

BOOK CLUB KIT

**HOW TO
BE AN
ANTIRACIST**

IBRAM X.

KENDI

NATIONAL BOOK AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR OF
STAMPED FROM THE BEGINNING

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In *How to Be an Antiracist*, Kendi shares his own experience with racist thinking. How does his honesty help give us space to acknowledge and name our own racist behaviors and attitudes?
2. Kendi writes, “The only way to undo racism is to constantly identify it and describe it—and then dismantle it.” Why does he believe we need to call out racism when we see it, even if it can be uncomfortable to identify?
3. The book’s central message is that the opposite of “racist” isn’t “not racist.” The true opposite of “racist” is *antiracist*. “The good news,” Kendi writes, “is that racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be racist one minute and an antiracist the next.” What does it mean to have to constantly reaffirm your identity as an antiracist? Is there any benefit to the fact that you can’t just decide you are “not racist” or an antiracist and be done with it?
4. What is the first step you, personally, will take in striving to be an antiracist? How will you check yourself and hold yourself accountable if you notice you, or someone else, is being racist?
5. Kendi thinks that we should assess candidates as being racist or antiracist based on what ideas they are expressing and what policies they are supporting—and not what they say is in their bones or their heart. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
6. Anyone who values immigrants from European countries and devalues immigrants from Latin America is guilty of racism. Have you ever been guilty of this type of 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.
7. There’s a stronger and clearer correlation between levels of violent crime and unemployment levels than between violent crime and race, but that’s not the story policymakers have chosen to tell. Discuss why you think this is. How might our society and culture change if policymakers characterized dangerous Black neighborhoods as dangerous *unemployed* neighborhoods?
8. Why do you think it is so hard for people to not assess other cultures from their own cultural standards? How does doing this trap people in racist ideas?
9. Inequities between Light and Dark African Americans can be as wide as inequities between Black and White Americans. How have you seen colorism play out in real life and/or in the media?
10. Kendi writes, “White supremacist is code for anti-human, a nuclear ideology that poses an existential threat to human existence.” How are white supremacists and their ideology actually harmful to all of humanity—including white people?
11. Kendi makes the case that to be antiracist, one must stand against all forms of bigotry. Why is standing against other bigotries so essential to standing against racism?
12. Kendi closes the book comparing racism and cancer. What do you think of this comparison?
13. Kendi believes we can defy the odds, heal society of racism, and create an antiracist society. Do you? Why is hope so central to the antiracist movement?

IBRAM X. KENDI'S ANTIRACIST READING LIST

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

By not running from the books that pain us, we can allow them to transform us. I ran from antiracist books most of my life. But now I can't stop running after them—scrutinizing myself and my society, and in the process changing both.

BIOLOGY

FATAL INVENTION

How Science, Politics, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-First Century

By **Dorothy Roberts**

No book destabilized my fraught notions of racial distinction and hierarchy—the belief that each race had different genes, diseases and natural abilities—more than this vigorous critique of the “biopolitics of race.” Roberts, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, shows unequivocally that all people are indeed created equal, despite political and economic special interests that keep trying to persuade us otherwise.

New Press, 2011

ETHNICITY

WEST INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

A Black Success Story?

By **Suzanne Model**

Some of the same forces have led Americans to believe that the recent success of black immigrants from the Caribbean proves either that racism does not exist or that the gap between African-Americans and other groups in income and wealth is their own fault. But Model's meticulous study, emphasizing the self-selecting nature of the West Indians who emigrate to the United States, argues otherwise, showing me, a native of racially diverse New York City, how such notions—the foundation of ethnic racism—are unsupported by the facts.

Russell Sage Foundation, 2008

BODY

THE CONDEMNATION OF BLACKNESS

Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America

By **Khalil Gibran Muhammad**

“Black” and “criminal” are as wedded in America as “star” and “spangled.” Muhammad's book traces these ideas to the late 19th century, when racist policies led to the disproportionate arrest and incarceration of blacks, igniting urban whites' fears and bequeathing tenaciously racist stereotypes.

Harvard University, 2010

IBRAM X. KENDI'S ANTIRACIST READING LIST

CULTURE

THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

By Zora Neale Hurston

Of course, the black body exists within a wider black culture—one Hurston portrayed with grace and insight in this seminal novel. She defies racist Americans who would standardize the cultures of white people or sanitize, eroticize, erase or assimilate those of blacks.

1937

BEHAVIOR

THE NEGRO ARTIST AND THE RACIAL MOUNTAIN

By Langston Hughes

“We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame,” Hughes wrote nearly 100 years ago. “We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.” We are all imperfectly human, and these imperfections are also markers of human equality.

COLOR

THE BLUEST EYE

By Toni Morrison

THE BLACKER THE BERRY

By Wallace Thurman

Beautiful and hard-working black people come in all shades. If dark people have less it is not because they are less, a moral eloquently conveyed in these two classic novels, stirring explorations of colorism.

