

SUMMARY

I'M JUDGING YOU
LUVVIE AJAYI



Summary of “I’m Judging You” by Luvvie Ajayi

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I’m Judging You (2016) is author Luvvie Ajayi’s humorous perspective on all of society’s worst foibles.

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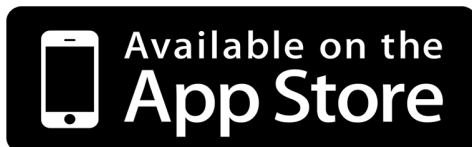


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Introduction

Luvvie Ajayi is a sharp, funny lady; that's the primary reason you should want to listen to her opinions. In fact, in her career as a humor writer, she's even attracted the attention of Shonda Rhimes, creator of the hit TV series *Scandal* with her humorous weekly recaps of the show. But as this book will show you, Ajayi has so much more to offer than funny reviews of binge-worthy television. And she has a lot to say about social media, women's rights, and discrimination against people of color in America. So, in this summary, we'll take a look at the world through Ajayi's eyes and explore her thoughts on:

- The difference between a friend who's a Lannister and one who's a "Frenemy"
- Why feminism isn't just a "white people thing," and
- Why you want to avoid your friend group's dinner scrooge

The Curse of the Dinner Scrooge

We've all got something wrong with us. Whether you-- like Ajayi-- are chronically late to everything or you tend to be forgetful, we all have a few annoying habits that could make our company unpleasant for others. But some faults are particularly distasteful and, according to Ajayi, the dinner scrooge is the worst of the worst. Dinner scrooges can come in three varieties, all of which are equally unpleasant. The first is the member of your dinner party who orders massive amounts of food and then wants everyone to split the check evenly. And if they don't eat all their food in one sitting, they might even order two or three more things so they can take it home!

Then there's the even more annoying dinner scrooge who busts out their calculator to figure up how much everybody owes. They'll be a stickler for ensuring that everyone pays up and are likely to stress how much less they ate than everybody else in addition to skimping on the tip. And last but not least, we have the dinner scrooge who always finds an excuse to disappear early and conveniently "forgets" to leave any money for the bill. And although this might happen to anybody once in the event of a personal emergency, making this faux pas twice indicates that they're a chronic dinner scrooge. Because dinner scrooges can create issues in otherwise lovely friendships and make eating out a very frustrating experience, Ajayi has come to the conclusion that it would be easier if dinners were prix fixe menus and everyone was required to pay cash. After all, wouldn't we all prefer watching Netflix to arguing over the bill?

The Nine Types of Challenging Friends

Sadly, dinner scrooges exemplify only one of the conundrums your friends can create for you. The nine types of challenging friends you're almost guaranteed to encounter can make everything even worse, starting with The Competitor. Because no matter what good news you've just had, this friend seems to be trying harder to one-up you than to genuinely celebrate with you. If you've got a new job, they just got promoted. If you've just started a new relationship, they've gotten engaged. The only common denominator is that your good news is always redirected until it becomes all about them,

The next challenging friend is the SOS Pal. They're never around when you just want to chat or grab a coffee, but as soon as anything goes wrong in their life, you can guarantee they'll pop up again. It doesn't help that they also seem to have more catastrophes than the average person. Bad friend number three is The Adventurer. Sure, their spontaneity makes them great fun to have around, but they're also such a wild card, they're liable to get you both arrested. They might not mean to be, but this friend can be truly dangerous and may get you into situations that make you truly uncomfortable. Friend number four is The Lannister, also known as the one you can't trust. This is the friend who's slept with someone else's partner or skipped out on more bills than you can count. At this point, you probably don't even trust them alone in your home, which begs the question of why they're even still in the friend group.

Number five is The Surface, the one whose friendship has never progressed much beyond those surface details of "I love your shoes!" even though you've known them literally forever. And at this point, the fact that you know so little about them is actually just a bit creepy. Friend number six is The Frenemy, the one who spends so much time insulting you, they're more like an enemy who's snuck in under the guise of friendship. Similar to The Lannister, you can't trust this friend and they offer little to nothing in the way of genuine care or support. And, let's be honest, do you really need them in your life?

Next up is number seven, The Enabler. Bad in a different way, The Enabler will support every unhealthy decision you make, no matter what. And while it might be reassuring to hear nothing but “yes” all the time, none of us need that; a true friend will challenge you to become your best self and improve your weaknesses. They definitely don’t reinforce your every toxic trait. Number eight is The Flake, the friend you can never trust for different reasons. Although they might not be mean or deceptive like The Lannister or The Frenemy, they’re just so unreliable that you can never count on them. And because The Flake is forever cancelling plans or leaving you hanging right when you need them most, you have to question just how badly you really need them in your life.

