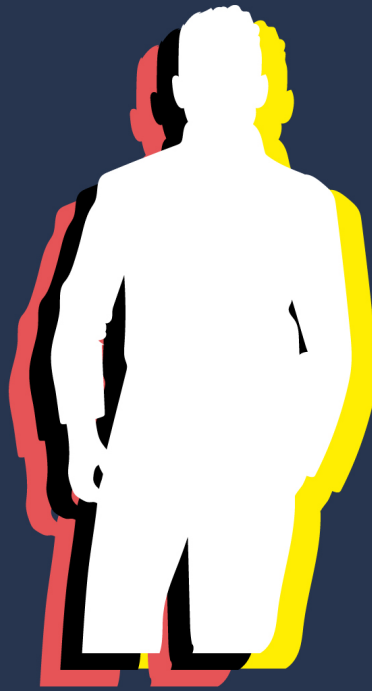


Summary

HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST

Ibram X. Kendi



Summary of «How to Be an Antiracist» by Ibram X. Kendi

Written by Lea Schullery

A guide in recognizing the racism that exists in today's society and learning how to adopt an equality mindset and ultimately become an antiracist.



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Introduction

With a recent surge in crime against African-Americans, including the 2015 shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, and an increase in violence against African-Americans by police officers, it is apparent that racism is still very much alive today. While society has improved leaps and bounds in the past few hundred years, racism is still an issue today. With a divide in politics that only continues to increase, it can sometimes feel as if racial inequality and hatred will become constant throughout society.

However, Ibram X. Kendi is here to spell it all out for you. He's here to teach you how to change your thinking and begin your journey to an antiracist mindset. From topics like segregation, biological racism, and colorism, the ideas in this book will help you abandon your traditional way of thinking to help you see racism clearly for the first time. Through sociology, politics, and personal memoirs, Ibram X. Kendi offers his insights to teach those who wish to change their thinking and make the world a better, more equal place.

Racial Inequality in Politics

It's one thing to experience racism while growing up in school. While still demeaning and wrong, people like to believe that racism stays there. That racism is only found in the small-town USA, but the reality is that racism permeates our society at every level. It's, unfortunately, a reality that will follow you at every stage of your life. Additionally, it's even more upsetting when we see racism in the highest-ranking position in America. We hold our leaders to a higher standard, and we expect them to be good in the face of adversity. However, in 2019, a time in which we expect racism to be improving, it seems as if it is only regressing.

“Laziness is a trait in Blacks.” “Mexicans immigrants are rapists and criminals.” Who made these claims? America's President, Donald Trump. So, in a time where racism is not only accepted but is also taught to society by the leader of the free world, it is important to ask yourself one question. “Are you a racist or an antiracist?” To answer this question, you will need to know the definition of the two.

With the idea that there are racist policies, racist society, and even racist ideas, all three go hand in hand. First and foremost, a racist is someone who communicates racist ideas or supports racist policies, they can support these either actively or by being apathetic, the latter being just as dangerous to society. So, what's a racist idea? A racist idea is one that considers one racial group to be superior or inferior based on cultural or biological differences. One such example of a racist idea is when Thomas Jefferson stated that African-Americans were “inferior to the whites in the endowments of both body and mind.”

In fact, the very concept of race didn't even exist until the 15th century when Portugal began enslaving Africans and trading them for a profit. The Portuguese proclaimed that Africans were both lazy and savage and they needed to be “saved” and the Portuguese were going to be the ones to save them. Thus a racist policy was formed, a policy that would benefit only one group of people while simultaneously oppressing another. But, they needed to be saved, right? So, a racist idea is formed to justify their actions.

How does this relate to today's policies? Typically, in a racist society, racist policies come first to benefit policymakers. Then, the racist ideas come afterward to justify the racial inequality that becomes a result of the implemented policy. What the Portuguese introduced in the 15th century is still implemented and used as a model for today's 21st century.

But what is an antiracist policy? An antiracist policy is one that promotes equality among all racial groups. An antiracist policy not only promotes equality, but it may also positively discriminate to achieve greater justice and fairness. This type of policy is not racist, it positively discriminates which may sound like an oxymoron, but you're about to see why it's not. For example, there have been several policies introduced in the US in the 1960s that have been labeled as racist. Affirmative action programs that favor African-American job applicants are sometimes seen as unfair since they promote one racial group over another. However, programs like these promote racial equality, to bring one race up to par with another, making the job market an equal opportunity among all races. So these policies cannot, in fact, be racist.

