Stamped

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JASON REYNOLDS AND IBRAM X. KENDI

Jason Reynolds was born in Washington, D.C. and raised in a nearby suburb. He was passionate about poetry and rap at a young age, but he didn't read a single novel until he discovered Richard Wright's *Black Boy* at the age of 17. Then, he started working his way through classic Black American novels. At the University of Maryland, he studied English literature, worked at a bookstore focused on Black literature, and started performing spoken word. He began publishing his poetry after graduation but mainly supported himself by working retail. He had his first big break in 2015 with *All American Boys*, a young adult novel he co-authored with Brendan Kiely. Ever since, he has published numerous acclaimed young adult novels, most of which focus on Black teenagers growing up in the U.S. in the 21st century. Ibram X. Kendi was born and raised in Queens, New York. After finishing high school in Virginia, he studied African American studies and magazine production at Florida A&M University. In 2010, he earned a PhD in African American Studies at Temple University, where he wrote a dissertation on Black student activism in the 1960s. He has taught at various universities around the United States, including the State University of New York (Oneonta and Albany), Brown University, the University of Florida, and American University. As of 2021, he is a history professor at Boston University, where he also directs the Center for Antiracist Research and founded the racial justice newspaper *The Emancipator*. He won the National Book Award for *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, and his *How to Be an Antiracist* was a number-one *New York Times* Best Seller in 2020.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Stamped deals with a wide range of historical events in the U.S. from the 1400s to the early 2000s, including the centuries-long debate over slavery, the fight against Jim Crow (legalized racial segregation), and the War on Drugs. Still, the authors always remind the reader that *Stamped* is really a book about the *present*. By understanding the past, Kendi and Reynolds think, young people can better understand the challenges they face during their lifetimes. Therefore, *Stamped* is intended for young people growing up in the 2020s, a period of renewed public interest in racism and violence against Black people. Many Americans viewed Barack Obama's presidency from 2008–2016 as a sign that the U.S. had defeated racism and become a "color blind" society. But Kendi and Reynolds insist that this is wrong—there are still vast racial disparities in every aspect of American life. In the U.S., white people live longer, have more wealth, and are less likely than Black people to be incarcerated or killed by the police. These disparities show that racism is alive and well in the U.S.—but antiracist activists also continue to fight it. Most importantly, Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi launched the #BlackLivesMatter movement in 2013 as a response to a series of highly publicized police killings of Black people. In response to the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, millions of Americans marched in a series of #BlackLivesMatter protests.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Stamped is based on Ibram X. Kendi's much longer and more in-depth history book about racist ideas, *Stamped from the Beginning*. Kendi's other works include *The Black Campus Movement* and *How to Be an Antiracist*. Jason Reynolds has published multiple books of poetry, including *For Every One*, and novels like *All American Boys*, *Long Way Down*, and the *Track* series. Like *Stamped from the Beginning*, *Stamped* is organized around the stories of five important figures in the history of racist and antiracist ideas in the United States. The first is Puritan minister Cotton Mather, who presented his racist ideas in works like *The Negro Christianized*. The second is Thomas Jefferson, who explained his complicated views on slavery in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. The third figure is abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, who published the *Liberator* newspaper. The fourth is sociologist and activist W. E. B. Du Bois, who's best known for *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Black Reconstruction in America*. Angela Davis, the fifth and final main figure that *Stamped* focuses on, has written numerous books on antiracism, feminism, and the legal system, including *Women, Race and Class* and *Are Prisons Obsolete?*. Other influential books mentioned in *Stamped* include Phillis Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects*, Frederick Douglass's autobiographies, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** STAMPED: Racism, Antiracism, and You
- **When Written:** 2019–2020
- **Where Written:** Washington, D.C.
- **When Published:** March 2020
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, Black American History, Young Adult Literature
- **Setting:** The U.S., 1600-present

- **Climax:** In the Afterword, Reynolds and Kendi tell the reader that it's up to them whether to be a racist or antiracist.
- **Antagonist:** Segregationism, Assimilationism
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Breaking New Ground. When Ibram X. Kendi first asked Jason Reynolds to adapt *Stamped from the Beginning* for young readers, Reynolds said no. He thought that he wasn't scholarly enough to write about history, because he usually writes fiction. But Kendi eventually persuaded him to give the project a try.

