Race and Racism in the United States:

A Sociological Guide for the Public

American Sociological Association

January 2023

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Recent social and civil protests against structural racism in the United States urge action, but none of us can change what cannot be faced. Reckoning with systemic oppression requires a frank discussion of the nation's history. Public debates over teaching about race and racism and concepts like privilege and "white fragility" have raised provocative questions such as: Why is this so controversial? What do "systemic racism" and "critical race theory"—terms used loosely in the news—really mean? And why should we care?

Sociology focuses on "the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior." As practitioners of this discipline, we, a team of expert sociologists convened by the American Sociological Association (ASA), created this guide on understanding systemic racism as a step toward eradicating it and working toward a more just U.S. society.

We argue, as Martin Luther King, Jr. did over 50 years ago, that systemic racism is the issue of "racial justice in America." We acknowledge the existence of legislative achievements on matters of civil rights, but, like Dr. King, we recognize that a "backlash" has occurred whereby every step forward is countered by a step back. Racial justice is unfinished work. In this document, we help equip others to join in this work.

This guide will be a great resource if you are …

- A parent interested in the curriculum about race and racism at your child's school.
- A teacher developing lectures and assignments about race in the U.S.
- A college president or secondary school principal responding to questions from legislators regarding teaching about race.
- A legislator considering proposals to limit anti-racism education.
- A reporter seeking to illuminate the debate over anti-racism efforts to a public audience.
- A CEO leading an effort to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion in your company.
- A professional (e.g., medical or legal) seeking to enact a just approach to your work.
- Anyone else who cares about the well-being of our country and its inhabitants.

We offer a critical sociological lens that reveals the racial bases of the power structure underlying society. Thus, we look beyond individual attitudes and behaviors to understand the broader forces and factors that impact people's lived experiences.

This document will showcase the sociological research in these areas that will permit a fuller understanding of the following statements:

There is nothing natural about race. Instead, race is a classification that has been used historically to create hierarchies that dictate people's access to opportunities.

Racism is real, longstanding, and pervasive in our society.

Racism is not merely about individuals and whether they are full of hate toward other groups.

Many U.S. social institutions and organizations were formed during a period of outright exclusion of certain racial, ethnic, and other groups (including women), and consequently, exclusion—overt and covert—is built into their structures and practices and is reproduced in contemporary society. See this statement from a group of fellow social scientists.

Racism is systemic, meaning it is born of interconnected institutionalized systems of discrimination across society, from housing to health care to law enforcement, to education, and beyond. It is embedded in everyday practices and policies that are often taken for granted.

Systemic racism contributes to persistent racial disparities.

It is a fiction that hard work on the part of minority groups is enough to overcome the consequences of systemic racism.

Racism isn't simply about Black and White people. It negatively impacts all people of color as groups are rank-ordered within a racial hierarchy.

Once you conceive that racism isn't simply about Black and White people, it is easier to see racism as it operates as anti-Semitic acts, the criminalization of immigration, AAPI Hate, and other forms.

Racism is about power. Because race operates as a hierarchy, many White people fear that the success of minority groups will mean they will have a lower position in society. To maintain the status quo and power structures intact, laws and policies are created to criminalize the behavior of minority groups and to deny them opportunities to access society's goods. This prevents minority groups, perceived as a threat, from building wealth and accruing power and potentially recalibrating the power hierarchy.

Racism intersects with other forms of inequality, including classism, sexism, heterosexism, citizenship status, ableism, ageism, and other systems to differentially shape life chances.

Anti-racism education lays bare these systemic inequities, which is a critical step in understanding how to move toward a more just society.

It is easier to downplay or even dismiss the presence of racism when we focus on the behaviors of individuals. But racism is not only about bad apples, it is about the whole orchard in which the apple trees grow. One of the key elements of racism is that it is systemic; it is built into the institutions, or the systems, of a society. Thus, even well-intentioned White people benefit from the existing structure in ways that perpetuate racial hierarchies and inequalities (Almaguer, 1994; Blumer, 1958; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Feagin, 2006; Feagin and Feagin, 1978; Lacy, 2021; McGhee, 2021; Omi and Winant, 1994).