Now that you know the difference between racist and antiracist ideas and policies, it is up to you to decide which one you choose to become.

Inferior Black Culture

Remember when Christopher Columbus discovered America? When he came and found that Native Americans were living on the land and because he believed he was superior and had the means to take over, he did. But, even after infiltrating their territory and building colonies, the white people still felt the need to “help” the Native American culture. How were they going to do this? Through assimilation. Native Americans were going to be taught the ways of the white culture, how to dress, talk, and be like the white people while abandoning their own culture and heritage. Is this giving Native Americans an equal opportunity? Or is this a subtle form of racism?

In 1985, Eleanor Holmes Norton, a celebrated politician, stated that improving the lives of African-Americans would need to go further than providing just goods and opportunities. Instead, society needed to set about changing the “ghetto culture” and that Black people would need to be taught how to assimilate to white culture through learning to have a better work ethic, and how to respect the value of education and their own families. Similar to Christopher Columbus setting out to “help” the Native Americans, Eleanor applied the same idea to “help” the African-Americans.

The idea of assimilation is rooted in racism found throughout society today. It basically states that other races have to change. If other races have to change, that implies that their race is lesser than and that another race is the benchmark or standard for all races. Assimilationists, therefore, believe that certain racial groups are inferior and only serve to patronize the people who are being forced to change. People of color are taught to believe that their way of life isn’t acceptable and that they are merely being taught the “right way” to behave, similar to what we teach our children. Is it any wonder that people of color feel patronized?

What about when Donald Trump expressed that a wall should be built to separate the United States from Mexico? Does this idea make him an assimilationist? No, this makes him a segregationist, one who believes that racial groups should be separated because people of color are seen as “animals” and therefore, should be separated from a more “civilized” race. We experienced this segregation during the Jim Crow Laws which began around the 19th century and weren’t abolished until the 1960s. We saw the Jim Crow Laws as “separate but equal” but there was little to no equality during that time. So, how is it that an idea that was dismantled in the 20th century is coming back in the 21st century...?

Here’s where you can learn more about adopting an antiracist mindset. As an antiracist, it is important to support neither assimilationist or segregationist ideas. Instead, the antiracist supports policies that believe that no matter the differences, each race is equally unique and there is no reason for any race to change or develop.

Let’s take an example from the 1980s to explain how people have supported antiracist policies in the past. When faced with rising violent crime rates among African-Americans, antiracists pointed out that not only were crime rates rising, but the unemployment rate among young Blacks was rising as well. Antiracists chose to focus on taking down the racist policies that put

young African-Americans at a higher probability of becoming unemployed rather than focus on the “ghetto culture” that many racists default to when creating new policies.

Biological Differences is a Racist Belief

Ibram X. Kendi introduces the notion that no race is biologically different or genetically superior or inferior to another. What does this mean? This means the idea that Black people are naturally better at physical activity, and better at jazz and hip-hop because of their biological differences or genetic makeup is a racist idea. And here's why.

Ibram recalls being in school and noticing the differences in the children surrounding him. From the Black girl with cornrows, dark skin, and broad nose to the straight-haired, thin-lipped white kids, he saw everyone as the same, and the only differences were rooted in something deeper and more meaningful. In fact, haven't we all been in similar positions? When have you noticed someone different than you, perhaps someone more athletic or more intelligent, and you attributed that difference to something more, like biology or genetics. "Oh, his dad is a doctor, so of course, he's going to be good at science." While this particular example isn't biological racism, people do the same when attributing biological differences to a person's race, and that is racism. People assign biological, genetic differences with different meanings to assign meaning to everything around us, and while this is a human practice, it is detrimental to society.

Many racist ideas are rooted in people assigning biological differences to a specific race. For example, the stereotypical notion that Black people are more athletic, or that Black women have larger butts, are all forms of biological racism, and here's why. There are no genetic differences among races. For 20 years scientists have proven that every human being has 99.9% identical genetic makeup. Is your mind blown yet? In fact, Ibram goes deeper into explaining why some of these biological differences are more common in some races than others.

While you cannot inherit specific racial genes from your parents, you can inherit your ethnicity. Scientists found that people from ethnic groups found in a specific region of the world will share similar genetic characteristics; however, none of that can be attributed to race. For example, when scientists compared different ethnic groups from Africa, they found that Western African ethnic groups shared more similarities with Western European ethnic groups than Eastern African ethnic groups. Thus proving that race is an illusion and has no genetic basis.

