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*How to be an Anti-Racist* Analytical Book Review

In *How to be an Anti-Racist*, the author Ibram X. Kendi utilizes his life story to illustrate the path of becoming an anti-racist. The term antiracist means “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” (Kendi 14). In our evolving society, it is no longer acceptable to just be “not racist.” According to Kendi, one who is simply “not racist” is in denial of their racist ideals and/or thoughts. However, an antiracist actually puts their belief into action in order to combat racism. Throughout the book, Kendi lays out methods in order to reach an antiracist society. Kendi’s book can be compared to many of the readings and theories we discussed throughout the semester.

In Chapter 3 titled “Power”, Kendi speaks about his entry into “racial puberty.” During his early childhood, Kendi’s knowledge and awareness of racist ideas became evident as he entered school. At the age of seven, he began to notice how racism has manifested in our society. Kendi states “What a powerful construction race is – powerful enough to consume us. And it comes for us early” (Kendi 37). Knowledge is created at an early age. It starts off at home and continues at school. In this chapter, Kendi mentions how White families in New York would separate their children from attending schools where children from Black families would attend. This comes an initial issue because it prevents the children to experience interactions with members of all backgrounds. Because they have no experience with this, it then becomes harder

for them to interact with members outside of their communities in the future. From prior experience, it becomes draining for Black and people of color to educate others as to how to properly interact with the minority population. Marginalized groups then must become educators for the majority groups. However, it can all be prevented if all members would integrate and interact with each other at an early age. Kendi's chapter relates to Patricia Hill Collins "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment" in Chapter 2 of our reader. Collins writes "Living as an African American woman is a necessary prerequisite for producing Black feminist thought because within Black women's communities' thought is validated and produced with reference to a particular set of historical, material, and epistemological condition" (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 71). Collins highlights how Black women have served as agents of knowledge for the marginalized and the suppressed. Due to their unique experiences, Black women have used the obstacles they faced in order to create knowledge that allows others to view the world differently and from the perspectives of Black women.

In Chapter 6 titled "Body," Kendi articulates the stereotypes and assumptions associated with the Black body. In our society, the Black body has been linked with violence and danger. Kendi states "History tells the same story: Violence for White people really has too often had a Black face – and the consequences have landed on the Black body across the span of American history" (Kendi 70). Colonizers and early slave owners viewed the Black body as evil and in need of control in order for society to properly function. Even in recent history, we continue to see how these false ideals are still prevalent in policies and regulations. Kendi also states that "Americans today see the Black body as larger, more threatening, more potentially harmful, and more likely to require force to control than a similarly sized White body" (Kendi 71). Our society has placed a social stigma on the Black body that worsens the discrimination faced by the

marginalized group. Due to this social stigma, it becomes difficult for members of this community to advance in our society. Black bodies are more likely to be killed by police, serve longer sentence, experience racial profiling by law enforcement, and more likely to be singled out for a crime even if they are innocent. Black bodies are also less likely to receive a job even if they are overqualified. Kendi's chapter on the Black body links to Linda Trinh Vo excerpt "Transnational Beauty Circuits: Asian American Women, Technology, and Circle Contact Lenses." Trinh Vo states that "Bodily features such as eye color or skin color are often politicized, since racial ideologies are attached to them, so biological characteristics are imbued with societal values and meaning" (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 203). Biological characteristics have been used by our society to create implications about certain groups of people. The author draws attention to how eyes and noses have become racial markers for Asian Americans. The racial markers and stereotypes created around them are used by others to display their superior over minority groups.

In Chapter 7 titled "Culture," Kendi reflects on how culture played a role in his life. During his high school career, Kendi was into playing basketball. Kendi stated that "basketball was life" (Kendi 81). This sport was a significant part of Kendi's identity to the point where he believed he would not survive without it. Another part of Kendi's identity was the central artery of Southside Queens the Ave. The Ave was where Kendi was able to dive into Black culture. The Ave was where Black culture was expressed freely and like no other. Although the White Americans looked down on the culture, Kendi still loved and admired the culture he expressed and embraced from the Ave. He then discusses how some Black culture's richness has been ripped away due to assimilation in White American culture. Assimilation into American culture has allowed for the Black culture to forget its cultural heritage and have more European cultural

standards. Kendi states that in order to be an antiracist, one must see the cultural differences as equals. Although each culture is different, there should not be one cultural superior to another. Black assimilation in White Culture connects with Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz's piece titled "Jews, Class, Color, and the Cost of Whiteness." In her piece, Kaye/Kantrowitz emphasizes how assimilation into White culture is accompanied with cultural loss for Jewish people (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 114). She also focuses on whether there is a connection between anti-Semitism and racism. Kaye/Kantrowitz argues that by definition, Jews are people of color and would not survive in a white supremacist society. However, due to assimilation and the assumption that Jews are concerned white, people fail to see Kaye/Kantrowitz's argument.