A History Book Makes History. In 2020, *Stamped* was the second-most-commonly banned and challenged book in American schools. In a public comment, Kendi pointed out that the effort to suppress the book was ironic, since the book is largely about the way racists have tried to suppress antiracist ideas throughout history.

PLOT SUMMARY

Stamped is young adult author Jason Reynolds's adaptation, or "remix," of Ibram X. Kendi's award-winning book Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America. *Stamped* explains how anti-Black racist ideas and policies have shaped U.S. history since colonial times and argues that young people ought to learn about this history in the 21st century. History shows why racial inequities like police brutality and mass incarceration continue to plague American society, but it also suggests that activist movements like #BlackLivesMatter can help fix those inequities.

Throughout U.S. history, three different groups have battled to control Black people's fate: segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists. First, segregationists hate Black people and think that they're inherently inferior to white people. Second, assimilationists tolerate Black people, but only when they act in a certain way. And finally, antiracists love other people just the way they are. Segregationists and assimilationists are racists because they blame Black people for racial inequities—meaning the differences in wealth, health, security, and status between white and Black people. But while segregationists try to exclude Black people from society, assimilationists try to change them. Neither of those strategies will really fix inequities. Instead, antiracists look at the evidence and blame *racism* for inequities; instead of trying to fix Black people, they try to fix racism.

The story of racism starts in the 1400s, with the Portuguese writer Gomes Eanes de Zurara. When Prince Henry the Navigator started enslaving people in West Africa, he asked Zurara to write the story of his voyages. In his chronicles, Zurara argued that slavery is actually justified because Africans are "savages" who need to be civilized and converted to Christianity. This racist idea spread fast: the Puritan ministers John Cotton and Richard Mather brought it to New England, where they decided that God made white men like themselves inherently better than Black and native people.

In fact, many white religious leaders felt this way. They found the most absurd reasons to say that Black people were inferior to white people. Some argued that different races are different species, and others said that Black people descend from Ham (who was cursed in the Bible). Many said that Africa's hot climate turned Black people into animals; others just thought that lightness was good, and darkness was evil, so white people must have been better than Black people. Cotton and Mather's grandson, Cotton Mather, used these ideas to help spread slavery in colonial America.

By the time of the American Revolution, slavery was the cornerstone of the colonial economy, but a growing abolitionist movement was also starting to speak out against it. Nobody represents this contradictory situation better than Thomas Jefferson. He famously wrote that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence, and he thought that slavery was cruel and immoral. But he was also a racist and a slaveowner, and even on his deathbed, he refused to free the people he enslaved. Like many powerful people, he put his personal interests above the common good.

The abolitionist movement gained steam in the 1800s thanks largely to William Lloyd Garrison, the daring white publisher of anti-slavery newspaper *The Liberator*. At first, Garrison was an assimilationist who believed in a theory called "uplift suasion": he thought that enslaved people should be free, but that they should have to start at the bottom of the social and economic ladder and work their way up to equality over time. But his friendships with abolitionists like David Walker turned him into an antiracist. By the end of his life, he was calling for immediate equality as well as immediate freedom.

President Lincoln actually had a similar change of heart. While he always supported abolition, he initially thought that Black people shouldn't have the same rights as white people. But he changed his mind during the American Civil War. Unfortunately, most American racists didn't. Violent mobs attacked free Black people throughout the South, and many states passed restrictive laws to limit Black people's civil and economic rights. So, long after emancipation, Black communities struggled to overcome poverty and segregation.

Around the turn of the 20th century, two powerful men presented themselves as the solution. Booker T. Washington preached standard assimilationist ideas: he wanted Black people to accept segregation, take hard, low-paying jobs, and eventually convince white people to give them equal rights. W.E.B. Du Bois preached a different kind of assimilationist idea: he thought the Black elite would help lift up the masses. But over time, as he travelled all over the world and met Black

artists, soldiers, and activists, he realized that assimilationism wouldn't work. He stopped trying to show white people that Black people deserved equality and became an antiracist instead. He started pushing for political change.

