

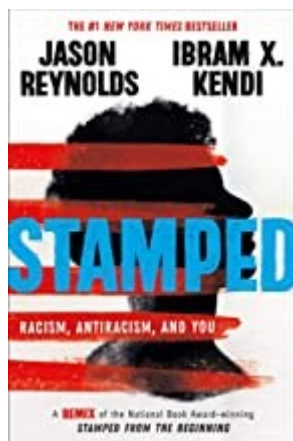
## Discussion Guide

### Stamped From the Beginning:

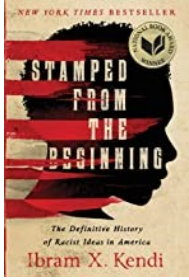
### The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America

by Ibram X. Kendi

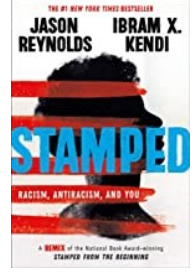
Compiled by the Racial Justice Team and members of  
First Baptist Church, Madison, WI



*Note:* Members of our discussion group also had the option of reading this book: **Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You** by Jason Reynolds & Ibram X. Kendi. Questions applied to both books.



# Discussion Questions



*Please note: these discussions questions were created by different members of our congregation, so their form may vary from part to part.*

## Prologue

"My definition of a racist idea is a simple one: it is any concept that regards one racial group as inferior or superior to another racial group in any way. I define anti-Black racist ideas-the subject of this book-as any idea suggesting that Black people, or any group of Black people, are inferior in any way to another racial group" Kendi, p. 5

~ What are your hopes for these discussions? Why are you here?

~ Why study the sources of racist ideas?

The Prologue lays out three positions: segregationist, assimilationist, and antiracist.

~ Thinking about instances where you have encountered or experienced racism, how was your experience tied with these positions?

~ Have you seen examples of how these ideas are promoted in pop culture today?

## Part 1

Part 1 covers the years from the 1400s through the North American colonial period. It discusses the rising economic importance of African slaves and the classification of humanity into races and covers the development of racist theories such as climate theory, curse theory, and polygenesis.

~ What especially struck you about this history?

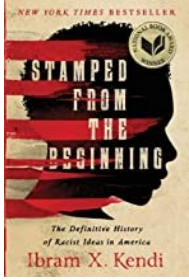
~ There are a lot of ideas out there. How do you distinguish good ones from bad ones?

The history of the American Baptist Church is entwined with the history of the nonconformist pilgrims. After reading Part 1, would you change the Baptist history taught our children?

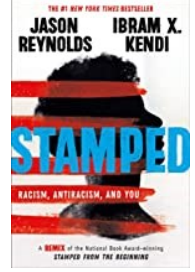
## Part 2

Thomas Jefferson's father Peter believed that "Christianizing the Negroes makes them proud and saucy, and tempts them to imagine themselves upon an equality with the white people." Cotton Mather's missionaries agreed that "a good Christian will always be a good servant."

~ Discuss the use/misuse of Christianity and its effect on the Black people of that day. We don't hold those principles today, but are there subtle ways we have misused our White privilege to be less than inclusive to persons of color?



# Discussion Questions



Two of the strategies used by assimilationists in this section are exhibits of “extraordinary Negroes” and uplift suasion.

~ Why did assimilationists think these strategies of countering racist ideas would be effective? According to Kendi, how did these strategies only further perpetuate racist ideas about Black people? How do these assimilationist strategies persist in our society today?

~ How does Kendi’s portrayal of the Enlightenment, the American founding, and figures such as Thomas Jefferson compare to the history that you’ve encountered in school and elsewhere? How does the history presented here—particularly how these movements and figures were deeply implicated in the production and dissemination of racist policies and ideas—complicate American mythology of the nation’s founding?

## **Consider this additional background relating to the above questions**

1743 was the end of an era when theologians mostly dominated racial discourse, and the beginning of a new intellectual era (the Enlightenment) which strongly associated enlightenment with light/white. Whiteness equaled reason and darkness ignorance. These ideas were just some of many which were mobilized to justify a racial hierarchy.