In Chapter 15 titled "Sexuality," Kendi discusses his dilemma and journey with comprehending sexuality. In the previous chapter, Kendi mentions that sexuality and sexual orientation was not something his family discussed or taught him about. It was assumed that because Kendi was male, you would be into females. His family's silence on the topic enable Kendi to not think of the other sexual orientations that do exist. Kendi labeled himself a "racist, sexist homophobe" when arriving to study at Temple University (Kendi 182). It wasn't until he found out his best friend Weckea at Temple was gay. Kendi had a negative assumption of how gay people looked and how they would act which did not allow him to envision his best friend being gay. Kendi was in denial of his best friend's sexual orientation then later comprehended that his best friend did not want to tell him because he knew that Kendi was homophobic. Kendi decided it was time to shift his mindset, especially for his best friend. He states that "We cannot be antiracist if we are homophobic or transphobic" (Kendi 197). In order to be a true antiracist, Kendi understood that he must include and fight for all Black lives and as well as understand all Black life experiences. Daisy Hernandez's story "Even if I Kiss a Woman" relates to Kendi's

experience with homophobia. In her story, Hernandez writes about her family's reaction when she revealed her sexual orientation. From prior experience, traditional Hispanics are strict when it comes to sexual orientation. They believe that men belong with women and same sex relationships are frowned upon. When Hernandez shared that she was dating a woman, her mother was "hyperventilating and fanning herself with her other hand. She stammers, 'I've never heard of this. This doesn't happen in Colombia'" (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 158). Hernandez's family and culture did not accept the idea that Hernandez was not heterosexual. One of her aunts stated "It's not going to work, sabes? You need a man for the equipment" (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 158). Hernandez's family's ideals negatively affected her because her family's actions changed due to her sexuality. Hernandez sought acceptance from her family. Even after telling a family member that her relationship with another woman did not work, it was evident that they had not yet to comprehend her sexual orientation.

In the final chapters of the book, Kendi writes about how he saw racism as a disease in which could be cured by antiracism. The beginning process to "curing" this disease is to understand where racist ideals are rooted from and how they could be changed. Kendi focused on the racist policies and regulations that exist in our society. In order to change these unjust policies, it is important to comprehend what racist ideas they portray and how target groups are affected by them. One must then recognize how antiracist ideas and policies improve the life experiences of the target groups and eliminate racism in our society. Kendi is optimistic and believes that it is possible for us to live in a society where racism no longer exists. He states that "racist policies [lead] to racist ideas, not the other way around, as we have common thought" (Kendi 230). Kendi believes that it is a common misconception that racist policies stem from racist ideas. However, it is the racist policies that enable the racist ideas to exist. Therefore, the

first step to creating an antiracist society is to annihilate the racist policies. To test his theory, Kendi began the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, it was revealed that changing racist policies to antiracist policies was successful in its mission to rid of racism. Kendi's call for change is similar to the excerpt on "Feminist Propositions for a Just Economy: Time for Creative Imaginations." This piece was written by Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), and the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), feminist organizations who sought to increase economic equality amongst genders. They list out major obstacles faced in order to create feminist just economies. The organizations teamed up to create an online project where people can "share, document, analyze, critique, and improve some of these propositions for a feminist economic justice agenda" (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 560). I believe that the project is successful because it allows people to bounce ideas off each other, learn from different lenses, and educate others. The journey to creating a just society does not come from one person or organization. This journey also does not come in the blink of an eye. Kendi and the feminist organizations seek for solutions by starting off at the root of the issue. This way they can be effective and long-lasting change to our society.

In conclusion, Kendi's *How to be An Antiracist* exhibits many of the themes and ideas we analyzed this semester. In order to create an antiracist society, we must reconsider our thoughts/ideas and transform them to antiracist ones. We can, therefore, put our thoughts and ideas into action in order to create a just, antiracist society where everyone is different but equal. We can also take the themes and concepts we learned this semester and put them into action to create this ideal society.

## Work Cited

Kendi, Ibram. *How to Be Antiracist*. One World, 2019.

Kirk, Gwyn, and Margo Okazawa-Rey. *Gendered Lives: Intersectional Perspectives*. Oxford University Press, 2020.