White supremacy is both an ideology and a set of practices that undergirds the political, economic, and cultural domination of Whites over those considered to be non-white. This domination is systemic, reflected in cultural beliefs, social practices, and institutional structures (Belew and Gutiérrez, 2021; Fleming, 2018). Materially, white supremacy has meant advantaging White people by giving them preferred access to the best schools, housing, jobs, and other wealth-building resources society has to offer (Oliver and Shapiro, 2006).

The power of whiteness is reflected in existing structures as well as in individual attitudes and identities (Bracey and Moore, 2017; Combs, 2022). The boundaries of whiteness—who is considered in the category and who is considered outside it—have been ever-changing throughout American history. Some White ethnic groups like the Irish and Italians were once considered not fully White; the same is true for Jewish people. Now, these groups are considered White by most Americans, and they have benefitted from systemic racism (McDermott, 2020).

In the United States, a racial hierarchy is evident. Different groups are imagined, situated, and positioned in relationship to whiteness and to each other (Molina, HoSang, and Gutiérrez, 2019). For example, prevailing cultural representations portray Asian Americans and Black Americans in diametrically dissimilar ways. Asian Americans are often viewed as a "model minority" while Black Americans are frequently criminalized and regarded as a "social problem" Groups are situated in the racial hierarchy according to how closely they are imagined to approximate whiteness (Kim, 2000).

Early Examples of Systemic Racism

Systemic racism has shaped the history of the United States and reflects the policies that impact everyday life. This is apparent in the four-plus centuries of this country's massive genocide, land-theft, and other forms of oppression targeting Indigenous Peoples/nations. Indigenous Peoples have claim to the land we call "the United States," therefore we must conceive of them as nations rather than racial/ethnic minorities (Das Gupta, forthcoming 2023). Anti-Indigenous abuses include forced placement and abuse of Indigenous children in federal boarding schools, white sexual violence against Indigenous women, dehumanization through the use of sports mascots and imagery, and environmental degradation of indigenous tribal lands (e.g., uranium contamination, Dakota Access Pipeline, excavation of sacred burial grounds) (Sherwood, forthcoming 2023).

The U.S. immigration system is shaped by and reproduces white supremacy and structural racism (Bashi Treitler, 2013; Bernstein, McTarnaghan, and Islam, 2021; Kim, 2008; Kim and

Dhingra, forthcoming 2023). For example, beginning in the mid-19th century, Chinese, Filipinx, Japanese, and other Asian-descent groups began settling in the U.S., only to find themselves victims of illegal (often violent) and legal white nativistic oppression. Racist immigration exclusion laws have barred Asian Americans more than any other immigrant group. These acts include the 1875 Page Law (barred the immigration of Chinese-descent women owing to their penchant for "prostitution"), the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act (barred all Chinese immigration), and the 1908 Gentleman's Agreement (greatly reduced Japanese immigration). Oppression of Asian Americans has persisted for decades in the form of anti-"foreigner" massacres, discriminatory immigration and citizenship laws, war-time incarceration in U.S. concentration camps, post-9/11 hate-crime violence against Muslims and people of Arab and South Asian descent, sexualized racism against Asian American women, and the racialization of Asian-descent groups, including as human "viruses" through many pandemic health crises since the 1800s (Kim, 2021; Shah, 2001).