~ How has this been embraced by our culture both then and now?

Benjamin Franklin was a very educated/revered man of his day, but his ideas would be seen as racist today. Thomas Jefferson expressed conflicting views of slavery, owned slaves and fathered six children with an enslaved woman of mixed race.

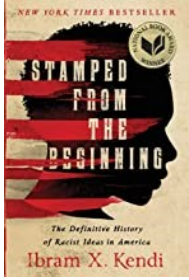
~ What can we learn from these historical figures and how does this relate to us today and how history will treat us? What racial “skeletons” might have existed in our past and what are we doing to rid ourselves of them now?

One of Kendi’s key arguments throughout the book is that racially discriminatory policies that serve the self-interests of the powerful have driven the development of racist ideas.

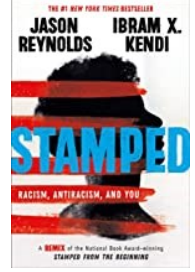
~ How does this dynamic emerge in this portion of the book?

Central to anti-Black racism are racist ideas about sexuality and gender.

~ How did racist ideas about Black women’s bodies and sexuality uphold the institution of slavery?



# Discussion Questions



## Part 3

Garrison said “We must give up the spirit of complexional caste” or “give up Christianity”. Caste is defined as a society-wide system of **social stratification** characterized by notions such as **hierarchy**, inclusion and exclusion, and purity.

~ Do you agree with this statement? If you agree, do you believe we still have this spirit of complexional caste (150+ years later)?

~ If we still have this complexion caste, what does that mean for us as Christians?

Abraham Lincoln’s views on rights for Black people were not as progressive as many thought. Kendi suggests that emancipation was done for political expediency and as a military strategy as opposed to a purely moral decision.

~ How does this depiction square with your previous impressions of Lincoln? How does that make you feel?

Lincoln also had blinders on when it came to Black self-determination and leadership.

~ What do you think keeps white people from promoting leadership roles for Black leaders?

William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist views were shaped by direct contact with leaders in the early movement against slavery. The fact that he was proficient in typesetting helped him create a popular newspaper, *The Liberator*, and gave him a platform to share his emerging views. Early on, he wrote that freedom was incremental – later he wrote that freedom should be immediate – right now.

~ What must it have been like for Garrison to admit to changing his mind about immediate emancipation?

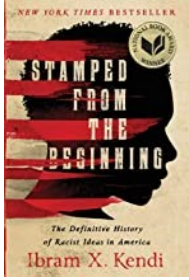
~ How might you have challenged Garrison at the time?

Garrison helped form the American Anti-Slavery Society – a group of abolitionists – and together they published a million anti-slavery pamphlets in one year (1835). Imagine you are writing the headlines and key points.

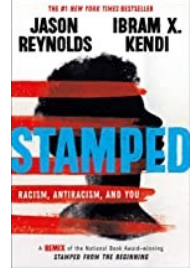
~ What would grab the attention of the public?

~ What sort of text would help convince others that slavery needed to be gone – right now?

~ What examples from the 20th and 21st centuries might you share about resistance to dismantling legal and social forms of discrimination. What steps have been taken that you agree or disagree? Please reflect on your life experiences from readings, observations or direct experiences.



# Discussion Questions



An important figure in this section of “Stamped” is Harriett Beecher Stowe – and her best-selling novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. This book is a classic and gives an interesting perspective on slavery.

~ What are your thoughts about using a novel to promote a concept such as racial justice?

Harriet Beecher Stowe simplified Black lives as being very fond of western civilization.

~ Wouldn’t such a tactic be bound to muddy the waters on the subject of freedom from the dominant practice of slavery?

~ Was her book perhaps an allegory about the subjugation of women?