And last but not least, there’s The Holy Roller. This is the friend who’s so religious that they’ve put themselves on an impossibly high pedestal and your every decision is subject to serious scrutiny and un-asked-for disapproval. While it’s okay to be religious, it’s not okay to use your beliefs as a free pass for making your friends uncomfortable, and that’s something the Holy Roller desperately needs to learn.

No One Needs Plastic Surgery

Seriously. No one. And yet, sadly, we're so obsessed with society's superficial beauty standards that we've actually created a market for anal bleaching, two words that should actually never exist in the same sentence. The same goes for pretty much every other lightening procedure, as Ajayi notes in her consideration of skin-bleaching practices in Nigeria. Because our conceptualization of beauty is tied to whiteness, this has created some seriously messed up beauty standards that cause women of color to devalue everything about their bodies and turn to cosmetic enhancement as a way of "improving" themselves.

But Ajayi wants women to know that that isn't necessary at all! That's why she's encouraging readers to give a little more thought to their futures before they go under the knife. Because you might be thinking about how beautiful you want to be, but how pretty is it really if your lips are so full, they look like you're having an allergic reaction? And it's not cool to visibly change your racial appearance by going so light, you now look Asian instead of black. The same is true of taking your A-cup breasts to double D's. That's because none of those enhancements are organic or naturally you, and when you modify your body so severely, you run the risk of becoming a fun-house version of yourself.

So, before you undergo any form of cosmetic "improvement," remember that society's standards of beauty aren't just messed up, they're temporary. In fact, you might go under the knife today only to find that your new appearance isn't in vogue tomorrow. It might also be helpful to keep in mind that the "perfect" body also comes with a terrible personality. If you didn't have your flaws to humanize you, do you think you would still be the same person? Or would you be a vain and selfish nightmare that made life unbearable for everyone around you? Ajayi definitely thinks that would have happened to her if she had her ideal body!

The Unintentional Racist

Sure, dinner scrooges are unpleasant, but sexist, racist, and homophobic people are the worst of the worst. They're also the sort of people for whom Ajayi has nothing but unending criticism and rightly so. But when it comes to passing judgment, we sometimes misperceive and assume that racists are as ugly on the outside as they are on the inside, that they always present as the KKK-hood-wearing protesters common to white supremacist marches. But the truth is that racists aren't always so easy to spot and they don't have to be people with malicious intent. In fact, you can be a very well-intentioned person and still have undeniable racist tendencies.

Why? Because racism is intrinsically woven into the fabric of American culture. You can't avoid it, given the fact that the success of white people was literally built on the blood, sweat, and tears of enslaved Africans. And unfortunately, although we may have done away with slavery, the social structures which privilege the white, wealthy, and powerful are still in place. And because those who conform to a white, Christian, heteronormative standard of social acceptability, it means they'll experience a certain quality of life-- and a set of expectations-- that many other people can never share. As a result, this privilege ensconces some people in a bubble, leading them to blindly indulge in racist micro-aggressions. For example, a woman who might proudly say that she doesn't have a racist bone in her body will-- without thinking-- clutch her purse a little tighter when a black person stands near her. Likewise, Ajayi recounts instances of white people telling her, "Oh, you're so well spoken!" after an interview.

This, of course, is blatantly predicated on racist ideology which views black people as intrinsically bad or less developed than their white counterparts. And even if that thought isn't consciously present in someone's mind when they commit these micro-aggressions, that's exactly the point! What a white person might regard as a thoughtless statement is a slap in the face that black people literally can't avoid, And if you pride yourself on being liberal and socially conscious, don't assume you're immune to these pitfalls. Even

well-intentioned liberals can commit microaggressions without intending to. A common example of this is the statement that you're "colorblind," as in, "I don't see color." While this sounds nice on the surface and is meant to suggest that you see everyone as being equal, this statement is also racist because it fails to acknowledge the inherent inequalities between black and white people.

Therefore, that logic isn't just absurd, it's dangerous. Because equality doesn't always mean treating people with equal fairness and respect. Instead, sometimes it can mean that you don't recognize the dangers and struggles others face because of their race, sexual orientation, gender, or religion. And if you fail to acknowledge and use your voice to address these inequalities, you're not just failing to be an ally-- your silence might be putting others in danger. So, even if you feel like the issue of race is too sticky or too political for you to get involved in, it's important to remember that the language we speak and the money we use are also heavily politicized constructs of our society and we can't afford to avoid them just like we can't avoid the issue of race. So, as the actress Kerry Washington puts it, "I don't want to live in a world where race isn't a part of who I am. But I don't want it to define the trajectory of my life."