Likewise, Latinas/os/xs have also faced systemic racism, including land theft and expulsion from the United States. White imperialists conquered and colonized Mexicans by way of the bloody annexation of about half of Mexico's territory in 1848 and then stole land from Mexican Americans (Montejano, 2010). White imperialists have invaded Latin American countries, installed U.S. puppet governments, and engaged in other forms of military, political and economic interventions serving US capitalist interests and forcing many Latin Americans into an expanding US empire (Gonzalez, 2000). Often invisible in contemporary discussions of migration, these imperial policies have resulted in a boomerang effect in which migrants have become the unintended "harvest of empire" having to move because of economic, political, and environmental necessity (Gonzalez, 2000; Ochoa and Ochoa, 2007; Abrego, 2014). Once in the US, generations of Mexican immigrants and Central Americans have been targets of racist discrimination, which includes exclusion, the denial of political asylum, and the overrepresentation of immigrants who are detained and deported, often under the pretense of racialized illegality (Menjívar, 2000; Telles and Ortiz, 2008; Feagin and Cobas, 2015; Fox and Guglielmo, 2012; Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013; Flores and Schachter, 2018; Asad and Clair, 2018; Menjívar, 2021).

We call readers' attention to this history for two important reasons. First, it is often ignored or taught in isolation. Second, it highlights the intersectional and systemic nature of such attacks.

Intersectionality and the Opportunity Structure

The U.S. Constitution indicates that all men (humans) are created equal. Yet, throughout the history of the nation, race has played a dominant role in the access that people have to valuable societal opportunities. Race interacts with numerous other personal characteristics to open doors of opportunity to a selected segment of the U.S. population and to shut doors for others. An intersectional lens illustrates this well.

Intersectionality theory, first coined by lawyer and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 2019), illustrates how race intersects with a variety of other attributes (e.g., gender, class, nativity, citizenship, ability, sexuality, etc.) to position individuals on the social, economic, and political hierarchy. The roots of Crenshaw's conceptualization of intersectionality stem from the case of five Black women workers who sued General Motors (GM) claiming discrimination

based on layoffs. The court considered racial and gender discrimination separately. They reasoned that because Black workers and female workers were employed at GM, the alleged discrimination did not occur. Crenshaw argued that by considering them only as Black or only as women the court ignored the plaintiffs' unique experience as Black women. In short, the court refused to contemplate the intersection of these two forms of discrimination. Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2005) expanded on Crenshaw's conceptualization to introduce the concept "matrix of domination," through which she adds the attributes of age, religion, and sexual orientation.

We can illustrate intersectionality by analyzing the hourly wages of workers ranging from 25 to 64 years old using data from the [2019 American Community Survey](#) (ACS). Black women with a high school diploma have a median hourly wage that is 91 percent as high as that of White women, 87 percent as high as that of Black men, and 68 cents as high as White men. Highly educated Black people don't fare significantly better. Black women whose highest degree is a bachelor's degree have a median hourly wage that is 90 percent as high as that of White women, 92 percent as high as that of Black men, and 68 percent as high as that of White men.

Not only does race interact with other attributes such as gender, class, sexuality, and ability to shape access to opportunity, we also see how societal institutions work in collaboration to perpetuate racism.

Systemic Racism Reverberates through Society's Institutions

Society's [institutions](#), such as housing, education, health care, and law enforcement, are deeply interrelated. For instance, where you live often determines not only the value of your home but the schools your children attend and the educational opportunities available to them. Institutions influence people's social, economic, and educational outcomes, including the [wealth gap](#). Even though we might view these institutions as race-neutral, racialized ideas and racism are embedded within them (Ray, 2019).

Housing

A home is the greatest asset most people accumulate in their lifetime. Because wealth acts as a buffer to life's challenges, racism in housing access and lending is particularly insidious. Housing policy in the United States illustrates how pervasive and consequential systemic racism is. From 1868 to 1934, over 1.5 million mostly White families profited from the Homestead Act, receiving 246 million acres of Indigenous People's land for the cost of a filing fee (Edwards, 2019). While [Black people were not formally prohibited from participation](#), few in this post-emancipation period were able to take advantage of the act.