## Part 4

W.E.B. Du Bois, born in 1868, was one of the most influential African American intellectual and civil right activists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was the first African American to receive a doctorate at Harvard followed shortly thereafter with a professorship at Atlanta University. Du Bois’ ideas changed over his lifetime.

### *The Talented Tenth—Double Consciousness:*

In his book, **The Souls of Black Folk**, Du Bois talked about “double Consciousness:

“This American world.... yields (the Negro) no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the type of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness-an American a Negro , two souls, two thought, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keep it from being torn asunder.” P.232

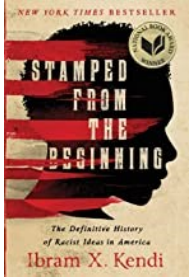
Du Bois asserted his double conscious group, which he named the Talented Tenth- the top 10% of Black America.

~ How do we see double consciousness and the “talented tenth” playing out in our culture? Should it be changed and if so, what would you suggest?

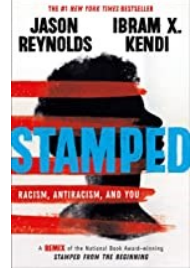
### *Eugenics Movement:*

Growing up in the 1870’s and 1880’s, DuBois realized that “no matter what he and other young Blacks like him achieved in school and in life, they were not changing the minds of discriminators”. During this time the Supreme Court declared that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional, racial segregation was beginning to emerge and some blamed socio – economic disparities between races on inferior characters of Black people rather than discriminatory policies. So, a eugenics movement began to emerge- IQ tests, “organic inferiority”, Racial Ethnic Ladder, as illustrated by a children’s rhyme of the time: “If you’re white, you’re right/ If you’re yellow, you’re mellow/ If you’re brown, stick around/ If you’re black, get back.”

~ Do you still see eugenics and what do we do about it?



# Discussion Questions



## *Democracy and Racial Prejudice:*

DuBois later wrote “that the majority of Americans would rush to the defense of democracy...if they realized how race prejudice was threatening it.”

~ Is it possible to have both democracy and racial prejudice? Why or why not?

## *New Deal*

By 1933, Du Bois had almost completely turned to antiracism and antiracism socialism. It was about this time that the “New Deal” was put into place under the FDR administration. However, Black people could not take advantage of these federal programs. Segregationists made sure Black people were excluded from job benefits, social security, unemployment insurance, etc.

~ How do you feel about that and what would you have done about it?

## *Media Suasion:*

As seen with movies like Tarzan, Planet of the Apes, Rocky, and Gone With The Wind, pop culture and media have played a large role in reinforcing racist ideas, whether their stories are overtly racist or are a bit sneakier in their propagation of racist ideas.

~ What current movies, TV shows, and stories promote racist ideas and how? What then?

## *Barriers:*

~ How do race, gender, and sexual orientation intersect and create barriers for people today?

## *Looking Ahead:*

~ How does what we have read in the last two weeks help us to understand the civil rights movement and where we are today? We all know that we still have problems but where do we go from here?

## **Part 5**

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

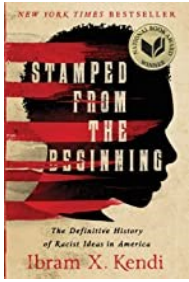
~ What is unique about the Black feminist movement that makes it possible for them to become major spokespeople for current anti-racist efforts?

~ What are your feelings on the movement for Black lives and how has your reading of Stamped changed those feelings or helped you understand the structure and philosophy of that movement differently?

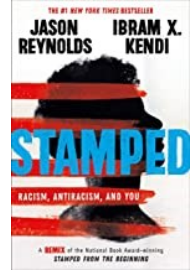
~ Why have the different approaches of assimilationism and uplift suasion thinking not been helpful in dispelling racism?

~ How has racism changed, improved, or worsened throughout American history? Do you think the problems of racism today are more dangerous than 30 years ago?





# Discussion Questions



~ What habits and actions can you or members of First Baptist do to promote anti-racism?

