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KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

1959

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Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leader in critical race theory, introduced the term "intersectionality" to describe the multiple ways people can be oppressed.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw was born May 5, 1959, in Canton, Ohio. After high school, she attended Cornell University, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in government and Africana studies in 1981. She then went to Harvard Law School, where she and other student activists demanded that the law school hire more professors of color and offer more classes about race and the legal system. During this time, Crenshaw decided she wanted to become a law professor so she could continue helping people of color and teach students about race and law.

After Crenshaw earned her law degree in 1984, she came to Wisconsin to study at the University of Wisconsin Law School. She also worked for Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Shirley Abrahamson. She graduated from the UW Law School with an advanced degree called a Master of Laws in 1985, and in 1986 she reached her dream of teaching when she became a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Law. She still teaches law now, splitting her time between UCLA and the Columbia School of Law in New York.

Crenshaw is known as a leader in the study of critical race theory, which looks at the relationship between racism and the legal system. She is famous for introducing the idea of intersectionality in an article she wrote in 1989. Intersectionality refers to how oppression or unjust treatment based on race, gender, and other categories combines and overlaps, and how people who are in more than one oppressed group experience systemic injustice in multiple ways. For example, Black women deal with racism, sexism, and oppression specific to them that white women and Black men do not have to deal with.

Crenshaw is still a dedicated activist. She is the president and executive director of the African American Policy Forum (AAPF), which she helped create in 1996. AAPF's mission is "to promote efforts to dismantle structural inequality." One of the movements AAPF has started, called #SayHerName, tries to raise awareness of Black women and girls who have been killed by police and helps support their families. In 2011, Crenshaw also started the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies at the Columbia School of Law. She gives speeches in the US and other countries, and she has received many awards and honors, including the 2021 Ruth Bader Ginsburg Lifetime Achievement Award from the Association of American Law Schools.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/kimberle-crenshaw



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