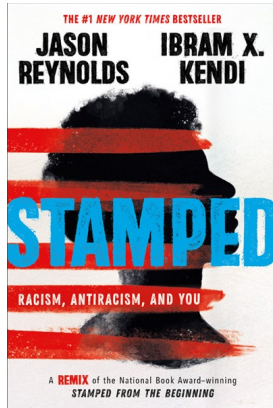




Reading Guide and Discussion Questions

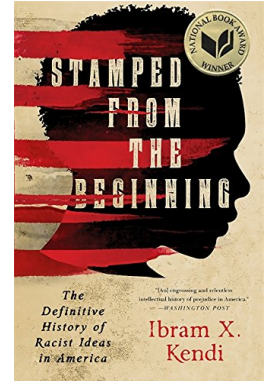


Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You
by Jason Reynolds and Ibram X. Kendi

Optional:

Stamped From the Beginning by Ibram X. Kendi

This guide applies to both versions of *Stamped*. Most of us are reading *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*, the young adult “remix” of *Stamped From the Beginning*, Ibram Kendi’s longer and more scholarly version.



Both books follow the same organization and the same discussion questions apply.

Parents: Note that the n-word appears in *Stamped*.

About the authors

IBRAM X. KENDI is one of America’s leading historians and antiracist voices. He is a National Book Award-winning and #1 *New York Times* bestselling author. Kendi is a professor at Boston University and the Founding Director of the [Boston University Center for Antiracist Research](https://www.bu.edu/center-for-antiracist-research/). He is a contributor at *The Atlantic* and a CBS News correspondent.

<https://www.ibramxkendi.com/about>

Jason Reynolds is an award-winning author. He currently serves as the National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature at the Library of Congress.

<https://www.jasonwritesbooks.com/about>

Why read and discuss books?

We read books for many reasons. Entertainment. Escape. Growth. To name a few. Sometimes we’re content with the words going “in one ear and out the other” – so to speak. But if we’re reading to learn, the words can’t simply pass through as they excite/scare/sooth us. They have to stick around in the space between our ears.

The best way for words to stick is to grab and hold them with a question, giving us time to think about what the words mean for us. That’s why there are discussion questions for the Big Reads. And why discussing the book is as important as reading it.



It's not the author's exact words we want to hold on to but the ideas and meaning that we make of those words. We're after lightbulb moments. We want to say, "Gee, I never thought of that!" and "I didn't know that!"

Stretching our brain with new ideas is not unlike stretching any muscle. It creates tension – like a rubber band. New thoughts pull and tug the old. Some may feel unwelcome. Like any workout, it's uncomfortable. The "feel good" part happens *after!*

Stamped Background

The title of *Stamped* is from a speech given by Mississippi senator Jefferson Davis in the senate on April 12, 1860. He was objecting to a bill funding Black education in Washington, D.C. (Davis went on to serve as President of the Confederate States from 1861-1865.) In his speech, Davis said: "This Government was not founded by negroes nor for negroes [but] by white men for white men [... the] inequality of the white and black races [...] was *stamped from the beginning*". The implication of "stamped from the beginning" was that it was part of God's creation and not for anyone to challenge or undo.

Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You for young adults, published in 2020, is called a "remix" of Ibram Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning*, published in 2016. Not only is it a remix, it's half as long!

Kendi wrote *Stamped from the Beginning* because he found the histories of race incomplete and inaccurate. The history of race in the United States is not a straight line of progress to a post-racial society. As Kendi notes, "There is, and has *always* been, a persistent line of antiracist thought in this country." Yet there is, and has always been, a persistent line of racist thought as well. These histories do not play out as a good versus evil story with good winning in the end or a story of half-baked ideas being supplanted by rational ones. It's more complicated than that.

Kendi sought the source of these ever present racist and antiracist ideas. And as he did, he realized what he had been taught was a "popular folktale of racism"that "ignorant and hateful people had produced racist ideas, and that these racist people had instituted racist policies."

What he discovered through research was the opposite. Racist ideas didn't cause racist policies. Rather, racist policies caused racist ideas. Kendi writes, "But when I learned the motives behind the production of racist ideas, it became obvious that this folktale, though sensible, was not true. I found that the need of powerful people to defend racist policies that benefited them led them to produce racist ideas, and when unsuspecting people consumed these racist ideas, they became ignorant and hateful."

Stamped takes us on a fast-paced journey not along a single line of progression, but two separate lines, one of racist ideas and the other anti-racist. It's these ideas that we have



stamped into our history and culture from the beginning. And as Kendi shows, just as racist ideas can be stamped in, they can also be stamped out.

