

Worldview Questions	Christianity	Critical Theory
Who are we? What gives us meaning?	God. Created in the image of God	The position in society of the groups we belong to: oppressor vs. oppressed
What is our fundamental problem?	Sin: All individuals have sinned	Systemic power: Groups oppress other groups
What is our ultimate hope?	Redemption through faith in Jesus Christ	Social liberation, freedom from oppression
What is our ultimate moral responsibility?	To love God and to love others	Activism: to dismantle structures of power & oppression
What is our ultimate purpose?	To glorify God	To create a utopian society free of oppression

Where did Critical Theory Come From?: Overview

1. **Karl Marx (1850s – 1880s)**



2. **Antonio Gramsci (1920s)**

3. **Frankfurt School (1930s)**

Max Horkheimer

4. **Herbert Marcuse & Angela Davis (1960s – 1970s)**



5. **Derrick Bell & Kimberlee Crenshaw (1970s – 1990s)**



6. **Present-day Scholar/Activists**

Chapter 2: Marxism + Culture = Critical Theory



Critical Theory

Herbert Marcuse (1960s)

Max Horkheimer (1930s)

Cultural Marxism

Frankfurt School (1920s – 1950s)

Antonio Gramsci (1910s – 1920s)

Karl Marx

Liberal (capitalist) societies are built on SYSTEMIC
POWER and OPPRESSION

From Marxism to Cultural Marxism

1. **Karl Marx (1850s – 1880s)**
2. **Antonio Gramsci (1920s)**
3. **Frankfurt School (1930s)**
Max Horkheimer
4. **Herbert Marcuse &**
Angela Davis (1960s – 1970s)
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Antonio Gramsci: Cultural Hegemony



Marx 1880 or so



Antonio Gramsci 1891 – 1937

Cultural Hegemony

IS THE IDEA THAT THE ***DOMINANT IDEOLOGY*** OF SOCIETY —THE BELIEFS, EXPLANATIONS, PERCEPTIONS, VALUES, AND MORALS—REFLECTS THAT OF THE RULING CLASS.

THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY JUSTIFIES THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC STATUS QUO AS ***NATURAL, INEVITABLE, PERPETUAL*** AND ***BENEFICIAL*** FOR EVERYONE, RATHER THAN AS ARTIFICIAL SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS THAT BENEFIT ONLY THE RULING CLASS.

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)- Foundational Theorist for the Sociology of Culture.



Antonio Gramsci — Cultural Hegemony

- **Hegemony**. The elites define (make up) the *beliefs, norms, values, moral worldview* of a *society*.
 - And they manipulate (“brainwash”) the rest of society into believing that these things are all natural and objectively true.
 - They control all the “cultural defining” institutions of society (*media, entertainment, education, economic institutions, and religious institutions*, etc.)



Hegemony Creates “False Consciousness.”

- Oppressed people groups fall prey to a ***false consciousness***: they accept the view of the world the elite class has created for them.
- They do not recognize that the notion of an objective reality and absolute truth is part of the hegemonic lie that oppresses them.
- For Gramsci (and Critical Theorists of today), the moral imperative is to liberate oppressed people from ***hegemonic power***. They need to be awakened from their ***false consciousness*** to a ***critical consciousness*** (awareness of what’s really going on).

Critical Consciousness: Antonio Gramsci's Moral Imperative

- **Critical consciousness = Woke**

- Oh, now I see... All the values, beliefs, norms, morality, and ways of thinking I once believed to be normal are actually just oppressive “social constructions.”

Same lil homie.. Same.



Cultural Hegemony is Assault on Truth

- **Cultural hegemony** is the claim that all statements about absolute truth are value-laden **constructs made up by powerful groups in a given culture to oppress others.**
- It plants the seeds for CRT's notion of "**cultural constructivism**", which is a rejection of ***objective reality, absolute truth,*** and rationalism.

