

Stamped: Racism, antiracism, and you (1st ed.), Jason Reynolds and Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2020, 320pp, \$8.99, hardback

Reviewed by Tamika Williams, University of Central Florida

No teacher would say racism is a boring topic. Still, most teachers do not want to touch it. Students say reading and hearing the same old stories about dead people is boring. Still, history teachers keep assigning and telling the same dead stories in the same dead way. Teachers often have a difficult time connecting ancient truths to new realities. *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* breathes life into dead tales and deftly narrates a conversation about a topic that can be difficult to discuss. This book takes young readers on a stimulating exploration of the origin and evolution of racist practices and beliefs in American history.

This book is a translation intended for young readers of Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. In the original work, Kendi seeks to get to the root of racist ideas. In this version, Jason Reynolds makes that exploration accessible, digestible, and even enjoyable for adolescent readers. Tackling the topic of race is often challenging for teachers in social studies classes. Teachers and students fear the risk of getting it wrong, so they avoid this subject. The avoidance inhibits the discussions that could inspire actions that lead to healing. This book tackles the third rail topic of race with courage and charm. *Stamped* is a conversation starter that can be used as a tool by teachers and parents. In fact, the book is written as a conversation between the authors and young people. The central argument of the book is that the self-interest and greed of the powerful and privileged led them to enact racist laws that oppressed Black people. Then those with the power to make and enforce the laws justified the laws by espousing racist ideas about the inferiority and depravity of Black people. *Stamped* clearly supports this argument without teaching or preaching but by simply encouraging a dialogue that young people can continue. While it enlightens and enlivens, the book could add reinforcement to its argument by expanding on antiracist solutions.

Reynolds is an award-winning and New York Times best-selling author who writes novels and poetry for teens and young adults. His books feature characters of color. They include *All American Boys*, *As Brave as You*, and *Miles Morales: Spider-Man*. Reynolds declares his plan to “not write boring books” on his website. This latest work supports that declaration.

Kendi is a historian, writer, teacher, scholar, and highly sought-after authority on race and racism. Kendi is currently the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities and the Founding Director of the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research. He is also a New York Times best-selling and award-winning author. His works include *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education, 1965-1972*, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, and *How to Be an Antiracist*. *How to be an Antiracist* established Kendi as a thought leader on race, racism, and antiracism. He co-authored this remix of *Stamped* with Reynolds in order to bring his insights to young readers.

The book enlightens the reader by offering a historical overview that, to borrow a phrase from the African American church, “makes it plain” for young readers. In the original book, Kendi creates a narrative by using five historical characters (Cotton Mather, Thomas Jefferson, William Lloyd Garrison, W.E.B. DuBois, and Angela Davis) to organize the book and guide the reader through the evolution of racism. In this version, Reynolds still incorporates these characters but does not use them to structure the book. Instead, he arranges the text by sectioning it into historical eras. This makes sense for young readers who may not be familiar with some of these lions of history. This is because the readers’ introduction to many of these historical figures may be through this book. Reynolds and Kendi also find a way to reintroduce the more well-known history makers. The authors explain how these characters’ actions and arguments contributed to the conditions African Americans face today. Research in social studies pedagogy shows how teachers should make history relevant for students. This book does that well, which will help students gain an understanding that will provide them with the necessary tools and experience to make decisions as adults.

The authors also introduce characters that do not appear in most textbooks. The authors argue that much of American history textbooks and curricula highlight positive and patriotic figures and events and avoid any information that does not glorify America and its heroes. The argument that social studies curricula overemphasize patriotism is supported by research in social science education. *Stamped* gives support to students and teachers by including material that does more than just sing a song of American strength and purity. This text serves as a tool that can arm students with awareness and agency. *Stamped* covers the origin of racist ideas beginning with *The Story of the World's First Racist*, Gomes Eanes de Zurara. The writers explain how Zurara wrote the first documented justification of slavery, using racist propositions. They take readers on a critical exploration of these ideas, moving through Europe and the Americas. They include countering antiracist ideas that coexisted with racism. These authors inspire evaluation of the ideals of American exceptionalism and freedom contrasted with the realities of American greed, while deeply considering oppression and the inner turmoil of these realities that drove the country to a literal war with itself. They continue with the aftermath of the Civil War, which devolved into a perpetuation of oppressive and terrorist policies and the use of anti-Black propaganda to justify those policies. They end with an analysis of the evolution of Black thought, from internalized racism, to assimilation, to antiracism. Respecting students by providing them with awareness and agency are part of the goal of social studies educators to help students think critically.