Let's Talk About Catcalling

Dear men: here's something every single one of you should know. No woman ever in the history of the world has wanted to be yelled at, honked at, or subjected to comments on her appearance as she walks down the street. And because there is a very strong culture of sexual violence in the United States, most women feel vulnerable in an increasing number of social situations where men are involved. So, literally the last thing any woman wants is to be shouted at by a male stranger on the street. And that's one of the inherent problems of catcalling that many people fail to see. Because catcalling is still a form of discrimination and an expression of inequality. After all, if people really viewed women as being equal to men-- instead of as sex objects whose primary purpose is to serve men-- would you really be yelling about their bodies in public?

It doesn't help that the political system still heavily favors men and centers around the power of a male law-maker legislating women's bodies, even in 2020. (You'd think that, at this point, we wouldn't still have to protest this). But sadly, even as feminists work to change the system, there are still some racial disparities in place that cause a new type of inequality. Because even though anyone, male or female, can be a feminist-- all you have to do is believe that everyone deserves to be treated equally and that no one should be discriminated against because of their gender-- in practice, feminism often functions as a white-centric movement.

But in reality, it should be for everyone, including men, women, and people of color! And it should also be free from performative requirements, Because feminism is not about hating men and neither is it about being white, stereotypically feminine, or Christian. However, a lot of people seem to struggle with understanding this and this has generates such debates as whether Beyonce can be considered a feminist because of the outfits she wears. Similar arguments have arisen over whether or not women should wear high heels because heels are a male invention. ...Seriously, people? Why are we focusing on these petty differences? Feminism is for everybody

and you don't have to look or behave a certain way in order to deserve equal rights!

Using Religion as a Tool for Discrimination

Because of her outspoken views on equality, it might surprise you to know that Ajayi is actually a devout Christian and has been for most of her life. But that doesn't mean that she's cool with a lot of stereotypically Christian stuff, like hating gay, poor, or black people. And it definitely doesn't mean that she's accepting of organized religion as a tool of oppression. Instead, she recognizes that even if some cultural elements of Christianity have grown more progressive with time, and even though she has strong personal feelings about her faith, Christianity has still been used as a tool of oppression for centuries, especially when it comes to attacks on gay and black people.

For example, Ajayi notes that many Christians often refer to-- and misinterpret-- the Bible verse Leviticus 18:22 in their argument that homosexuality is a sin. But that's not what the verse literally means at all, and a lot of Christians also conveniently ignore a lot of other rules that are far more explicit-- like God's command to avoid eating shellfish or pork or wearing your hair in a manner that looks "rough." The same is true of the common Christian portrayal of Jesus. Because-- sorry to burst any racists' bubbles-- but there's no way that Jesus, a Jewish man from the Middle Eastern town of Nazareth was ever a white dude with blonde hair and blue eyes! However, a lot of Christians like to forget the reality of this statement and continue distorting their religion to make it fit their conservative political views. This then conveniently allows them to justify Islamophobia, general racism, and sexism because of another Biblical misinterpretation: the idea that women should be the property of men.

But although Ajayi often struggles with the fact that the Bible was written exclusively by men, all of whom were from a very different time period with very different views on gender equality, she still seeks to accept these flaws and embrace her faith because she knows that a relationship with a higher power can bring a lot of comfort and guidance.

Final Summary

Our society needs to do better. If we didn't already know that, Ajayi asserts that surely the 2016 election was a national wake-up call. But in addition to improving the way we handle splitting the bill at dinners with our friends, avoiding the misuse of hashtags, and cutting out each of the nine different types of toxic friends, we can also improve our awareness of the world's inequality. So, if you're white or male, be aware of your privilege and use your voice to make the world a better place for those who lack the advantages society gives you. And in so doing, remember that "colorblind" is not "color kind"; being willfully blind to inequality doesn't do anybody a favor and it can actually make the world more dangerous for your friends who are LGBT or people of color.

We can also be more considerate friends, users of social media, and citizens of the world as we seek to avoid indulging in misconceptions, using religion as a tool of discrimination, or posting selfies with the casket at your loved one's funeral. We may live in a world where the rules of social etiquette are changing every day, but some forms of basic kindness and good taste will always stay the same.



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