Counter-hegemony: Creating a new worldview

- **Counter-hegemony:** Alternative definitions and understandings of reality and truth that oppose those of the dominant group.
 - **Examples:** rewriting history (1619 Project), new ideas about race, gender, sexual orientation, economic arrangements of society etc. New words, new definitions of old words, cancelled words.

Counter-hegemony: Creating a new worldview

- **Moral Revolution:** For social progress and the **liberation** to occur, the **culture** and **value system** must be disrupted, dismantled and replaced.
- **How?** "Woke" people must control political and social institutions that **create culture** (e.g., *universities, media, church, schools, courts, legislative bodies, administrative offices*) so they can **disrupt** and **dismantle** those existing institutions and create mass acceptance of (and **conformity to**) a critical conscious **counter-hegemony (a new worldview)**.

The Frankfurt School

- In 1924, a group of Marxist scholars formed a think tank called the *Institute for Social Research* in Frankfurt, Germany. The Institute became known as the *Frankfurt School*.



Max Horkheimer

- **Max Horkheimer** was a psychologist and Marxist philosopher. He became Director of the Frankfurt School in 1930.



Max Horkheimer: A Cultural Marxist

- **Max Horkheimer** was Cultural Marxist like Gramsci.
 - A person's **social identity** defines them.
 - Industrial societies are organized by **systemic power** creating two social identities: **oppressed** and **oppressor**.
 - The elite, oppressor class rules through **cultural hegemony**.
 - **Revolution** is necessary to achieve a socialist utopian society.
 - **Revolution requires control of culture: counter-hegemony.**
 - Control of political and social institutions that **create culture**

Critical Theory: Going beyond Gramsci

- Horkheimer wanted give his Cultural Marxist worldview a method of societal analysis to precipitate **cultural revolution**.
- In 1937 he wrote a paper in which he called his cultural Marxist philosophy/ideology combined with new method of societal analysis "***Critical Theory***."

Critical Theory: Three Features

- **A vision** of what society should look like: a utopia in which the means of **systemic power** are controlled by government thus eliminating oppression.
- A **method** of **critiquing** the ways (through hegemony) that societies inherently institutionalize oppression and domination.
 - It seeks to “**deconstruct**” the institutions of society and awaken people to the inherent, often-hidden forms of oppression in those institutions.
- **A goal** of promoting activism intended to transform society according to its utopian vision (revolution).
 - The goal is not to find truth, but rather to create a “**critical consciousness**” in the masses that would fuel **activism** and ultimately revolution.

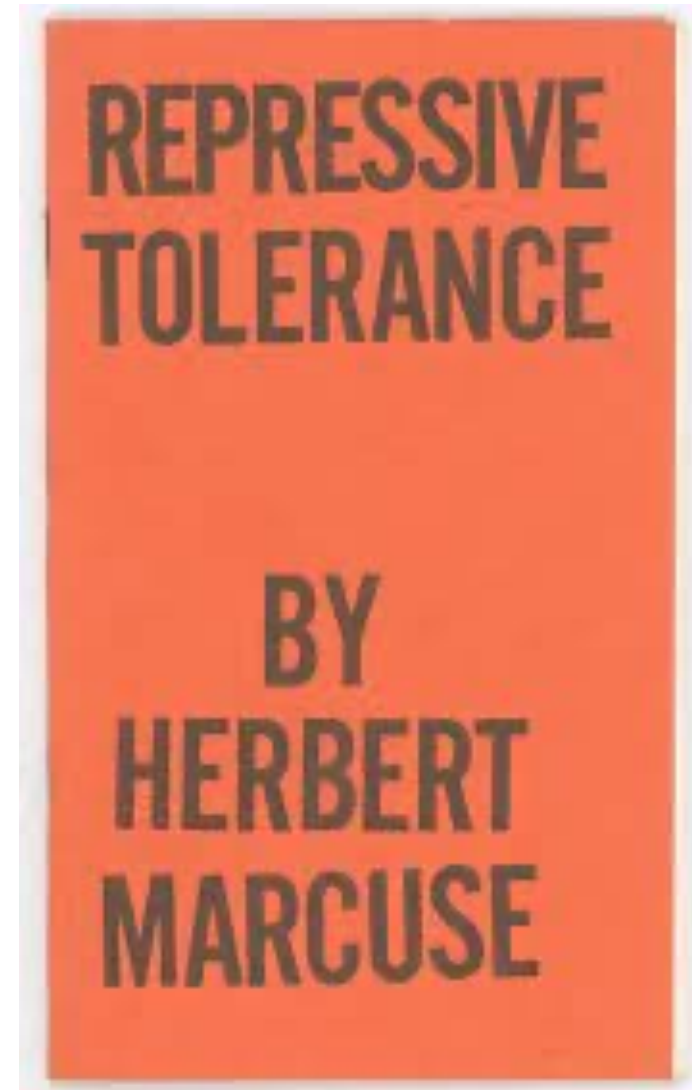
Herbert Marcuse: Bridge to *Contemporary* Critical Theory

