic in Virginia and beyond in the recent elections.

It was not a chimera or a racist dog whistle. It was (and is) an issue of real concern.

Britt Hume put it like this: "There's ample evidence that critical race theory very much influences and is injected into what is being taught in those schools and these parents knew that." That was the point I was making to my colleague, and that would be true even if many parents could not define CRT with precision.

Hume continued, "Now, you could say technically it is not being taught in the sense of volumes have been written on critical race theory and it's not been handed out as a textbook"—which was the point my colleague was making to me—"but its influence and its tenets are in those schools."

That, again, is the crux of the matter, and that's what brings me to an approach that, hopefully, can help us work together for the betterment of our children, exposing bigoted and racist attitudes on all sides.

We continue to dig deeper with two sets of questions for parents.

1. Do you want your children to gain a truthful and accurate perspective of American history which includes the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad? That would exclude things like the 1619 Project, given its deep flaws and biases. It would also exclude an airbrushed telling of our national story. Do we want balance and honesty here? If so, can we agree on which textbooks and curricula to use? And can we help educate one another and fill in each other's blind spots?

2. Do you agree that it is wrong to make a child feel guilty or inferior or evil because of the color of their skin? Do you also agree that it is wrong to separate children into different groups, based on skin color and ethnicity? And do you agree that it is wrong to identify some children as part of the oppressed class and others as part of the oppressor class?

If we can say yes to the first set of questions, that rebuts

the idea that parents who oppose CRT don't want their kids to know the truth about slavery and segregation (and more). To the contrary, these parents are saying, "Yes, let the whole story be told, but in a fair and accurate way."

If we can say yes to the second set of questions, that rebuts the idea that proponents of CRT want white children to feel guilty or that they want to incorporate identity politics into the classroom. To the contrary, they are saying, "We have no desire to lay a guilt trip on white Americans."

On the other hand, those who want to whitewash our history will expose their own bigotry by saying "No" to the first set of questions, while those who have replaced anti-black racism with anti-white racism will expose their bigotry by saying "No" to the second set of questions.

But this way, we can at least expose and confront bigotry and bias while working with others of like heart and mind to do our best to continue to move forward as a nation.

Can we at least give this a shot by putting these questions on the table? It's sure better than fomenting more division and anger by yelling and accusing as we sail by each other's ships in the dark of night. {eoa}

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.