So, how can you adopt an antiracist mindset when it comes to biological differences? By simply understanding that race cannot be inherited and that everyone's genetic makeup is nearly identical. Therefore, a person's race cannot determine athletic ability, intelligence, or even biological features, these are all stereotypes that have been adopted through biological racism.

The Myth of Lighter is Better

Altering our appearances has played a huge role in today's society, especially with the rise of social media, younger people feel the need to change the way they look to become more attractive. Whether it's wearing more makeup, trendy clothes, or even tanning the skin to alter their complexion, it's all too common a practice to alter your appearance for the sake of impressing those around you. Tanning the skin, however, seems contrary to the idea that lighter is better, but if you dig deep, you will see that as a whole, society values lighter skin over darker skin.

Ibram recalls a time in college when he wore honey-colored contacts to make his eyes a lighter shade than his natural brown-colored eyes. But why did he do this? He probably would've told you that he was just altering his appearance to become more attractive to his peers. But now as an antiracist, Ibram questions the decisions of his younger self and also questions why lighter is better.

Ibram realizes now that what he experienced in college was a form of colorism. Colorism is the collection of racist ideas that force people to believe that dark skin and light skin should be viewed differently, and that light skin should be viewed as the superior color. Unfortunately, this practice of colorism has resulted in darker-skinned people of color becoming historically discriminated against while lighter-skinned people of color have become vastly more privileged.

There is a myriad of evidence to support how darker Black people have been discriminated against, including studies showing how white voters favor Black politicians with a lighter skin color over those with a darker complexion. These ideas can be seen rooted in childhood as well when studies have proven that white children show more positive emotions about lighter-skinned people versus darker-skinned people of color.

Not only is this discrimination seen in the world of politics, but it is seen in the job market as well. When white interviewers are faced with choosing a lighter-skinner or darker-skinner person of color, studies show that a lighter-skinned person of color is more likely to be offered the job even if the darker-skinned Black person had more experience and qualifications. Lastly, discrimination becomes apparent in the judicial system as well with darker-skinned people of color receiving harsher sentences than those with lighter skin color.

Studies have also shown that Black women have experienced lower self-esteem than other racial groups, but why might this be? Ibram believes that colorism in society has bombarded girls with impossible beauty standards that feature light-skinned girls that are racially ambiguous with thick lips and butts, pointed noses, and light skin and eyes. Thus, the correlation of darker-skinned girls and lower self-esteem can be easily traced to society's impossible beauty standards.

With the myth that lighter is better being engrained in society's views of beauty and intelligence, it's now more important than ever to adopt an antiracist mindset when it comes to colorism. To become a color antiracist, you should be aware of the privileges that lighter-skinned people receive while their darker-skinned counterparts continually experience loss and discrimination. And while racial inequality may be prevalent among those of different races, it's important to remember that racial inequality happens within racial groups as well.

Racism Against White People

In December of 2000, Ibram Kendi found himself thinking the worst. He found himself falling into the trap that many African-Americans fall into, and that is that Ibram began to despise white people. But what led to this rage that he felt inside? The rage can be attributed to an election in which George W. Bush won over his opponent, Al Gore. But what was so important about this election? Well, the African-American community experienced immense racism when it came to voting, causing hundreds of thousands of African-Americans unable to cast a ballot, enough votes to have the power to change the outcome of the election.

Some examples of this racism include African-Americans having never received their registration cards even after registering to vote. In Florida alone, African-Americans had their ballot papers rejected ten times more than their white counterparts. An example of extreme racism that prevented Gore from taking over the White House. And, as mentioned previously, it caused Ibram to despise white people.

In an effort to dig deeper into his newfound white racism, Ibram picked up a book about the teachings of the Nation of Islam, an African-American movement that once had civil rights activist Malcolm X as one of its followers. According to the Nation of Islam, white people are a race of pale-skinned devils created by an evil African scientist, thousands of years ago. Creating pale-skinned devils resulted in the relocation of the white savages to Europe where they lived as cavemen until eventually taking over the world. This idea only fueled Ibram's racism, and he began to hate all the white people who had ever wronged him and other Black people like him, including the white officials who stole the Presidential election from people of color.

Now, Ibram Kendi has adopted an antiracist mindset and believes the idea of the Nation of Islam is inherently racist. According to Ibram, the ideas of the Nation of Islam present an idea that people typically refuse to believe. That racism can also be directed by Black people towards white people. Additionally, Ibram believes that anti-white racists believe white people to be inferior which is no different from white racists believing Black people to be inferior. Therefore, antiracists must distinguish the difference between white racists who create racist policies and ordinary white people who have no political power in society. All in all, racism is racism no matter which race the racism is directed at.