Meanwhile, debates about race were also spilling over into popular culture. The popular Black boxer Jack Johnson polarized the U.S., racist films like the pro-KKK flick *The Birth of a Nation* incited white violence, and the two World Wars made the U.S. a global power—but they also gave American racism a global audience. After World War II, Congress responded to this international pressure by passing civil rights legislation, and important supreme court decisions banned real estate discrimination and integrated American schools. Black people started winning important civil rights battles in the 1950s.

Over the next decade, the civil rights movement built on these victories to pass broader, more powerful bills like the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964. Most young people know about the civil rights movement's charismatic leaders, like Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr., but not about the millions of ordinary people who organized antiracist groups like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee to protest segregation. Many young people also wrongly learn that Martin Luther King Jr. was a tame assimilationist who wanted to create a color-blind society by appealing to white people's good will. Actually, he was an antiracist socialist who wanted economic justice and policy change for Black people.

While the civil rights movement changed many important laws, it didn't end racism, so antiracists kept organizing to fight it. Black activists, writers, and musicians launched the Black Power movement, and a bold feminist professor named Angela Davis quickly became one of its most public figures. The government fired her for her beliefs and even accused her of murder after one other acquaintances attacked a courthouse. But she proved her own innocence and became a vocal anti-prison activist.

Meanwhile, racists fought back hard against Black Power. Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and even Bill Clinton ran for president using the "southern strategy"—or by being racist without saying "Black" or "white." They fought a War on Drugs, which started disproportionately throwing Black people in prisons for nonviolent offenses like marijuana possession. And all the while, the media was all happy to help: it started painting Black people as criminals and spreading sensationalist myths about "crack babies" and "super-predators." Bill Cosby's popular *Cosby Show* played on the assimilationist trope of the "**extraordinary Negro**" by depicting an ideal Black family, as if to show Americans what Black people could become if they just decided to start pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. Basically, racism went underground between the 1970s and the early 2000s: Americans claimed to be "color blind" while continuing to discriminate.

In this context, it's little wonder that Barack Obama became the U.S.'s new sweetheart when he gave a major speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2004. Many Americans painted him as yet another "extraordinary Negro" and argued that his presidency represented the end of racism in America. But they were wrong: racial inequities continue in almost every aspect of American life. And like so many other prominent Black leaders, Obama often expressed antiracist ideas but ultimately ruled as an assimilationist.

The fight against racial inequity continues today, and the growing #BlackLivesMatter movement shows that antiracist activism is as urgent and promising as ever. Like all true antiracism, #BlackLivesMatter is inclusive and based on love. But racist movements, both segregationist and assimilationist, are also growing. Young people reading this book have a choice to make: which side do they want to join?

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Cotton Mather – Cotton Mather was a late 17th- and early 18th-century Boston Puritan minister and writer. He's the first of the five intellectuals whom Kendi uses as guides through the history of racist ideas in Stamped from the Beginning. Named after his grandfathers, the influential Puritan ministers John Cotton and Richard Mather, Cotton Mather grew up extremely religious and started studying at Harvard University at just 11 years old. He went on to become one of the most influential intellectuals in the Thirteen Colonies. In particular, he defended a strict social hierarchy that put white Puritan men at the top. He also helped launch the Salem Witch Trials in an attempt to prevent poor colonists from rebelling against the elite. His actions and ideas represent the early roots of segregationism in the United States.

Thomas Jefferson – Thomas Jefferson was an influential Virginia slaveholder, politician, and philosopher. He's best remembered as the main author of the Declaration of Independence and the third president of the United States, from 1801–1809. In *Stamped*, he's also the second of the reader's five main guides through the history of racist ideas. His relationship to racism and slavery was extremely complicated. He grew up on a plantation, surrounded by enslaved people, and he went on to own and trade enslaved people throughout his adult life. But he also famously wrote that "all men are created equal" and believed that slavery was cruel and immoral. He even publicly apologized for slavery after his presidency. But then he went home to live on his plantation, where he never freed the people he enslaved, because his finances depended on their labor. This shows how racism is primarily a method for powerful people to gain more power and make profit. Jefferson's complicated mix of segregationism and

assimilationism also shows that it was possible to oppose slavery while still being a racist.

