



**HOW TO
BE AN
ANTIRACIST**
**IBRAM X.
KENDI**

Study Guide for “How to be an Antiracist” by Ibram X. Kendi

(Based on a similar study program used by the University of Ohio and modified for our purpose of study)

We will use the Ground Rules below for our discussion group.

The beginning: This group is intended to be a forum for **discussion** of ideas and for learning about differing viewpoints, not for **debate**. We are people who may be used to trying to convince everyone that we are right, or that we have the right point of view on various topics. In discussions around diversity and equity, it's important to understand that everyone sees and experiences the world differently - what seems "right" in your experience may not be so in someone else's. Everyone

is asked to consider different perspectives, for the purpose of sensitivity, learning, and growth. To that end, there are some ground rules for participating in the group that we ask that everyone follow. We will read and review these Ground Rules prior to each session to help get people in the right frame of mind for our discussions.

- **Recognize:** We recognize that we must strive to overcome historical and divisive biases, such as racism and sexism, in our society.
- **Acknowledge:** We acknowledge that we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own group(s) and about members of other groups. This is true for everyone, regardless of our group(s).
- **No Blame:** We agree not to blame ourselves or others for the misinformation we have learned, but to accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
- **Trust:** Everyone has come to the table to learn, grow, and share. We acknowledge that we may be at different stages of learning on the content and discussion topics. We will trust that people will do the best they can. We all make mistakes and have bad days; when these occur, let's challenge and encourage each other to do better.
- **Respect:** We agree to treat other participants' reflections and questions with respect. We acknowledge once again that we may be at different stages of learning on the topic. However, this does not mean we should ignore problematic statements. See information here on calling in and calling out. Both approaches are valid and can be done with care and respect, with the goal of helping each other learn.
- **Individual Experience:** We agree that no one should be required or expected to speak for their whole race or gender. We can't, even if we wanted to.
- **Share the Air:** Share responsibility for including all voices in the discussion. If you have a tendency to dominate discussions, take a step back and help the group invite others to speak. If you tend to stay quiet, challenge yourself to share ideas so others can learn from you. If you are exceedingly quiet, do expect that the facilitator will call on you in meetings to participate.
- **Not Experts:** No one is an expert on these topics. We are here to help open up awareness and understanding in this process. Everyone is here in this group to learn. We also recognize that everyone has an opinion. Opinions, however, are

not the same as informed knowledge backed up by research. Depending on the topic and context, both are valid to share but it's important to know the difference. To engage in deep learning, we will want to lean more toward informed knowledge and gain practice reflecting and speaking thoughtfully on difficult topics.

- **Ask for help:** It's okay not to know. Keep in mind that we are all still learning and are bound to make mistakes when approaching a complex task or exploring new ideas. Be open to changing your mind, and make space for others to do so as well.

Study Guideline for meetings and discussion

There may be supplemental information in the form of videos for any of the weekly discussion series – they will be added and the program updated as necessary.

Please try to read the chapters assigned before each meeting.

July 7th and 14th Discussion Questions:

Unit 1: Intro, Chapters 1 - 4: Intro; Definitions: Dueling Consciousness; Power; & Biology

- Introduce yourself: We learn a lot about Kendi's family and his own *positionality* in these chapters. Among other things, Kendi states he is "one generation removed from picking cotton for pocket change... outside Savannah." Introduce yourself and your own positionality; what are you "*one generation removed from*"?
- What is the difference between someone who is "not racist" and someone who is "antiracist," according to Kendi's definitions?
- Kendi has already stated unequivocally in the book's Intro that pretending to be colorblind is actually "...a mask to hide racism." He expands on this in Chapter 3, p 38, by saying it is "... the **privilege** of being inherently normal, standard, and legal" that allows some whites to *not have to think about race*, to *dismiss* or *deny* racism, etc. Similarly, in Chapter 4, p 54, Kendi says the "post-racial strategy" of insisting there is *only one race* (i.e., the human race) is misguided and "harmful."
 - Without pushing back or fighting against these statements, explain what is meant by *privilege* and explain Kendi's perspective.

July 21st and 28th Discussion Questions

Unit 2: July 21st Chapters 5 & 6 Ethnicity; Body; Culture; Behavior

In these chapters, Kendi unpacks the various ways that racism impacts perceptions of ethnicity, bodies, culture, and behavior.

- In Chapters 5 and 6, Kendi introduces the terms *racialized ethnic groups* and *racialized bodies*.
 - Explain what is meant by these terms, as well as how these forms of racism manifest. Thinking beyond the examples Kendi offers, identify an example of ethnic racism or bodily racism that you can think of from recent years.