How to read *Stamped*

Patterns not details

Stamped is a history book covering 400 years. It covers a lot of ground. It goes wide, not deep, to give us the big picture. We're not reading *Stamped* (especially the shorter young adult version) for the details. Rather, we're reading it to see the patterns repeated in the various historical time periods. Leaving us with the question – what patterns are repeating now?

Stamped begins with the Introduction (or Prologue) in which Kendi explains the lenses through which he's looking at the history of racism. His lenses are racist and anti-racist ideas – the definition of each -- and he looks through them like a scientist looks through a microscope onto five periods of time in the United States.

Five sections

Each period of time is a section in the book, each with multiple chapters and a varied number of pages to read.

- Section 1: 1415-1728, 36 pages
- Section 2: 1743-1826, 38 pages
- Section 3: 1826-1879, 30 pages
- Section 4: 1868-1963, 48 pages
- Section 5: 1963-Today, 80 pages

Reading tips:

- Read a section and pause.
- Answer the Section Questions in this guide.

Note: Use these the section questions with your conversation partner(s) if you are discussing each section.

A human tour guide for each section

Reynolds and Kendi pick one historical figure from each time period (section) as a tour guide for that time in history. Their story is entwined with the history of racist/anti-racist ideas in their day. Each of these figures – Cotton Mather, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham



A Call to Justice and Mercy

Lincoln, etc. – is a product of their time. Each had racist and/or anti-racist positions during their lifetime and each influenced the beliefs of others.

Yet each of these influencers was human. Reynolds and Kendi do not hold them up as paragons. Their positions were at various times conflicting, shifting, vague or even, to our sensibilities, peculiar. Cotton Mather, for example, merged racist ideas with his beliefs about witches.

By including the stories of these historical figures – and looking at them through Reynold's and Kendi's racist/anti-racist lenses – we see what racist and anti-racist ideas-in-action look like. Having the skill to recognize racist/anti-racist ideas and actions *back then* helps us recognize them right now.

Other material on the history of racism in the United States

- The National Museum of African American History – part of the Smithsonian Institution – offers an excellent overview of the history of racism.
<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/historical-foundations-race>
- Watch this 10-minute video from PBS on the origin of race in the U.S.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=CVxAlmAPHec&feature=emb_logo

Discussing *Stamped* with a conversation partner, family or friends

We learn new things from reading a book or watching a movie. Even deeper learning happens when we talk about the book or movie with someone else.

Plan to talk about *Stamped* with someone you trust and can be candid with:

- Find a conversation partner. This can be a friend, a spouse or partner, a parent. AND/OR,
- Talk as a family. AND/OR,
- Talk in your Bethel small group such as a women's circle, book group, men's group, youth group, XYZ, etc.

Then,

- Agree to carve out time for discussion with minimal distractions. Will you talk after reading the entire book? After each section? Block the time.
- Use the suggested discussion questions and add your own.



SECTION QUESTIONS

- Use these questions to reflect on the section after you finish reading it.
- Discuss these questions with a conversation partner or your family if you are discussing each section.

Introduction (“Dear Reader”)

- Why study the history of racism?
- Did you learn the same “folktale” as Kendi – that ignorance and hate led to racist ideas which led to racist policies?
- What’s your reaction to Kendi’s discovery that the cause/effect is the other way around – racist policies led to racist ideas to justify the policies?
- In the Introduction Kendi shares his own experience with racist thinking. Why does his candor and honesty matter to readers? To you?

Section 1: 1415-1728

- The first chapter defined segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists. In the Introduction, Kendi says that both segregationists and assimilationists are racist positions. How so?
- How was Christianity used to support racist ideas?
- There were some odd theories “back then” like climate theory (Black people would turn white if they lived in a cooler climate), curse theory (Noah’s son Ham) and polygenesis (Africans aren’t human). How can we differentiate a good idea from a bad one?
- How did you feel after reading this section?

Section 2: 1743-1826

- How are your observations of or experiences with racism tied to the list of racist ideas in Chapter 6?
- The authors introduce the concept of “uplift suasion,” the idea that white people would become less racist if they saw Black people lifting themselves up – going to church, speaking “proper” English, and living like white people. How did this assimilationist strategy perpetuate racist ideas? How does this strategy persist today?
- How does the book’s portrayal of the American founding and Thomas Jefferson compare to what you learned? How does this history complicate the mythology?
- The Enlightenment was a new intellectual era associated with light and white. Light (and white) equaled reason and dark was ignorance. These ideas were used to justify a racial hierarchy. Where do we see these ideas in our culture today?
- One of Kendi’s key arguments is that racist policies that serve the interests of the powerful have driven the development of racist ideas and not the other way around. How does this cause-effect show up in this section?