Subsequently, the [federal government was complicit in segregating neighborhoods](#). The Federal Housing Administration (FHA), created in 1934, applied a schema developed by the Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) to categorize neighborhoods according to perceived risk level to mortgage lending processes. The FHA established the racial composition of the neighborhood as the most important risk facing lenders. This practice, termed [redlining by sociologist John McKnight](#), denied Black people and other persons of color federally insured

mortgages, subjecting them to exploitation by predatory lenders. Redlining was an important tool in creating exclusively White suburbs (Jackson, 1987).

Restrictive covenants written into homeowner deeds, which forbade homeowners from selling or renting their homes to Blacks or Jews, played a role in segregating the suburbs too. In most suburbs, it was impossible to buy a home without implicitly agreeing to the restrictive covenant. The Supreme Court finally ruled in *Shelly v. Kraemer* (1948) that private racial covenants could not be enforced, but the custom of excluding Black home seekers from the most desirable neighborhoods continues in other ways.

It was not until decades later, with the passage of the Fair Housing Act in 1968, that systemic discrimination in the housing market became unlawful (Massey and Denton, 1993). Still, the policy has been enforced unevenly, leading to new forms of discrimination. Popularly known as the "father of environmental justice," sociologist Robert Bullard's work demonstrates that, despite legislative advances, housing discrimination not only persists today, it has byproducts, such as higher pollution levels in neighborhoods where Black people are concentrated (Blain, 2022).

These discriminatory practices help to explain why homeownership varies by race: 72.1 percent of White householders own their homes, but only 48.1 percent of Latino householders and 42 percent of Black householders do.

The reverberations we alluded to persist. A home is the most valuable asset for most Americans, yet homes located in areas that were redlined in the 1930s are today worth just 85 percent of the median value of homes in areas that were approved for FHA mortgages. And the gap is wider in some areas. In Atlanta and Tampa, for instance, homes in redlined areas are still worth less than half of those located in White neighborhoods. In 2021, the Brookings Institute found that biased appraisals and a general devaluation of housing in Black neighborhoods contribute to continuing inequality and result in less wealth accumulation for families of color.

These past and present discriminatory practices have real consequences for people and their ability to acquire and pass down generational wealth. In 2019, on average, for every $1 in net worth that Whites possessed, Blacks had around 12 cents and Latinos 21 cents. In turn, White middle-class families are better positioned than other groups to use their home's equity to finance college tuition or down payments on homes for their children.

Housing is just one of many institutions shaped by structural racism, and none of them operate in a vacuum.

Education

The long history of segregated neighborhoods in the U.S. has implications for the nation's schools. For much of the history of the United States, Black, Indigenous Peoples, Asian American, and Latina/o children were segregated from White children by law and custom. The children of Indigenous People were forcibly removed from their families and shuttled to boarding schools, where they were subjected to repeated physical and sexual abuse. Housed in

dilapidated buildings with outdated textbooks, such segregated schools typically aimed to assimilate children into the White mainstream and steer them to low-wage jobs in ways that maintained racial and class inequalities (Gonzalez, 2013).

Building on California's 1947 *Mendez v. Westminster* case, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling deemed racial segregation in schools unconstitutional. In its wake, the federal government put pressure on states to desegregate their school systems "with all deliberate speed," especially in the South. By the end of the 1970s, educational segregation by race fell noticeably. However, a common reaction among White parents was to separate their children from Black students by moving to areas that had few or no Black residents or to send their children to private schools (Cready and Fossett, 1998; Reardon and Owens, 2014). Beginning in 1980, court cases eased the enforcement of educational segregation based on race. Despite legislation barring racial segregation in public schools, Black and Latino students continue to attend segregated schools today; indeed, some are more segregated now than they were at the time of the Brown ruling.

Racial disparities in housing continue to generate inequities in school funding because a large part of public school funding is derived from property taxes. In its *Funding Gaps 2018* report, the Education Trust found that public schools with the largest percentage of Black, Indigenous, and Latina/o students received about $1,800 less in funding per student compared to schools with the smallest percentage of students of color, a 13 percent gap.

