

Critical Race Theory: Frequently Asked Questions

The Sikh Coalition values community questions and feedback on all of our work. In our effort to provide clarity and transparency, we want to directly answer some of the most frequently asked questions regarding Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the intersection that political attacks on CRT have on our ongoing efforts to integrate Sikhism into state social studies standards and to ensure that accurate information about Sikh history and traditions is included in classroom materials.

The Sikh community in America is part of a larger landscape that includes many other communities that have suffered atrocities, institutionalized racism, bigotry, and violence. Just as the Sikh community would like to see our history, traditions, beliefs, and philosophy represented in an accurate, meaningful and holistic manner, so too do many other communities whose history and current condition have been purposefully left out of or misrepresented in curricula and educational materials.

What is Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

Critical race theory (CRT) is a [scholarly framework](#) that has been around for more than 50 years. Note that CRT is primarily a college-level theory not taught in K-12 schools. It emphasizes that racism is not just the result of individual bias, but that it is embedded in America's institutions and policies. This theory was established in response to the reversal of many advancements made by the civil rights movement. The Critical Race Theory framework provides an analysis of why racial inequities continue to hold back advancements for minority communities. As a result, this results in a society better able to understand intentional and unintentional bias and the impacted communities.

Is CRT taught in K–12 public schools?

No. Most education experts recognize that CRT is primarily a college-level academic theory that is not being taught in almost any [K-12 classrooms](#).

If CRT is not taught in K-12 public schools, why are lawmakers at the state level introducing laws to stop it from being taught?

Several states have proposed legislation that bars teachers from teaching “divisive” concepts like white privilege and racial equity. In fact, many of the bills introduced don't mention the concept of CRT, but are instead vague restrictions designed to stop education on white privilege and restrict classroom discussion of our nation's deeply rooted challenges with racism. Even when these bills do not get enacted into law, they still have ‘chilling’ effects on teachers and schools that are terrified of backlash for initiatives to improve diversity and inclusion. Political rhetoric has rallied individuals to mobilize against school districts and educators at school board meetings and school events to make sure they are not indoctrinating students with a “liberal agenda.”



How do these attacks on CRT and inclusive learning impact the Sikh Community?

The Sikh Coalition knows from [our own research](#) that Sikh youth experience bias-based bullying at a rate dramatically higher than the national average. Educating students about underrepresented communities is imperative to our efforts to combat and prevent bias, bigotry, and backlash. This includes changing state educational standards so that students learn about the Sikh faith and community in a constitutionally appropriate manner.

For more than ten years, we have worked to ensure that accurate information about Sikhism is included in public schools nationwide. In that time, we have learned that how information about history and culture is included dramatically affects how safe and inclusive our classrooms are for students. For example, the Sikh Coalition spent more than six years working to correct over 50 factual errors in K-12 textbooks, including passages which falsely claimed “Sikhism is a branch of Hinduism.”

The conversation over how marginalized communities in America, such as the Sikh community, are represented and included in school curricula is severely impacted by attacks on CRT and inclusive education. Unfortunately, the concept of “Critical Race Theory” has been wrongfully twisted to now include any discussion of race, identity, or culture. This, in turn, puts our work to continue accurately having Sikhism and the Sikh community represented in curriculums and textbooks in peril. Not only may we not see more representation and inclusion of Sikhs in classroom settings--we also risk seeing more misinformation arise against the Sikh community.

Finally, as a community that has seen and felt the painful impact of white supremacy from 1909 in Bellingham, WA, to 2012 in Oak Creek, WI, it is vital we stand in solidarity with communities who stand to suffer. Just as Sikhs demand the right to define our history and traditions, so too do marginalized communities whose history has been warped and distorted. It is vital we stand against those who seek to oppress, dismiss, and diminish the experiences of marginalized communities.

Why has CRT become a polarizing political topic?

As millions of Americans began reckoning with the ongoing high-profile cases of unarmed Black men being murdered by police, including George Floyd’s murder in May 2020, society began to re-examine America’s history of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans in the [United States](#). During the contentious 2020 presidential election and in election cycles since, CRT became a political ploy to further divide people on issues of race and identity. Much of the rhetoric claims there is a “culture war” against white Americans to scare voters, and many people who condemn critical race theory haven’t read it or studied it intensely. As a result of political rhetoric, disinformation has spread that CRT is not just a scholarly framework dealing with systemic racism but broadly includes anything related to diversity and inclusion.



Are there examples of institutional racism that is important for everyone in our society to understand?

Yes, there are multiple examples of institutional racism in our history that has led to systemic inequality today.

Lending discrimination, otherwise known as “redlining,” led to communities of color having less access to capital to invest in their homes and neighborhoods. This meant that banks denied mortgages to Black families who sought homes in neighborhoods that were deemed to be white. This allowed for federal and state investment in Black neighborhoods and communities to be substantially less than that in white neighborhoods, and for the Black community to simply have less access to important resources.

While these practices began in the 1930s, they continue to have repercussions on Black communities that were not able to pass down wealth between generations, leaving behind diminished property values with limited economic opportunities--which, in turn, has held back school funding to this very day. Redlining impacted the drawing of school districts that are funded by property taxes and based on home values. As a result, non-white school districts receive \$23 billion less than White districts despite serving the same number of students.

Another example of institutional racism is the impact of [Federal Indian Boarding Schools](#), which existed between 1819-1969. Under the guise of “assimilation,” these boarding schools stripped Indigenous children of their native languages, traditions, and beliefs. Per the U.S. Department of the Interior, childhood experiences in Federal Indian boarding schools, “at a minimum, the separation from family,” has contributed to poor health outcomes for the indigenous community.

While these are just two examples of institutional racism, many more can be cited throughout American history.