Section 3: 1826-1879

- This section includes Harriett Beecher Stowe and her best-selling novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In what ways is the book racist? How did it draw northerners to the abolitionist movement?
- In *Stamped*, we read that Garrison “transformed abolitionism from a messy political stance (like Jefferson’s) to a simple moral stance. Slavery was evil...and it was the moral duty of the United States to eliminate the evil of slavery.” In *Stamped From the Beginning*, Kendi includes this quote by Garrison, “We must give up the spirit of complexional caste” or “give up Christianity.” In other words, it isn’t only slavery that’s evil. We can’t have a social hierarchy based on race and be Christian. What are the implications of Garrison’s words back then? Today?
- The authors suggest that Lincoln emancipated slaves for political reasons rather than the moral argument that Black people were equal. How does this square with your impression of Lincoln?
- Early on, Garrison believed that freedom for Blacks should be incremental but later he believed that freedom should be immediate – right now. He changed his mind. What can we learn from this?

Section 4: 1868-1963

- W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the most influential African American leaders in the early 20th century. In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois introduced double consciousness – “A self that is Black and a self that is American.” He called his double conscious group the “Talented Tenth” – the top 10% of Black America. How does double consciousness and the “talented tenth” play out in our culture today?
- Why did Du Bois move from being an assimilationist to an antiracist?
- Books and movies like *Tarzan* and *Birth of a Nation* have had a big role in forming and reinforcing racist ideas. What current movies/TV shows promote racist ideas?
- A eugenics movement began to emerge with IQ tests and standardized tests to prove that Black people were inferior. Where do you see eugenics today? What can be done about it?
- Reynolds calls the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments examples of a “big deal” that is far from being a “done deal.” Why are these constitutional amendments not “done deals?”

Section 5: 1963-Today

- How are Angela Davis’ ideas on racism different from other anti-racists such as Du Bois, Martin Luther King, William Lloyd Garrison, and others?



A Call to Justice and Mercy

- When describing Black political movements Reynolds writes, “The shift went from fighting for civil rights to fighting for freedom. The difference between the two is simple. One implies a fight for fairness. The other, a right to live.” What is the difference between fairness and a right to live? Was Martin Luther King fighting for civil rights or for freedom?
- Why have the different approaches of assimilationism and uplift suasion thinking not been helpful in dispelling racism?
- How has racism changed, improved, or worsened throughout American history? Do you think the problems of racism today are worse than 30 years ago.
- Reynolds notes how Richard Nixon would reference Black people in his speeches without ever saying “Black and “white” by using words like “urban” and “ghetto”. What are other words in our culture that invoke race without mentioning race?
- At the beginning of *Stamped* and in chapter 13, Reynolds asserts, “Life rarely fits neatly into a box. People are complicated and selfish and contradictory.” Who are some of the complicated political figures with respect to their ideas about race, past and present? What makes them complex?

Discussion questions for the entire book

- Why study the history of racist ideas?
- Why does Jason Reynolds say that *Stamped* is not a history book?
- The book lays out three positions: segregationist, assimilationist, and antiracist. How do these patterns repeat in history? Where do you see these ideas today?
- What were you surprised to learn?
- What did you read that caused you to have a strong reaction for it? Against it? Why?
- Kendi challenges conventional thinking when he says that racist policies that serve those in power have driven the development of racist ideas, not the other way around. How does this cause-effect show up in the book?
- At the beginning of *Stamped* and in chapter 13, Reynolds writes, “Life rarely fits neatly into a box. People are complicated and selfish and contradictory.” Who are some of the complicated political figures with respect to their ideas about race, past and present? What makes them complex?
- Both William Lloyd Garrison and W.E.B. DuBois changed their positions on race. For example, DuBois moved from assimilationism to antiracism. Why did they change their positions? What can we learn from this?
- Why have the different approaches of assimilation and uplift suasion not been helpful in dispelling racism?
- How has Christianity been used to support racist ideas?
- As seen with books and movies like *Tarzan*, *Planet of the Apes*, *Rocky*, and *Gone With The Wind*, pop culture and media have had a big role in reinforcing racist ideas.



What more recent movies, TV shows, and stories promote racist ideas and how?
What then?

- Racism is so embedded in our lives that even everyday expressions associate Blackness with negativity. Examples include words like black sheep, blackballing, blacklisting, and black mark. Other words include minority, ghetto, and inner city. What are more words? What can we do about this?
- How has racism changed, improved, or worsened throughout American history? Do you think the problems of racism today are better or worse than 30 years ago?
- Although published as a book for young people, how do readers of all ages benefit from *Stamped*?
- How have you/your family/your group benefitted from reading *Stamped*?
- Why is it necessary for us as Christians to know the history of racist ideas?