**Key Messages for Talking about Critical Race Theory**

Further Guidance for Philanthropy

While we’ve celebrated the recent progress of many philanthropic efforts and organizations to support racial justice and the movement for Black lives after the death of George Floyd, we should anticipate “pushback” on elevating issues of race and Critical Race Theory within foundation Board rooms and across the sector. Foundation leaders must empower themselves with an alternative, truthful narrative to combat the aggressive propaganda machine capturing headlines. Below, we offer some key messages for you to use.

**What is Critical Race Theory (CRT):**

* Critical Race Theory is an academic framework centered on the idea that racism is systemic (e.g., embedded in policies and legal systems), not based purely on individual prejudices.
* Critical race theory is the idea that racism is built into American institutions and frameworks to keep White people in the position of power in society.
* Developed by academics about 40 years ago in response to “a lack of racial progress following the civil rights legislation of the 1960s.” The academics argued the United States was “founded on the theft of land labor” and federal law continued with unequal treatment of people on the basis of race.
* Critical race theory is a practice. It’s an approach to grappling with a history of White supremacy that rejects the belief that what’s in the past is in the past, and that the laws and systems that grow from that past are detached from it.[[1]](#endnote-1)

**…and What it is Not**

* CRT is not new – it emerged out of a framework for legal analysis in the late 1970s and early 1980s created by legal scholars including Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw and Derrick Bell, among others.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* It does not suggest that all White people are racists; nor does it aim to make White people hate themselves or feel guilty. Rather, it suggests that policies and systems in this country (education, public health, legal systems, etc.) – not people – can advance opportunities for some groups (Whites) over others.
* CRT is not the same thing as diversity and inclusion work which aims to build representative groups and/or institutions and ensures that all people have a voice.

**What Foundations and Grantmakers Need to Know**

* The most important actions for foundations to take in this moment is to increase investments in people-of-color-led racial justice groups to push back against these false narratives.
* Philanthropy can bring constituencies together and fund the infrastructure for frame and narrative alignment to push back against CRT propaganda.
* Attacks on CRT are attacks on our ability to advance racial equity. We lose ground on progress that has been made if we ignore it.
* Provide trainings to foundation staff and boards with *factual* (not *theoretical*) information and data about the lived experiences of people of color in America.
* These attacks on critical race theory are a part of a broad, coordinated effort to thwart a multiracial democracy at a time when the right is consolidating their base in the lead-up to the mid-term elections.[[3]](#endnote-3)
* Our response cannot be that we abandon or malign the concept; but that we keep the focus on the purpose of these attacks and how having honest and courageous conversations about race – how it shows up in our past and informs our present – is the key to building the promise of a just, multiracial, democratic society. Their goal is for us to stop doing our work of advancing racial equity – whether in the classroom, in the workplace, or in government. [[4]](#endnote-4)

1. https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/01/us/critical-race-theory-explainer-trnd/index.html [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.raceforward.org/bannedwords> Guide to Counter-Narrating the Attacks on Critical Race Theory [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.raceforward.org/bannedwords Guide to Counter-Narrating the Attacks on Critical Race Theory [↑](#endnote-ref-4)