- **Herbert Marcuse (1898 – 1979)**
 - Fled Germany with the other Frankfurt School scholars in the mid-1930s
 - Ended up at Columbia University in New York.
 - In 1965 he wrote a paper called ***Repressive Tolerance***.



Herbert Marcuse: Repressive Tolerance

- In 1965 he wrote an essay called ***Repressive Tolerance***.
- Tolerance in traditional sense promotes oppression. It is repressive.
- Alternative: **Liberating tolerance**.



Herbert Marcuse: Repressive Tolerance



Liberating tolerance, then, would mean intolerance against movements from the Right, and toleration of movements from the Left.

(Herbert Marcuse)

Critical Theory + Identity Politics = Many “Critical Theories”

- **Marx:**

The power dynamics in a capitalist society necessarily means that the bourgeoise are the oppressors and the proletariat are the oppressed.

- **Critical Race Theory:**

The power dynamics in a White, Western society necessarily means that the White people are the oppressors and non-White people are the oppressed.

- **Critical Queer Theory:**

The power dynamics in a heteronormative society necessarily means that straight people are the oppressors and the non-straight people are the oppressed.

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CRIT. THEORY EXAMPLES

FEMINIST THEORY

A theory aimed at understanding the nature of gender inequality through examination of women's and men's social roles, and how these drive interests, opportunities, and experiences in a variety of contexts

QUEER THEORY

A theory deconstructing sexuality & viewing it as a discursive social construction, and therefore fluid, plural, and continually negotiated rather than a natural or fixed identity

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

A theory that recognizes racism is engrained in the fabric of society, with particular attention to structural racism, institutional racism, and how the law and legal traditions adversely affect people of color

ANTI-COLONIAL THEORY

A theory emphasizing resistance to oppressive political, economic, and cultural forces created by colonial power via advocacy for restoration of local control



Summary of Critical Theories

- **Social Identity and Power:** Divide the world into oppressor and oppressed groups by race, class, sex, age, physical ability, etc. “Identity politics.”
- **Hegemony:** Dominant groups oppress others through **cultural hegemony**. They manipulate the rest of society into seeing the world through the lens of their worldview.
- **Liberation is our Hope; Activism our Moral Responsibility.** Critical Theorist/Activists seek to liberate oppressed groups from hegemonic power, which requires taking control over the culture: **counter-hegemony** and awakening people from their *false consciousness*.
- **Woke.** When oppressed people awaken to a *critical consciousness*, they will see that the values, beliefs, norms, morality of the dominant group, **all they thought to be objectively true**, are merely social constructions created by the dominant group to exploit other groups. They will revolt against cultural hegemony and embrace a counter-hegemony rooted in critical consciousness.
- **Marcuse’s Liberating Tolerance** introduces a **moral asymmetry** that provides the justification for the censorship of the Right by those on the Left.

CRT: Preview of Next Week