Systemic racism is not only overt, it can also involve implicit bias, attitudes and stereotypes that often unconsciously influence our thinking. Scholars B. Keith Payne and Jason W. Hannay (2021) argue "implicit bias reflects systemic racism." Even when schools are racially integrated, curriculum tracking leads to separate and unequal learning opportunities. Most schools in the U.S. still divide students within schools along perceived ability as determined by standardized tests scores, teacher and parent recommendations, or student choice (Oakes, 1985; Lacy, 2007; Tyson, 2011; Ochoa, 2013). This system of curriculum tracking is rooted in racist beliefs from over a century ago when groups of color, along with southern and eastern Europeans, were believed to be biologically and cognitively inferior to northern and western Europeans and thus tracked away from academically rigorous classes (Oakes, 1985; Gonzalez, 2013). Moreover, studies show the racist impacts of the educational system: Black and Latina/o students are underrepresented in top-tier classes, reducing their academic opportunities for life (Alvaré, 2018; Stewart, García, and Peterson, 2021).

Health Care

Systemic racism also shapes access to quality health care. Sociologist Sabrina Strings illustrates the cruel neglect of the health and well-being of Black people as early as "[t]he era of slavery when White Americans determined that Black Americans needed only the bare necessities, not enough to keep them optimally safe and healthy. It set in motion Black people's diminished access to healthy foods, safe working conditions, medical treatment and a host of other social inequities that negatively impact health."

Two examples exemplify the institutionalized dehumanization of Black people. They show that while denying Black humanity, Black bodies have been co-opted to generate medical knowledge to benefit White people. First, the [Tuskegee Experiment](#) involved poor and sometimes illiterate Black men presumed to have syphilis being told they were receiving medical attention while researchers secretly studied the effects of not providing treatment, even after a cure for the disease was available (Washington, 2008). Second, historian Deirdre Cooper Owens used the term ["medical bondage"](#) to describe enslaved Black women who had experimental gynecological procedures performed on them without their consent or the use of commonly available anesthesia.

Backed by eugenics movements and racist anti-immigrant ideologies, there is a long history of attempting to control the bodies and reproduction of poor and working-class women of color through coercive sterilization (Gutiérrez, 2008). Most recently, in 2020, a former nurse in an immigrant detention center in Georgia exposed a similar pattern of medical abuse against Spanish-speaking women. Thirteen immigrant women then filed a lawsuit against a doctor contracted by the detention facility for performing ["nonconsensual" hysterectomies](#).

Today, Blacks and other people of color continue to face systemic barriers that result in unequal access to adequate health care; consequently, they experience worse health outcomes than White people. For example, despite the legislative passage of the [Affordable Care Act](#), while 6.6 percent of Whites lack health-care insurance, 19.1 percent of Indigenous Peoples, 18.7 percent of Latinas/os, and 10.1 percent of Blacks do not have insurance. In addition, health disparities along racial lines persist: In 2020, compared to their respective White counterparts, the [life expectancy](#) of Indigenous People men was 11 fewer years, Indigenous People women 9.4 fewer years, Black men 7 fewer years, and Black women 4.7 fewer years. In 2019, Black and Indigenous People infants [died](#) before reaching their first birthday at a rate 2.4 times and 1.8 times, respectively, higher than that of White infants. Furthermore, over the period between 2007 and 2016, Black (40.8 deaths per 100,000 births) and Indigenous People (29.7) women were 3.2 times and 2.3 times, respectively, [more likely to die](#) due to pregnancy-related causes compared to White women (Petersen et al., 2019). Some of this disparity is likely rooted in a history of distrust borne of the abuses outlined above.

