

CLAS Reads! Ibram Kendi's *How to Be An Antiracist*

Reading and Discussion Guide

Before first meeting: [Complete cultural/competency self-assessment checklist](#)

January Meeting: Discuss Preface through Chapter 6

Questions to Reflect on While Reading:

Introduction: Do you have any goals or questions as you began reading this book?

Chapter 1: Consider what actions might fit into Kendi's racist and antiracist definitions, first on a personal level then on a community level. Where have you seen antiracist actions? What explicit racism have you encountered, observed, endured? What institutional racist practices have you experienced or observed?

Chapter 2: Kendi brings us into the discussion of "dueling consciousness" by telling us about his parents' and his dueling consciousness. He writes later in the chapter: "Whites have generally advocated for both assimilationist and segregationist policies. People of color have generally advocated for both antiracist and assimilationist policies" (32). Looking back on your own actions and beliefs through this lens of dueling consciousness, what do you see? What assimilationist or segregationist or antiracist beliefs/actions do you see?

Chapter 3: Thinking back to your elementary and secondary classroom experiences, which ones stand out the most? Why? What stands out to you in higher education?

Chapter 4: Consider historical examples of the promotion of biological racial hierarchy such as Hitler and the Aryan nation.

Chapter 5: Kendi writes of the ethnic racism behind the question, "Where are you from?" How have you experienced this question? Perhaps you have asked this question of others, or maybe you have been asked yourself. How has your experience compared to Kendi's? What do you make of the similarities or differences?

Chapter 6: Were there any neighborhoods or places you were forbidden from visiting as a kid? Why? Are there neighborhoods or places you avoid as an adult now? Why? How do your responses relate to this chapter?

Suggested Reading Group Discussion Questions:

When did you first become aware of your own racial identity? Has your racial identity changed over time?

Analyze and discuss Kendi's quote, "There is no in between safe space" between racist and antiracist. Reflect and share group members' definitions of "racist" and "antiracist." What is sacrificed by the illusion of "safe"? How does naming and framing racism assist with advancing racial justice?

WEB Du Bois writes about double-consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* as "a sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." Kendi offers a way out of dueling consciousness: "But there is a

way to be free...To be antiracist is to conquer the assimilationist consciousness. The White body no longer strives to be the American body, knowing there is no such thing as the American body, only American bodies, racialized by power" (33-34). How do you understand this passage, in your own words?

Reflecting on your day-to-day interactions, do you observe any limits on whose voices are heard or included in decision-making (at the university, locally, beyond)?

What examples of the racist idea of biological racial difference can you give from current society?

What is ethnic racism? How does ethnic racism divert attention away from policies and towards group behavior? How were the jokes that Kendi made about his childhood peer Kwame examples of ethnic racism?

Discuss the unique resilience and resourcefulness people possess if they leave everything in their native country behind and immigrate to another, as Kendi examines in the chapter on Ethnicity.

Whenever violence or violent acts are brought up in conversation with family members and friends, how are they discussed? Who are viewed as the perpetrators? Where is violence assumed to occur most?

Individual Action Ideas:

Earlier you reflected on your experiences with dueling consciousness. Choose one approach or event from your past that you would like to change to an antiracist approach, free from dueling consciousness. Imagine a specific different approach you might take.

In your usual media and social media, look for and identify examples of "resilience and resourcefulness" in portrayals of, or discussions of immigrants. What patterns do you notice? Are these portrayals different when the authors/speakers are immigrants themselves?

In your usual media and social media, look for and identify portrayals of Black individuals. What messages about the Black body are taught in the United States? How do these messages show up in the media, in policies, and in our perceptions about communities?

February Meeting: Discuss Chapters 7-11

Questions to Reflect While Reading:

Chapter 7: Think back upon a time when you felt powerless. Reflect upon those individuals and events involved. Now think back to a time when you felt powerful. How did those two experiences shape you?