The first and primary argument of the book challenges the notion that the evils of hate and fear cause racist policies, that Americans must wait until people's minds change to expect a change in policies. Instead, the authors argue that discriminatory policies lead to racist beliefs. Their second argument asserts that Black people do not need to be fixed or improved, challenging the idea that slavery and oppression distorted the humanity of Black people in a way that Black people need to be healed. The authors argue that there is nothing wrong with Black people. Further, they assert that the idea that there is something wrong with Black people is racist. Instead, they argue, it is the racist policies and ideas that need to be fixed. This anti-deficit paradigm is associated with culturally relevant pedagogy, which calls for a shift away from the focus on students' perceived deficiencies. This shift is especially important for Black students who have often been viewed as the problem. The authors enliven readers by provoking them to consider new ideas instead of just accepting old ones. The book inspires critical consciousness and awareness, which can empower students to act.

The authors support their arguments with historical examples that show what came first. They show that the formation of anti-Black beliefs began with the self-interest of powerful White elites who institute policies to maintain their positions of power. The racist ideas were formed and used to support oppressive policies. The book is packed with stories to support this argument, including the Salem witch trials, anti-miscegenation laws, the Fugitive Slave Act, the Black codes, and sentencing disparities.

Reynolds repeats over and over that the book is not a history book. This is because, as he says and as is supported by educational research, kids hate history. Although the book is packed with history that will expose readers to important information, it is not a history book in the traditional sense. It is a conversation about a topic that is often difficult to discuss. Studies show that the conversation is necessary but there is silence because teachers and students don't know how to begin and are afraid of what it will lead to. There might be hurt feelings or even fights. Someone might lose his or her job. *Stamped* makes the conversation easier because the book itself is a dialogue. Reynolds deals with difficult history with a charm and authenticity that makes it easy to digest.

This book adds to the traditional American history narrative by telling the story of systematic race-based oppression and violence. However, the title suggests a story of antiracism or at least more suggestions for those who seek to be antiracist. This would be especially beneficial in a book written with young readers in mind. However, the book does not deliver as well on the topic of antiracism.

The writers should also include more evidence to support the argument that Black people don't need fixing. This argument is relevant to today's pedagogical research and theories that promote cultural relevancy and the asset-based model. The book does not offer enough examples of Black wellness and wholeness.

Finally, most oppressed people in America, especially Black people, realize racist policies affect them negatively and hinder progress in this country. Often, the people who promote racist policies or benefit from them are the ones who have trouble recognizing racism. Simply providing historical evidence may not be enough to support the argument and convince those who push or benefit from racism today. Challengers often complain about discussions of America's past sins, saying the past should be left in the past. In fact, as evidenced by the vehement movement against critical race theory, there is a growing effort to end any discussion about racism in American history. The authors may do more to continue the analysis of the origin of racist policies by looking into the selfishness that leads to laws and practices that oppress people. If policies are the source of racism, research into the source of the policies would be instructive for those who have the mind to do antiracist work.

Reynolds and Kendi add a powerful resource that educators and students can use to gain insight and critical awareness of the problem of racism in America. This book is both informative and inspiring for young readers. This work would have been even more impactful if it had included more discussion about and examples of antiracist solutions. Reynolds says the purpose of this book is to lay out the history. The writers do a great job of explaining the historic roots of racism. Reynolds and Kendi argue that racist policies are what caused racist ideas. They also suggest that antiracist policies are the remedy for racism. Further, they posit that Black people are not defective. Examples demonstrating successful antiracist policies and Black wholeness would add strength to these claims.

Racism is a virus in the bloodstream of America that the country has never fully acknowledged or attended to. Americans feel the symptoms but attribute them to other issues like ignorance, misunderstandings, and bad behavior. However, the writers of this book begin a powerful discussion for the young people who inherited this virus. They give young readers the knowledge that could lead to the cure. Teachers and parents should read this book and buy it for their teens and young adults. Central to the National Council for the Social Studies mission is preparing students to be active and engaged citizens who can make informed decisions for the continuation of a democratic society. *Stamped* aligns with this mission by providing information that facilitates students' critical thinking and decision-making.