The impact of these inequalities has been especially acute during the COVID-19 pandemic. Woolf, Masters, and Aron (2021) observed that the United States sustained a drop in life expectancy between 2018 and 2020 which was 8.5 times higher than 16 comparison countries. U.S. Whites saw their life expectancy drop by 1.36 years between 2018 and 2020 compared to a decline of 3.88 years among Latinas/os and 3.25 years among Black people. Woolf et al. (2021) point to systemic racism as the major culprit associated with these pandemic disparities.

Policing

Policing, too, is defined by systemic racism. It is a form of social control. The institution, at least partially, [originates with the establishment of restrictive laws](#) known as *slave codes* in the 19th century.

With each slave rebellion, the slave codes—a form of institutionalized subjugation and social control over Black bodies—grew stricter. Soon, *slave patrols*, became another tool in the degradation and subjugation of enslaved people. Created for the dual purposes of protecting the institution of slavery and policing slave insurrection, slave patrols were the precursor to the modern police state. In some states, every White man was required to be part of this surveillance system. Historian Sally E. Hadden writes, "The history of police work in the South grows out of this early fascination, by White patrollers, with what African American slaves were doing. Most law enforcement was, by definition, White patrolmen watching, catching, or beating black slaves" (2003: 4). These racist roots inform the culture of policing today.

These origins make it unlikely that people of color are coincidentally subjected to what sociologist Victor Rios (2011) calls "overpolicing." Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately more likely than White people to be racially profiled, stopped, searched, and killed by police. Black men are 2.5 times and Latino men 1.3 times more likely than White men to be killed by police while Black women are 1.4 times more likely than White women to lose their lives.

For example, the brutal murder of George Floyd in 2020 by a White policeman with other police officers as witnesses in Minneapolis, Minnesota is easy to detect as a racist act. It is harder to observe the systemic factors *within* the criminal justice system and larger racist beliefs resulting in Black and Latino men being disproportionately stopped, detained, incarcerated, and killed by the police (Alexander, 2010; Rios, 2011).

Another contemporary illustration of the way the criminal justice system is often racially discriminatory is the disparate approach to the crack cocaine era of the 1980s and 1990s in comparison to the opioid era beginning in the early 21st century. In the latter era, White people are disproportionately using and becoming addicted to opioids and heroin. This time, public attention was driven by concern for the well-being of drug users and the downward mobility of working-class White people, many of whom were overdosing. The term "deaths of despair" emerged in the social science lexicon to describe the rise of deaths due to suicide, drug overdose, and alcoholic liver disease. From a policy perspective, the prevailing approach to dealing with the country's drug problem shifted from the crack epidemic to the opioid epidemic, from "incarcerate, don't rehabilitate" to "rehabilitate, don't incarcerate."

Rising Violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

We highlight an ongoing, pervasive pattern of racist violence. During the COVID-19 pandemic, unprovoked violence directed against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders increased. From March 2020 to March 2021, 6,603 incidents of harassment and violence against Asian Americans were reported to the Stop AAPI Hate coalition, while an AAPI survey in 2021 found that 27 percent of Asian American respondents said that they have been "a victim of a hate crime." An intersectional lens reveals that much of the anti-Asian hostility has been directed at Asian American women, such as the women massacred in an Atlanta spa in March 2021, who account for nearly two-thirds of the incidents reported to Stop AAPI Hate. Asian-owned restaurants, shops, and salons have witnessed a sharp decline in business along with some businesses being vandalized, robbed, and subject to racist graffiti and disparaging online reviews.

The dramatic increase in unprovoked hostility and violence reveals the multilayered dynamics through which people are defined by their race or seen as the "other," the "non-American." As George Mekari outlines, the mere presence of immigrant groups often fueled nativist fears. The common stereotype of Asian Americans as a "model minority," a myth that portrays "Asian Americans as a polite, law-abiding group who have achieved a higher level of success than the general population through some combination of innate talent and pull yourself up by your own bootstraps immigrant striving" has broadened to include racial threat (2019; 1). Racial threat theories suggest that dominant groups often feel threatened by the presence of racial or ethnic minorities and in turn take actions rooted in the social control of the minority racial group in order to reduce this perceived threat (Blumer, 1958). Much of the current anti-Asian hostility and violence was spurred by high-ranking politicians who characterized COVID-19 as the "Wuhan virus" or "Kung flu" (Louie and Viladrich, 2021).