"Reagan fought down all those empowerment movements (i.e., King's nonviolent resistance, Black Power) fomenting in his home state of California and across the nation. Hardly any other Republican politician could match his "law and order" credentials, and hardly any other Republican politician was more despised by antiracists." (Chapter 33)

"Reagan's fame for "peace" and "order" meant something different to antiracists and blacks than it did to most whites. The unequal burden of his policies, placed upon black people, rendered him almost wholly disapproved of by African Americans."

"Reagan's War on Drugs did not, ostensibly, seem to suggest mass incarceration of black people, and especially black males. But once unequal punishments of black people seemed to show up in incarceration statistics, they undid the "fairytale" (that racial discrimination no longer existed in the criminal justice system) that had lauded the act as universally helpful. In the interim, black males were imprisoned in unprecedented numbers, disrupting families, communities, and societal progress for black Americans."

~ Law and order is becoming a major campaign issue this year (2020). What are your feelings about this issue?

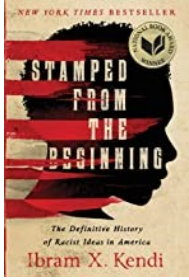
## Epilogue

Some thoughts from Kendi on the end of racism:

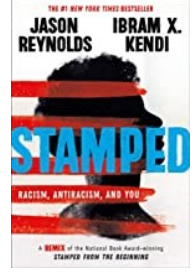
"Forms of educational persuasion, like uplift suasion, have been predicated on the false construction of the race problem: the idea that ignorance and hate lead to racist ideas, which lead to racist policies. In fact, self-interest leads to racist policies, which lead to racist ideas leading to all the ignorance and hate. Racist policies were created out of self-interest."

"Antiracists should stop connecting selfishness to racism, and unselfishness to antiracism... Antiracists merely have to have *intelligent self-interest*, and stop consuming those racist ideas that have engendered so much unintelligent self-interest over the years... It is in the intelligent self-interest of White Americans to challenge racism, knowing they will not be free of sexism, class bias, homophobia, and ethnocentrism until Black people are free of racism."

"Americans...remain indifferent to the need to pass sweeping legislation completely overhauling the enslaving justice system; unmoved in pushing for initiatives like fighting crime with more and better jobs; indifferent to calls to decriminalize drugs and find alternatives to prisons; unmoved in empowering local residents to hire and fire the officers policing their communities. They remain for the most part unwilling to pass grander legislation that re-envision American race relations by fundamentally assuming that discrimination is behind the racist disparities (and not what's wrong with Black folk), and by creating an agency that aggressively investigates the disparities and punishes conscious and unconscious discriminators. This agency would also work toward equalizing the wealth and power of Black and White



# Discussion Questions



neighborhoods and their institutions with a clear mission of repairing the inequities caused by discrimination.”

“The most effective protests that have been started by antiracists focusing on their immediate surroundings: their blocks, neighborhoods, schools, colleges, jobs, and professions. These local protests have become state wide protests, and statewide protests have then become national protests, and national protests have then become international protests. But it all starts with one person, or two people, or tiny groups in their small surroundings.”

“Protesting against racist power and succeeding can never be mistaken for seizing power. Any effective solution to eradicating American racism must involve Americans committed to antiracist policies seizing and maintaining power over institutions neighborhoods, counties, states and nations. An antiracist American can only be guaranteed if principled antiracists are in power.”

“That day is sure to come when Americans realize that the only think wrong with Black people is that they think something is wrong with Black people. There will come a time when we will love humanity, when we will gin the courage to fight for an equitable society.”

~ List some of the areas Kendi sees that need change.

~ Who or what groups are working on these changes in Madison or Wisconsin or the nation? Where or how can First Baptist help with changes?

~ What surprised you in this book? What angered you or made you sad? What other emotions did you experience while reading?

\*Some quotes are from **Stamped**; some sections from Part 5 & the Epilogue are from **Super Summary STUDY GUIDE - Stamped from the Beginning by Ibram X. Kendi**