

How to be an Antiracist, Dr. Ibram X. Kendi One World New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2019, 320pp. \$27.00, hardback.

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‘What’s the problem with being ‘not racist’? It is a claim that signifies neutrality. ‘I am not a racist, but neither am I aggressively against racism’. This is the foundation of Ibram X. Kendi’s award-winning book ‘How To Be An Antiracist. Kendi, a professor, author, writer, and the founding director of the Antiracist Center at Boston University provides a foundational and explanatory difference between a person who says ‘*I’m not racist*’ and a person who states ‘*I’m an antiracist*’. Kendi is now heralded as the leading expert on racism. He provides his audience with a concrete definition of racism and its impact on society, through government-sponsored policies and laws that further deepen the divide in this country around racism. He connects the lineage of the birth of this country and throughout history where racism has been methodically implanted in society up and until today.

In chapter one, Kendi provides a clear definition of what is a racist and antiracist. According to Kendi, a racist is ‘*One who is supporting a racist policy through their actions or inaction*’. An antiracist can be described as ‘*One who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea*’ (p13). It is also in chapter one, we are introduced to Kendi’s parents Larry and Carol Kendi. He talks of their introduction and their involvement in the black agenda and liberation. It’s clear he wants the reader to understand with their involvement in various seminars and workshops on black liberation would have a profound effect on Kendi. According to Kendi, racist policies are developed and implemented. The crutch of his book is couched in the idea that: “*A racist is someone who is supporting a racist polity by their actions or inactions or expressing a racist idea. An antiracist is someone who is supporting an antiracist policy by their actions or expressing an antiracist idea.*”

It’s in this chapter and throughout the book, the reader will uncover various examples and definitions of where racism can be found in almost every aspect of society.

Chapter four begins with just one of those examples. Titled ‘*Biology*’ the difference between a ‘*Biological Racist*’ and a ‘*Biological Antiracist*’ (p44). Subsequent chapter starters like this one can be found throughout his book giving the reader a preview of what type of racism Kendi is going to be addressing. The author makes the argument that “*Biological racism rests on two ideas: that the races are meaningfully different in their biology and that these differences create a hierarchy of value*”.

In chapters five throughout the rest of his book, Kendi continues to use these one-word titles only to go into more detail about how it relates to racism. In “*Culture*” the title of chapter seven, the author talks racism affects African Americans. One of the examples he gives is the use of “*Ebonics*” and how it’s seen as broken or not acceptable English. However, why is German not seen as broken or not acceptable English? Further clarifying, the group that makes the cultural standards, makes the standards for everybody and everybody is expected to accept it without question, thus making the group who creates and sets these expectations further pushing the agenda of cultural racism.

It’s in chapter eleven where Kendi really pushes the discussion of racism and places it right at the feet of African Americans. He talks about something that has been a continuous acceptance by African Americans when it comes to racism, ‘African Americans can’t be racist, we don’t have the power’. According to Kendi, African Americans can be racist because we do have the power. He talks about everyone from “*Clarence Thomas*” to “*black judges*” who all hold some kind of power to be in the positions they’re in and therefore has the power to be racist. He states: “*The powerless defense strips Black policymakers and managers of all their power. The truth is: Black people can be racist because Black people do have power, even if limited*”. This would still be a hard argument to make to African Americans who would still hold the belief that even though they’re judges or in political positions of power, they still don’t have the real power to make policy changes and create laws that further subjugate the African American community. One could even make the argument that if they did have that much power why would they steadily stand by and allow inequalities to continue to exist for African Americans.

Although defining what is a racist and antiracist is the foundation of the book. Readers will have the opportunity to get to know Kendi on a more personal level. In each chapter, he shares his personal triumphs and struggles. He boldly discusses how he wasn't that 4.0 student who brought home academic awards. He admittedly shares how his life could've gone down a different path when he was living in New York and running with some of his friends who started to already go down the wrong path. He shares his own feelings about himself thinking he was too dark, especially when he started attending the historical black college/University(HBCU) Florida A&M University(FAMU) It was here, according to Kendi, his life would change and he would never look at race or racism the same again. Kendi's university experiences and thoughts include everything from understanding fraternities/sororities, the controversy between light skin versus dark skin Black people, to the LGBTQ community through his lesbian and gay friends. Kendi highlights his own struggles with white people during his university years at FAMU and at the noted, and predominately white, Temple University where he would be introduced to his major field of study, African American studies, and a professor that would change his life forever.

In the final analysis, Kendi makes good distinctive differences between a person(s) who are racist or even a person who says 'I'm not racist' and a person or persons who make the claim they're 'antiracist'. He clearly did his research in understanding the history of the United States and policymaking and enforcement of laws that would further engulf the nation into a system of racism that can be found in every aspect of society. I think Kendi has more to understand however when it comes to African Americans having enough power to be racist. As he continues to grow as a scholar, I believe his arguments on this issue will change over time.

As a history teacher, this book was insightful and extremely connected to the understanding of the racist history of this country. With some of the changes that are taking place because of the many protests for change after the murder of Mr. George Floyd, this book sits at the center of those conversations. I and hopefully other teachers, scholars, and historians can and should use this book as a guide and reference to help teach students what it means to be an antiracist.

It's clear why this book is #1 on the New York Times bestsellers list as well as the fact that it's been translated into several languages because of its international success. The timing of it couldn't have been more perfect with all of the protests and marches going on across the country, that are focused primarily on racist laws and policies. If we take a careful examination of what the protests are about, which is not just the murders of African Americans by the police, we see they are also a national outcry to defund the police. In addition, our educational system is wound so tight in a knot with institutional racism that it would literally take decades to undo. "*How To Be An Antiracist*", leads us in the direction to break down centuries-old laws/policies. It encourages all of us who read his book to take a long hard look at ourselves in the mirror and ask the question 'What am I doing to end racism?' It is not enough to say I'm not racist, according to Kendi, you have to take action and become an antiracist.