Chapter 8: How were state and national test scores talked about in schools you attended? To what extent were you aware of differences in test scores among racial groups? What inferences did you make about "smartness" based on what you heard about tests? When you were a child, how were "good" behaviors and "bad" behaviors and students described?

Chapter 9: When did you first notice color? What was the catalyst for your becoming aware?

Chapter 10: How is voting a right rather than a privilege? Should voting be a right or a privilege?

Chapter 11: What does Kendi mean that he terminated “a part of myself – for the better”? If you choose/have chosen to work towards antiracism, would you have to terminate a part of yourself?

Discussion Questions:

What does Kendi mean by “surface sighted eyes”? (86). What are the deep structures of culture?

How do educational policies create disparities between and among racial groups?

How is colorism, including preferences for particular skin and eye colors, hair textures, and facial features, reflected in today’s beauty standards? What steps can we take to build and support a culture that celebrates natural beauty?

Where does racism exist in the voting process? Consider intersectional identities.

How is engaging in antiracist work different for White people than it is for People of Color?

Individual Action Ideas:

Schedule a Zoom or in-person coffee/chat with someone unlike yourself.

How are racist ideas perpetuated by humor? Choose one aspect of your life and listen to how people use humor. To what extent does the humor you hear reinforce or challenge racist ideas or images? List possible actions to take, as a bystander, to respond to racist humor.

March Meeting: Discuss Chapters 12-15

Questions to Reflect on While Reading:

Chapter 12: Before reading this book, what assumptions did you have about people experiencing homelessness, and about people in the top 1% of household net worth in the country? Has chapter 12 altered your assumptions?

Chapter 13: Consider the neighborhood in which you grew up. Why does Kendi assert that “(t)he idea of the dangerous Black neighborhood is the most dangerous racist idea”?

Chapter 14: Kendi does not explicitly discuss gender and the experiences of Black women until more than half-way through the book. To what extent do you think this matters?

Chapter 15: How did you discover your sexuality? What social messages influenced the development of your sexuality?

Discussion questions

How do racist policies connect and intertwine with capitalist policies? Can you think of an example of a policy that is both racist and capitalist? How could the policy be reframed as antiracist?

How do resources define a space? Discuss how resources and access reflect systemic racism for Black spaces.

What is gendered racism? How does racism disproportionately impact women, particularly Black women? What about the impact on Black people who are gender-non conforming?

Do you perceive homophobia and racism to be intertwined? What relationship does the Black community share with the queer community?

Individual Action Ideas:

Compile a list of stores, providers, and businesses you engage with most often. How many are locally or family-owned? Do any of the companies focus on giving back to the local community? Do any of those listed allocate funds to racial equity or social justice causes? Before your next purchase, explore local and family-owned businesses to expand your purchase behaviors.

April Meeting: Discuss Chapters 16-18

Questions to Reflect on While Reading:

Chapter 16: Was there a time you felt shame or guilt for being racist? Why? Did you make any changes based on your feelings?

Chapter 17: Kendi lists the steps to be an anti-racist on page 226. Think through your understanding of each step and your own commitments.

Chapter 18: Reflect back on the book and what you have learned. What do you think of Kendi's idea that racist policy leads to racist thought rather than racist thought leading to racist policy? Find specific examples from your experience.

Discussion Questions

How was the Abolitionist movement racist in its "parental care" of free Black individuals?

What is the harm in using the terms "protest" and "demonstration" interchangeably?

Kendi offers a list of "the steps we can all take to eliminate racial inequity in our spaces" (231-2). Reflecting on these steps, and the book as a whole, what new insights and ideas will you take with you into your next steps? What might you do in your own spaces?

Individual Action Ideas

Return to the [Cultural Competency Self-Assessment Checklist](#) you completed at the beginning of the semester. Reflect on your results. What, if anything, has changed?

Share your "next steps" with colleagues and friends and schedule check-ins to discuss your progress.

**This reading and discussion guide was adapted from the University of Denver's Action Book Club resources.*