

When Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 30 years ago, it was a relatively obscure legal concept. Then it went viral.

By [Jane Coaston](#)

There may not be a word in American conservatism more hated right now  
[the new caste](#)  
[system](#) -heterosexual people on top.

I met Kimberlé Crenshaw in her office at Columbia Law School on



That brings us to the concept of intersectionality, which emerged from the ideas debated in critical race theory. Crenshaw first publicly laid out her theory of intersectionality in 1989, when she published a paper in the University of

[read that paper here](#).

As Crenshaw details, in May 1976, Judge Harris Wangelin ruled against the separate, protected class within the law, or else it would risk opening a  
ould demand to be heard in the law:

"The legislative history surrounding Title VII does not indicate that the goal of the statute was to create a new classification of 'black women' who would have greater standing than, for example, a black male. The prospect of the creation of new classes of protected minorities, governed only by the mathematical

seriously, they actually try to master them, or at least try to read the sources  
 en with

case, but what many people have heard or know about intersectionality

### **How the right started worrying and learned to fear intersectionality**

Beginning in 2015 and escalating ever since, the conservative response to intersectionality has ranged from mild amusement to outright horror. In 2017, writer Andrew Sullivan argued that intersectionality was a religion of sorts: In his view, human experience is explained and through which all speech must be filtered. Its version of original sin is the power of some identity groups over others. To overcome this sin, you need f

When you talk to con  
 measured. They say the concept of intersectionality the idea that people  
 experience discrimination differently depending on their overlapping identities  
 , a writer for National Review  
 who described  
 idea is more or less indisputable.

can man is going to experience the world differently than an

hierarchy of oppression but, in practice, an inversion of it, such that being a white straight cisgender man is made anathema.

which conservatives had no real problem, until it was spoken.

In a 2018 [clip for Prager University](#), an online platform for conservative of identity politics in which the value of your opinion depends on how many victim groups you belong to. At the bottom of the totem pole is the person

In an interview, Shapiro gave me a definition of intersectionality that seemed

of course, they actually do, and the people at the top of our current identity hierarchy are more concerned about losing their spot than they are with eliminating those hierarchies altogether.

identity, exactl

people, from the very beginning of the civil rights movement, who had denounced the creation of equality rights on the grounds that it takes

To Crenshaw, the most common critiques of intersectionality that the are actually affirmations of the

intersect in ways that impact how they are viewed, understood, and treated. Black women are both black and women, but because they are *black women*, they endure specific forms of discrimination that black men, or white women, might not.

cultural structures just to give people of color power over white people, for example. She wants to get rid of those existing power dynamics altogether changing the very structures that undergird our politics, law, and culture in order to level the playing field.

Still, as Crensh  
prism [of intersectionality] necessarily demands anything in particular of

The conservatives I spoke to understood quite well what intersectionality is. ed by intersectionality as legal concept, or intersectionality as an idea. (I asked Shapiro this question directly, and he

ctice of  
intersectionality, and moreover, what they concluded intersectionality would ask, or demand, of them and of society.