Everyone is Capable of Being a Racist

Throughout the book, Ibram has defined racism as the idea that one race is superior or inferior to another. But what about when racism within the same racial group? Ibram recalls a time in college when he was meeting with another African-American editor. During the meeting, the editor commented being fed up with being treated by police like he was one of those “N-words.” By using the N-word, the editor was clearly attempting to distinguish himself from the lower-income Black people. While Ibram was shocked at the editor’s comments, he took the opportunity to dive deeper into the topic and came to the realization that everyone is capable of being a racist.

Internalized racism was apparent during Chris Rock’s 1996 comedy special called Bring the Pain. Throughout his routine, Chris Rock made jokes about how parts of the African-American community were unwilling to educate themselves, which led to them becoming deadbeat parents willing to live off welfare for the rest of their lives. Similar to the editor that Ibram met with, Chris Rock used the derogatory N-word to describe this group of people as well.

While internalized racism can be blatant like that of Chris Rock’s special, it can also take on more subtle forms. For example, the Pew Research Center found in a 2017 survey that 1/3 of African-Americans expressed similar beliefs to Chris Rock. African-Americans were responsible for their own circumstances and that race had nothing to do with the inequality throughout society. Some argue that this internalized racism does not exist, that Black people simply don’t hold enough power to be racist. But Ibram proves why that thinking can have a detrimental impact on society.

If someone believes that they do not hold enough power to be racist, then that means that they believe that they don’t have the power to combat racism either. This is simply untrue. These people ignore that Black people do hold positions of power and that they have the power to speak out about the inequality and discrimination they experience. Black people in power can adopt internalized racist beliefs, or adopt an antiracist mindset and recognize that they have the power to combat racism and educate society on antiracism.

How Racism is Similar to Cancer

We know about cancer. We know how detrimental cancer can be to a person and their family. Watching a disease take over a person's body, feeling helpless, there's a reason that the popular organization F*** Cancer serves to educate and help those in need because they know that cancer sucks. It's the absolute worst. It's devastating and can change the course of a person's life forever. And like cancer, racism can become just as devastating.

In 2018, Ibram Kendi received news that would change his life forever. Not only was he diagnosed with colon cancer, but he was also told that it was stage-four and that it had spread to other parts of his body. He was only 35 years old, he didn't think this could be possible, he had a life ahead of him. And while he went through his aggressive cancer treatment, he began to see the similarities between cancer and racism.

Similar to his prognosis, Ibram believes the odds of beating racism are slim. Upon learning about his cancer, the doctors informed Ibram that those with his advanced stage of cancer only have a 12% chance of surviving over the next five years. And similarly, Ibram believes racism has an even lesser chance of beating the odds. This may sound extreme, but Ibram has his reasons. Like cancer, racism develops and spreads to other parts of the body, infiltrating our politics and society. Racist cancer, as he calls it, blames victims for their own inequalities, incites the mass murder of innocent people, and elects to power people like Donald Trump who divides nations and spews racist comments.

However, despite their similarities, there is still one major difference between racism and cancer. Those plagued with cancer typically accept their disease, and while they might fight hard, they eventually come to terms with their illness. They eventually either beat the odds or succumb to the power of cancer. However, when it comes to racism, people still refuse to accept that it still exists in today's society. They avoid the topic and never come to terms with the idea that racism is still alive and prevalent today. Even when looking at the inequalities around them and in the workplace, many people refuse to believe the discrepancies have anything to do with race and refuse to believe that racist policy exists to contribute to the inequality.

However, just like Ibram Kendi overcame stage-four colon cancer, he also believes that society can overcome racism. Similar to when Ibram was in the darkest place with his cancer, he never gave up. He overcame it by believing that he had a better future, that this wasn't the end. And while society may be in a dark place when it comes to racism, Ibram sees the light at the end of the tunnel. Together, he sees society learning and coming together to beat racist cancer.

Final Summary

Racism can take on many forms. From blatant racist policies that promote assimilation and segregation to more subtle forms of racism like colorism and internalized racism, they all are detrimental to society and shouldn't be ignored. The first step to adopting an antiracist mindset starts with recognizing that racism exists, that it is alive and prevalent in today's society. What begins as a racist policy then turns into racist ideas. But an antiracist works to combat these policies. They recognize the inequality that these policies create and recognize that racism comes in more than one form, including hating white people simply for being white. So, to adopt an antiracist mindset, one must realize that all races are inherently equal.



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