

# Have You Been *Wondering?* HOW RACISM AFFECTS ALL OF US

## How Racism Affects All

### Overview and Context

Conversations focused on histories of race and racism are foundational to advancing learning environments that support all students in their positive identity development. While many adults have been taught not to see color or to treat everyone as equals, research shows that this approach is not the best way to reduce racial prejudice. Children, from a very young age, start to make associations between people within and outside of their racial identity groups. By centering dialogue about our differences and how to navigate through them, we equip students with skills to become problem solvers, address conflict, and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. The 21st-century context in which our students are learning and growing is increasingly complex and interconnected and requires individuals to act in empathic and compassionate ways toward others. In order to do so, we must embrace and celebrate our racial differences and work to address practices, policies, and behaviors that continue to perpetuate disproportionate outcomes based on racial identity. Conversations about race and racism are central to cultivating a school community where we can come together to take action against racial injustices, value racial diversity, and support one another as we continue to build a future in which each of us can thrive.

### Resources

- [How Racially Diverse Schools and Classrooms Can Benefit Students](#)
- [Diversity Wins, Inclusion Matters](#)
- [How Diversity Makes Us Smarter](#)

## What is Systemic Racism

The history of race and racism in the United States is long and complex. While some might argue that we are in a post-racial society, the legacies of systemic racism are all around us and well documented across many fields of study. Nevertheless, we often understand racism

## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**RACE:** Race is a made-up social construct, and not an actual biological fact. Racial designations have changed over time (some groups that are considered “white” in the United States today were considered “non-white” in previous eras), and the way in which racial categorizations are enforced (the shape of racism) has also changed over time.

**RACISM:** Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.

**PRIVILEGE:** Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g. white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it because we’re taught not to see it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it.



as a phenomenon that only impacts communities that have been historically marginalized. These misconceptions are perpetuated by zero-sum thinking, which claims that gains for one group come with losses for others. This kind of zero-sum ideology is dangerous and ignores how racism affects all of us and how it would benefit all of us to come together to fight against its systemic impacts.

Systemic racism is an interlocking and reciprocal relationship between the individual, institutional and structural levels, which function as a system. These levels are:

- Individual (within interactions between people or as internalized within a person)
- Institutional (within institutions and systems of power)
- Structural or societal (among institutions and across society)

There are disproportionate psychological, financial, and social impacts for communities of color over generations. Researcher Heather McGhee, however, writes in her new book, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* that racism affects all of us, including white Americans. She, like many scholars of race before her, explains that systemic racism leads to divisive, competition-based, individualistic ideas of success and progress, preventing us from forming strong relationships with one another. In contrast, solidarity with one another, across our racial identities and differences, allows us to think about solutions that can benefit us all.

## Critical Race Theory

One of the key frameworks that has been a subject of debate in the past couple of years is Critical Race Theory (CRT). There are many misconceptions about what this framework is (and is not). Most recently, the debate is linked to misleading conversations about books that should be banned for allegedly touching on or teaching critical race theory. These claims illuminate anxieties that talking about racism further divides us, but research shows that talking about racism, from an early age, actually helps individuals recognize each other's differences and celebrate them instead of further dividing them from one another.

### What is it?

"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."

~Kimberlé Crenshaw, leading scholar and professor of Critical Race Theory



## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**POWER:** Power may be understood as the ability to influence others and impose one's beliefs. All power is relational, and the different relationships either reinforce or disrupt one another. The importance of the concept of power to anti-racism is clear: racism cannot be understood without understanding that power is not only an individual relationship but a cultural one, and that power relationships are shifting constantly. Power can be used malignantly and intentionally, but need not be, and individuals within a culture may benefit from power of which they are unaware.

**ANTI-RACISM:** Anti-Racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life. Anti-racism tends to be an individualized approach, and set up in opposition to individual racist behaviors and impacts.

**RACIAL EQUITY:** Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted one's outcomes in society. When we use the term, we are thinking about racial equity as one part of racial justice, and thus we also include work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or that fail to eliminate them.

Source: [Racial Equity Tools](#)

## Critical Race Theory (con't)

- The core idea is that race is a social construct, and that racism is not merely the product of individual bias or prejudice, but also something embedded in legal systems and policies
- Names structures of disadvantage across history - from enslavement to Jim Crow Laws, and voter suppression today
- A framework that examines the role that law played in establishing the very practices of exclusion and disadvantage vs the common notion that the law is objective and fair
- Offers a way to examine systemic racism through rigorous academic study of American history

### What critical race theory is not?

- Blaming white people for racism: instead it names the complex interplay of race as a construct and systems of power
- Anti-American: exposing histories of exclusion is often labeled an anti-American act, which runs counter to the idea of free speech and debate that defines American democracy. As sociologist Victor Ray has noted, “making laws outlawing critical race theory confirms the point that racism is embedded in the law.”
- Not a synonym for culturally relevant teaching, social justice, or diversity, equity, and inclusion (though can be integrated with this work). It is specifically a framework that thinks about how policies and practices can help perpetuate racism.
- Does not teach that achieving racial justice and equality between racial groups requires discriminating against people based on their whiteness

Cited from Janel George, “[A Lesson on Critical Race Theory](#),” American Bar Association, January 12, 2021.

## What Is Happening At Rowland Hall?

As an independent school in the Salt Lake Valley committed to promoting equity and inclusion, Rowland Hall recognizes the need to continue to name histories of systemic exclusion in order to learn from and build a more welcoming and inclusive country. Naming systems of advantage and disadvantage is part of our work toward racial and social justice. Critical Race Theory, however, is not a framework being explicitly taught to students, as it is an academic field of study. Some of the research and scholarship that informs CRT, though, continues to impact how educators view schools as systems that can perpetuate racist policies and practices.



## READ WATCH LISTEN

### READ

- [The Cost of Racism to White People](#)
- [How to talk to family and friends about racism and white privilege](#)
- [History of Racism in Utah](#)
- [White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)

### WATCH

- [Black History is Utah History: A Youth City panel discussion with Representative Sandra Hollins and Rowland Hall alumni Sophie Ayers-Harris](#)
- [Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man](#)

### LISTEN

- [Code Switch \(NPR\)](#)
- [1619 \(NY Times\)](#)
- [Intersectionality Matters!](#)
- [Seeing White](#)
- [How to Talk to Kids About Race \(PrinciPALS podcast\)](#)

## What Is Happening At Rowland Hall? (con't)

Conversations about systemic racism take place amongst faculty and staff at Rowland Hall as we examine:

- Recruitment of students from historically excluded communities
- Curricular frameworks and questions of exclusion and representation
- Institutional policies and practices that might perpetuate inequities

Students at Rowland Hall learn about the multiple histories that define America's past as well as the diverse range of cultures and communities that make up American life today, but they are not being taught that one race is inherently inferior or superior to another or that white people are to be blamed for racism. Instead, our students engage with narratives about the lived experiences of Americans from dominant and marginalized backgrounds, histories of movements for civil rights, contemporary movements for social justice, as well as their own identities and backgrounds. They are taught to ask questions about themselves and the world and to arrive at their own informed conclusions through open dialogue.

"The Truth About Critical Race Theory and How It Shows Up in Your Child's Classroom," Education Post, May 5, 2021.