William Lloyd Garrison – William Lloyd Garrison was a white 19th-century antislavery publisher and activist. He's the third of the five main figures who Kendi and Reynolds use to illustrate the history of racist and antiracist ideas. He is best remembered for founding the American Anti-Slavery Society and publishing *The Liberator*, an influential abolitionist newspaper. Garrison reframed slavery as a moral question, rather than a political one, and won widespread support for abolition. While he originally defended assimilationist ideas like "uplift suasion," he eventually changed his mind and became an antiracist. His efforts show that white people can use their privilege for good and that the media is the most powerful tool in spreading racist and antiracist ideas.

W. E. B. Du Bois – The fourth of the five main historical figures in *Stamped*, W. E. B. Du Bois was a prominent Black writer, sociologist, and activist. He was born in 1868 and died at the height of the civil rights movement in 1963. After attending Fisk University and getting his PhD at Harvard, Du Bois became a powerful intellectual leader for many Black Americans. He taught at Atlanta University, co-founded the NAACP, and published the influential book *The Souls of Black Folk*. He publicly opposed Booker T. Washington's proposal that Black people should accept segregation and white rule in order to advance in American society. However, Du Bois still spent much of his career pushing assimilationist ideas. For instance, he believed in "uplift suasion": he thought that Black people needed to educate themselves and economically develop in order to win equality in American society. He even thought that he was superior to other Black people because he was biracial. But over the course of his life, he met antiracists like the anthropologist Franz Boas and the poet Langston Hughes, who gradually brought him around to their side. By the end of his life, Du Bois gave up on uplift suasion, quit the NAACP, and started working with Black freedom activists to fight for racial equality.

Angela Davis – The fifth and final of the main figures in *Stamped*, Angela Davis is a renowned antiracist, feminist philosopher and activist. She grew up in Birmingham, Alabama to civil rights activist parents and studied philosophy in Boston, California, France, and Germany during the civil rights movement. Then, a series of controversies engulfed her. California governor Ronald Reagan repeatedly tried to fire her—first, for being a communist, and later, for defending imprisoned Black Power activists. The state even charged her with murder when one of her activist friends attacked a courthouse and got in a shootout with the police. But she defended herself in court and proved her innocence. Since the 1970s, she has vocally supported antiracist movements, prison abolition, and left-wing political struggles. In particular, she has focused on integrating socialism, feminism, and antiracism. For instance, she argues that antiracists have to oppose capitalism and patriarchy in order to achieve their goals. Today, she is a major inspiration for scholars like Kendi and activist movements like #BlackLivesMatter.

Martin Luther King Jr. – The preacher and activist Martin Luther King Jr. was the most prominent leader of the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. He led numerous protests, marches, and nonviolent actions, but he's best remembered for the Birmingham campaign and the "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington, both in 1963. His work is largely credited with convincing Lyndon B. Johnson's administration to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, Kendi and Reynolds argue that his legacy is also widely misunderstood. King is often viewed as an assimilationist who wanted to win white acceptance, desegregate the U.S., and build a color-blind society. While some of this was true early in his life, by the time of his assassination in 1968, he was actually an antiracist socialist who focused on building economic and political power in the Black community. He saw that desegregation mostly benefited Black elites, so he started focusing on economic justice and policy change instead. When he died, he was organizing the Poor People's Campaign to establish an "economic bill of rights," including affordable housing and a universal basic income.

Malcolm X – In the 1950s and 1960s, Malcolm X was an influential Black civil rights activist and Nation of Islam minister. Although he was originally an assimilationist and then an anti-white separatist, he became an antiracist at the height of his popularity in the early 1960s. Today, he's often viewed as a militant, radical alternative to Martin Luther King Jr., but the truth is far more complicated. Reynolds and Kendi explain that he advocated self-defense, not violence, and he and Dr. King agreed on most major issues at the end of their lives, when both became antiracists. Even after his assassination in 1965, Malcolm X inspired the Black Power movement and activists like Angela Davis.