While the pandemic illustrates how the COVID-19 virus has been racialized today, one must recognize that racial stereotypes and the scapegoating of Asian Americans have deep, historical roots. In 1900, Chinese community members were blamed for an outbreak of bubonic plague in San Francisco (Trauner, 1978). Consequently, patterns of residential segregation were even more strictly enforced and the push to exclude other Asian immigrants gained traction. It also helped solidify exclusive white ethnic immigrant enclaves. And during World War II, under the misguided assumption that they would be loyal to Japan, not the U.S., Japanese American citizens were uprooted and placed in incarceration camps following the bombing of Pearl Harbor (O'Brien and Fugita, 1991).

Why We Need Anti-Racism Education

A 2021 survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that civic awareness among people in the U.S. is on the rise, but "many still misunderstood basic facts about how government works." When surveyed, respondents say that the country has made significant progress on race, leading some to believe we no longer need to talk about racism. We have shown systemic racial discrimination in the U.S. still has a significant impact today. Ignorance of the past—feigned or real—impacts individuals' ability to understand the ongoing implications of that legacy. It is only through understanding the historical and sociological context that we can seek to address racial disparities and work toward a society characterized by greater racial justice.

We view attacks on Critical Race Theory as an effort to maintain a culture of ignorance of our racial past and its connection to the present. For that reason, sociologist Victor Ray's book, *On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters & Why You Should Care,* comes at an apt time. In the introduction, Ray draws on insightful words from James Baldwin: "'Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced'" (2022: xix). According to Ray, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is "a body of scholarship that faces America's brutal racial history, recognizes the parts of that history that remain unchanged, and works toward changing the rest" (2022: xix). CRT is an academic framework and method of analysis that originally emerged in law schools in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Crenshaw, 2010). CRT was established by legal scholar Derrick Bell in the late 1970s and early 1980s with other major contributors including law scholars Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Kendall Thomas, and Patricia Williams, among others.

Current public debates often lump all teaching about race and racism under the moniker of Critical Race Theory (CRT). This is misguided. While CRT provides a useful frame for understanding how race and racism operate in the U.S, it is one approach. Until the recent political debates about teaching race in public schools, it was rarely used outside of colleges and universities. The attack on CRT is a proxy attack on all anti-racist teaching, research, and understanding, amplifying the need for anti-racist education at all educational levels, as early as nursery school (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001) and beyond (Hagerman, 2018).

Our focus in this report is on ensuring that people understand the historical and sociological roots of race and racism in the United States. These efforts seek to expand understanding of the ways in which racist policies and practices infuse our institutions and give people the information they need to work toward greater equity.

Legislation and other forms of political activism opposing the teaching of accurate portrayals of American history are being erroneously framed as examples of CRT in order to criminalize and threaten public school teachers. Such actions deny that structural racism is a part of the nation's history and privilege ensuring that White students are not made to feel uncomfortable with ongoing inequality. According to the UCLA School of Law's [CRT Forward Tracking Project](#) (2022), 212 actions—in the form of statements, resolutions, legislation, Attorney General letters, regulations, policies, and executive directives—have been adopted across 40 states with the most adopted being in Georgia (24), Texas (16), Virginia (15), South Dakota (12), North Carolina (9), and Missouri (8), Ohio (8), and Pennsylvania (8).

Given such intense legislative and other forms of actions intent on hiding the nation's history of racism and its continued presence today, it is clear that racism will not end on its own. Dismantling racism requires actively working against entrenched racial inequalities. This requires knowledge about how racism works and persists. This guide is one step in that direction.

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