Unit 2: July 28th Chapters 7 & 8 Ethnicity; Body; Culture; Behavior

- In Chapter 7, Kendi explores how African American culture (cultural practices; fashion; language; music, and more) is seen by "culturally racist scholars," sociologists and apologists, and contrasts that with how he describes the experience of being a young Black male navigating "on the Ave."
 - How can we explain these differences in perspective, using the lenses of *power* and *cultural racism*?
- Kendi connects in Chapter 8 the development of IQ tests and standardized tests with the 19th century eugenics movement, and states "... because we're talking about featureless, objective numbers, no one would ever think that racism could have played a role."
 - Had you ever thought of standardized tests in this way before? What is the difference between the achievement gap and the opportunity gap, as Kendi describes, and how might this impact how we interpret a student's performance on standardized tests?

August 4th and 11th Discussion Questions

August 4th Unit 3: Chapters 9 &10, Color: White; Black; Class

1. Chapter 9 addresses colorism, or racist ideas and policies that lead to inequities between light- and dark-skinned people. Kendi unpacks his own struggles with colorism, from his honey contact lenses to his pledge to date only dark-skinned women. In Chapter 11, he exposes racism from Blacks directed at other Blacks as a means of debunking the saying that "Black people can't be racist." Address **one** of the following:

- Explain Kendi's ultimate position on how to be an antiracist in regard to standards of beauty; give examples.
- Kendi gives numerous examples of Black on Black racism in Chapter 11. Which one of the scenarios surprised you the most, and why?

2. In Chapter 10, Kendi states that "...ordinary white people benefit from racist policies, though not nearly as much as racist power, and not nearly as much as they could from an equitable society." (p 129) Identify a racist policy or racist power that "ordinary white people" like us benefit from. How might that policy or power be changed to be more equitable and more antiracist?

August 11th Unit 3: Chapters 11 &12: Color; White; Black; Class

1. As described in Chapter 12, what is the "intersection" of race and class, and how does this intersection disproportionately and negatively impact people of color? Give examples.

August 18th and 25th Discussion Questions

Unit 4: August 18th Chapters 13 & 14: Space; Gender; Sexuality; Failure

1. What is depicted [in this mural](#) called "When Tillage Begins"? In what ways does the artwork connect with the themes of Chapter 13?



In his quick summary in Chapter 14 of Black women's movements, Black feminism, and gendered racism, Kendi credits Philomena Essed as defining **gendered racism**, and briefly introduces Kimberlé Crenshaw's highly influential concept of **intersectionality**. Choose **one** of the following to address in your Reflection:

a. In becoming an antiracist, why is it useful to recognize the various -isms that intersect with and compound the effects of racism? Why is the intersection with *gender* particularly important?

b. Kendi mentions 20 women by name in the space of two short pages, plus refers to unnamed "Black queer activists" (whose names are also known: Marsha P. Johnson and Stormé DeLarverie, to name two, plus Sylvia Rivera, to name a Puerto Rican-Venezuelan), all on pages 187-188. Of the women and achievements mentioned, whose works would you most like to read more about, and why?

c. Do you think that Kendi has given "enough space" to the topics of gender and sexuality? Why or why not?

Unit 4: August 25th Chapters 15 & 16: Space; Gender; Sexuality; Failure

3. Throughout the book, Kendi gives numerous teaching and learning examples. In Chapter 15, he credits queer Black feminists with challenging him to address and overcome his own homophobia. He writes: *"It is best to challenge ourselves by dragging ourselves before people who intimidate us with their brilliance and constructive criticism. ...I wanted to run away. They did not let me run away, and I am grateful now because of it."* (p199) Earlier in the book, Kendi provides the example of

meeting with the Ghanaian student to address racist misconceptions, drawing him *in* to conversation instead of pushing him away. In Chapter 16 Kendi states the "...failure of opening closed-minded consumers of racist ideas" should not be blamed on the closed-minded person but on "...our own foolish decision to waste time reviving closed minds from the dead." (p 213)

- These are all teaching and learning examples. In what ways can we apply these examples to holding ourselves and others productively accountable for understanding, addressing, and overcoming biases and intersecting oppressions? Give examples.

September 1st Discussion Questions

Unit 5: Chapters 17 & 18 Success; Survival, and Book Wrap-Up

1. In Chapter 17, Kendi introduces the framework by Toure and Hamilton of overt racism and covert racism. Explain how these two are differentiated. Why are they both important, and why do you think Kendi focuses more on covert racism in both Chapters 17 and 18?
2. We have now read the entire book. What were your own biggest take-aways from the book, and why?
3. We reflected in an earlier unit about moving from knowledge to action, meaning knowledge of racism in its many forms, and taking antiracist action to interrupt or dismantle it. As you reflect on antiracism and what you learned from this book, do you feel moved to take action? Why or why not? If not, what support do you need to be able to take action? What concrete steps can you take to work with others within your organization to identify the antiracism needs of your organization and/or community?
4. What are any other observations or comments you wish to make?