Abraham Lincoln – Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States, from 1861 until 1865. Although he's often credited with single-handedly ending slavery in the U.S., the reality is much more complicated. At first, he ran for office on a racist but anti-slavery platform. Later, during the American Civil War, he famously declared that all enslaved people were free—but he didn't actually free anyone, since enslaved Black Americans in the North were already free, and enslaved people in the South were under Confederate control. At the end of his life, Lincoln finally became an antiracist and argued that Black people should be able to vote. But John Wilkes Booth assassinated him a few days later, and Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, tried to undo his legacy.

Ronald Reagan – Ronald Reagan was the governor of California from 1967 to 1975 and the 40th president of the

United States, from 1981 to 1989. As governor, he got Angela Davis fired from her job, and as president, he copied Nixon's "southern strategy" by promising to control and pull resources out of "urban," "undesirable," "ghetto" neighborhoods—meaning Black communities. His solution was the War on Drugs. By increasing the penalties for minor, nonviolent drug offenses and focusing enforcement on Black communities, Reagan's policies drove crime in Black communities, limited their political power, and created the modern system of mass incarceration.

Barack Obama – Barack Obama was the 44th president of the United States, from 2009 to 2017. The nation's first Black president, Obama won broad support by campaigning on a mix of antiracist and assimilationist rhetoric. Antiracists celebrated him as a great symbol for racial progress, segregationists attacked him relentlessly, and assimilationists portrayed him as an "**extraordinary Negro**" who proved that the U.S. had overcome racism.

Booker T. Washington – Booker T. Washington was a prominent Black leader in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He believed that Black people should cooperate with white segregationists and work their way up from the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, rather than fighting for civil rights through the law. Therefore, he was a more extreme assimilationist than his main rival, W. E. B. Du Bois, who wavered between assimilationism and antiracism.

Phillis Wheatley – Phillis Wheatley was an enslaved writer in the 1700s who became the first Black person to publish poetry in the United States. She was born in Africa, sold into slavery in the U.S., and bought by the Wheatley family, who educated her and encouraged her writing. Reynolds and Kendi cite her as one of the earliest "**extraordinary Negroes**"—she caused public controversy because white people didn't think that Black people were intelligent enough to write poetry. She forced racists to come up with the theory that *slavery* made Black people into savages.

Rodney King – Rodney King was a Black man whom the police brutally attacked in Los Angeles in 1991. The incident became national news after a neighbor caught it on video. The police officers went on trial for excessive force, but the jury found them not guilty. After the verdict, Black LA residents rebelled, and the government sent in 20,000 soldiers to subdue them. In response, Bill Clinton ran for president on an assimilationist platform, blaming Black culture and hip-hop music for causing crime and violence. The Rodney King case and uprisings were an important precursor to the contemporary #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Gomes Eanes de Zurara – Gomes Eanes de Zurara was the 15th-century Portuguese writer who chronicled Prince Henry the Navigator's conquests in Africa. Kendi considers Zurara "the world's first racist" because he was the first person to come up with a *racial* justification for slavery: he argued that Africans were "savages," so Henry was Christianizing and civilizing them through slavery.

Jack Johnson – Jack Johnson was a Black world champion boxer in the early 1900s. Black people saw him as a crusader against racism, while white people hated that he defeated all the best white boxers, showed off his wealth and power, and married white women. At the height of his fame, he got arrested on false sex trafficking charges when he went on a road trip with his wife.

George W. Bush – George W. Bush was the 43rd president of the United States, from 2001 to 2009. He was elected with a minority of the popular vote, which Reynolds and Kendi partially credit to racist voting restrictions in Florida. They argue that Bush promoted "anti-Islamic and anti-Arab sentiments" after the September 11 attacks and diminished resources in Black-majority neighborhoods by defunding poorly-performing schools.

John Cotton and Richard Mather – John Cotton and Richard Mather were devout English Puritan ministers who moved to Massachusetts in the 1600s. They founded churches and Harvard University, where they taught that white Puritans were God's chosen people, and that all other races were inferior. When their families intermarried, they both became Cotton Mather's grandfathers.

Lyndon B. Johnson – Lyndon B. Johnson was John F. Kennedy's successor and the 36th president of the United States, from 1963 to 1969. Johnson's administration greatly expanded civil rights for Black Americans. However, his achievements were mostly responses to pressure from the civil rights movement, which shows how well-organized activists can create policy change.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jason Reynolds – Jason Reynolds is the award-winning Black writer—the author of *All American Boys* and *Long Way Down*—who adapted Ibram X. Kendi's Stamped from the Beginning into *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* for a younger audience.