1970 | 1929

WHITENESS

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

By Malcolm X and Alex Haley

DYING OF WHITENESS

How the Politics of Racial Resentment Is Killing America's Heartland

By Jonathan M. Metz

Malcolm X began by adoring whiteness, grew to hate white people and, ultimately, despised the false concept of white superiority—a killer of people of color. And not only them: low- and middle-income white people too, as Metz's timely book shows, with its look at Trump-era policies that have unraveled the Affordable Care Act and contributed to rising gun suicide rates and lowered life expectancies.

1965 | Basic Books, 2019

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BLACKNESS

LOCKING UP OUR OWN

Crime and Punishment in Black America

By James Forman Jr.

Just as Metzl explains how seemingly pro-white policies are killing whites, Forman explains how blacks themselves abetted the mass incarceration of other blacks, beginning in the 1970s. Amid rising crime rates, black mayors, judges, prosecutors and police chiefs embraced tough-on-crime policies that they promoted as pro-black with tragic consequences for black America.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2017 (Read the review.)

CLASS

BLACK MARXISM

The Making of the Black Radical Tradition

By Cedric J. Robinson

Black America has been economically devastated by what Robinson calls racial capitalism. He chastises white Marxists (and black capitalists) for failing to acknowledge capitalism's racial character, and for embracing as sufficient an interpretation of history founded on a European vision of class struggle.

Zed Press, 1983

SPACES

WAITING 'TIL THE MIDNIGHT HOUR

A Narrative History of Black Power in America

By Peniel E. Joseph

As racial capitalism deprives black communities of resources, assimilationists ignore or gentrify these same spaces in the name of "development" and "integration." To be antiracist is not only to promote equity among racial groups, but also among their spaces, something the black power movement of the 1960s and 1970s understood well, as Joseph's chronicle makes clear.

Holt, 2006

GENDER

HOW WE GET FREE

Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective

Edited by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor

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WELL-READ BLACK GIRL

Finding Our Stories, Discovering Ourselves

Edited by Glory Edim

I began my career studying, and too often admiring, activists who demanded black (male) power over black communities, including over black women, whom they placed on pedestals and under their feet. Black feminist literature, including these anthologies, helps us recognize black women “as human, levelly human,” as the Combahee River Collective demanded to be seen in 1977.

Haymarket, 2017 | Ballantine, 2018 (Read our profile of Glory Edim.)

SEXUALITY

REDEFINING REALNESS

My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More

by Janet Mock

SISTER OUTSIDER

Essays and Speeches

by Audre Lorde

I grew up in a Christian household thinking there was something abnormal and immoral about queer blacks. My racialized transphobia made Mock's memoir an agonizing read—just as my racialized homophobia made Lorde's essays and speeches a challenge. But pain often precedes healing.

Atria, 2014 | Crossing Press, 1984

IBRAM X. KENDI'S ANTIRACIST SYLLABUS

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN *THE ATLANTIC*

From each book, move to a lifetime of anti-racist action.

We should begin by developing clarity and direction that can come only from definitions.

Definitions of race: Dorothy Roberts's *Fatal Invention*.

Definitions of racist and anti-racist, which I seek to explain in my books: *Stamped From the Beginning* and *How to Be an Antiracist*.

If you are white and feeling on edge already, then read Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*. **If you are a person of color and think this syllabus isn't for you,** then read James Forman's *Locking Up Our Own*.

Once definitions and feelings are clear, it may be prudent to be carefully led into racism and anti-racism through **political memoirs of the past**—Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*—and then of the present, with Janet Mock's *Redefining Realness*, Brittney Cooper's *Eloquent Rage*, and Kiese Laymon's *Heavy*.

From memoirs, proceed to essays: James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*, Coates's *Between the World and Me*, and Jesmyn Ward's anthology, *The Fire This Time*.

From the essays, move to the nonfiction monographs:

Slavery: Edward E. Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told*. Daina Ramey Berry's *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*.

The North: Leon Litwack's *North of Slavery*.

Reconstruction: Eric Foner's *Reconstruction*.

Convict leasing: Douglas A. Blackmon's *Slavery by Another Name*.

Jim Crow: James D. Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*. Khalil Gibran Muhammad's *The Condemnation of Blackness*. Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law*. Thomas J. Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*.

The Great Migration: Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns*.

Civil and human rights: Jeanne Theoharis's *A More Beautiful and Terrible History*. Mary L. Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights*. Deborah Gray White's *Too Heavy a Load*. Paula J. Giddings's *When and Where I Enter*.

Mass incarceration: Elizabeth Hinton's *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*. Angela Davis's *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*.

Police violence: Wesley Lowery's *They Can't Kill Us All*. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*.

Health and housing: Harriet A. Washington's *Medical Apartheid*. Matthew Desmond's *Evicted*.

Voting: Ari Berman's *Give Us the Ballot*. Carol Anderson's *One Person, No Vote*.