Ibram X. Kendi – Ibram X. Kendi is an influential Black historian, professor, and activist. He wrote Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America, which Jason Reynolds adapted into *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*.

Marcus Garvey – Marcus Garvey was a Black Jamaican antiracist activist who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914. He advocated for Black separatism and took issue with W. E. B. Du Bois's assimilationism.

Frederick Douglass – Frederick Douglass was an influential Black abolitionist leader. He escaped from slavery in the late 1830s before publishing his memoir and becoming an antiracist

activist.

Andrew Johnson – Andrew Johnson was Abraham Lincoln's successor and the 17th president of the United States, from 1865 to 1869. He tried to undo Lincoln's legacy and limit free Black people's rights in the South by supporting discriminatory laws and terrorist groups like the KKK.

Bill Clinton – Bill Clinton was the 42nd president of the United States, from 1993 to 2001. Although he ran as a Democrat, he copied aspects of the Republican "southern strategy," accelerated Reagan's War on Drugs, and repeatedly blamed Black people for racial inequality.

Harry S. Truman – Harry S. Truman was the 33rd president of the United States, from 1945 to 1953. He pushed civil rights legislation through Congress and governed during the important court decisions *Shelley v. Kraemer* and *Brown v. Board of Education*.

John F. Kennedy – John F. Kennedy was the 35th president of the United States, from 1961 to his assassination in 1963. He supported civil rights legislation but was assassinated before he could help it get passed.

Richard Nixon – Richard Nixon was the 32nd president of the United States, from 1969 to 1974. He invented the "southern strategy" to push segregationist policies without specifically naming the Black people he wanted to target.

Woodrow Wilson – Woodrow Wilson was the 28th president of the United States, from 1913 to 1921. An unapologetic segregationist and racist, he screened the pro-KKK movie *The Birth of a Nation* in the White House and did everything he could to stop Black people from gaining power or civil rights.

James Baldwin – James Baldwin was an influential, openly gay, antiracist Black writer. He's best known for his essays about politics and sexuality published in the mid-20th century.

Bill Cosby – Bill Cosby is a famous Black comedian, actor, and convicted sex offender. His wildly popular *Cosby Show* popularized assimilationist ideas in the 1980s and 90s.

Sister Souljah – Sister Souljah is a Black hip-hop artist and activist whom Bill Clinton targeted in 1992 for her comments about the Rodney King riots.

Craig Ventner – Craig Venter is a prominent American biochemist and genetics researcher.

Stokely Carmicheal – Stokely Carmichael (or Kwame Ture) was a prominent civil rights and Black Power activist.

TERMS

#BlackLivesMatter – #BlackLivesMatter is an antiracist activist movement focused on fighting anti-Black racism and police brutality. The Black feminist activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi first launched #BlackLivesMatter in 2013, and as of the early 2020s, it's one of the largest protest movements in American history.

Antiracists – Antiracists are activists who fight to change racist policies and debunk racist ideas. They believe that all racial groups are fundamentally equal, so they strive to create a society that reflects this equality. But most people aren't born antiracists. Instead, everyone has the choice to be an antiracist, assimilationist, or segregationist—and **Kendi** and **Reynolds** encourage their readers to be antiracists.

Assimilationists – Assimilationists are racists who believe that certain racial groups are better than others, but that inferior groups can become equal if they change. For instance, assimilationists blame Black people for slavery and inequality but say that Black people can fix their problems if they act more like white people. According to **Reynolds** and **Kendi**, Black leaders like **Booker T. Washington**, **Bill Cosby**, and **Barack Obama**, weren't actually antiracists—they were assimilationists who preached "uplift suasion." However, many influential activists also started out as assimilationists before becoming antiracists later in life, including **William Lloyd Garrison**, **W. E. B. Du Bois**, and **Martin Luther King Jr.**

Colonization – In the 19th century, the American Colonization Society campaigned for colonization: freeing enslaved Black people but then forcing them to leave the U.S. and move somewhere else (preferably Africa). **Thomas Jefferson** favored the racist idea of colonization because he thought it would let white people keep full control of the U.S. and help Black go "civilize" the African continent.

NAACP – The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is a civil rights activist group that **W. E. B. Du Bois** helped found in 1909. Its political stances are often assimilationist.

Segregationists – Segregationists are racists who think that different racial groups should be separate because certain racial groups are naturally better than others. Usually, they believe that white people are better than Black people, then use this idea to argue for racist policies like slavery, Jim Crow (racial segregation) laws, and mass incarceration of Black people.

SNCC – The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee was a young people's activist group that led sit-ins, protests, and voter registration drives in the South in the 1960s. The SNCC helped Black people win civil rights protections in the 1960s, and it shows how young people have the power to make change if they organize.

Stamped from the Beginning – *Stamped from the Beginning* is **Ibram X. Kendi**'s award-winning book about the history of anti-Black racist ideas in the U.S. *Stamped* is an adaptation of *Stamped from the Beginning*.

The "Southern Strategy" – Politicians have used the "southern strategy"—appealing to white Southern voters with racism—to

build political support since the 1960s. Instead of talking explicitly about white and Black people, they use code words like "ghetto" and "urban."

Uplift Suasion – "Uplift suasion" is the assimilationist racist idea that Black people should act "respectable"—or imitate middle-class white people—in order to show white people that they're human and convince the government to give them equal rights.

Voting Rights Act of 1965 – The Voting Rights Act of 1965 gives the U.S. government the power to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment and stop voting-related racial discrimination. Congress and **President Lyndon B. Johnson** passed the Voting Rights Act in response to the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. **Kendi** and **Reynolds** consider it the most effective civil rights law ever.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACISM VS. ANTIRACISM

Stamped is Jason Reynolds's "remix" of Stamped From the Beginning, Ibram X. Kendi's book about the history of racist ideas. Throughout history, Kendi and Reynolds argue, three groups have fought over Black people's status in the United States. Segregationists are the racist "haters" who think that Black people don't deserve equal status in society because they're inherently inferior to white people. Assimilationists are a bit more subtly racist: they agree with segregationists that Black people are inferior to white people, but they think that Black people can *change* in order to become equal. Finally, in line with all the available scientific and historical evidence, antiracists believe that all racial groups are inherently equal. They see that racism causes the inequities between racial groups, so they dedicate themselves to fighting it. Everyone gets to choose if they want to be a segregationist, assimilationist, or antiracist. In other words, they can decide to hate people who aren't like them, try to change those people, or love those people and fight for equality. Kendi and Reynolds think that antiracism is the right choice, both scientifically and morally. Therefore, they encourage readers to become antiracist in both their thinking and their actions.

Segregationists believe that certain racial groups are naturally better than others and therefore deserve to get more power, privilege, and wealth. But Reynolds and Kendi argue that this is an unscientific, harmful, and self-serving worldview. The classic segregationist idea is the human hierarchy. For instance, the Puritan minister Cotton Mather believed that God made white Puritan men superior to everyone else. In the 1800s, racist scientists pushed versions of the same idea—they argued that white people have bigger brains or are more evolved than non-white people. Even though they had no legitimate scientific evidence for their claims, their point was the same: white people are better, so they should rule over everyone else, and policies like slavery are justified. But modern segregationists have become much less forthcoming about their racist ideas. For instance, since the 1960s, segregationist politicians have used the "southern strategy": instead of saying "white" and "Black," they talk about the need to protect respectable middle-class (white) people from the "urban" (Black) "thugs," "criminals," and "super-predators" who live in "ghettos." They really want the same thing as old-school segregationists like Cotton Mather: an unequal system in which white people rule over Black people, based on the unscientific and antiquated idea that white people are inherently superior.

Next, *assimilationists* also wrongly blame Black people for inequality—they argue that Black people just have to improve themselves, work harder, or imitate white people if they want to achieve equality. Like segregationism, this is a misguided and racist mindset. The classic assimilationist idea is that Black people are inherently equal to white people but have become savages because of some external factor like slavery, poverty, or even Africa's hot climate. They believe that Black and white people *can* become moral and intellectual equals, but aren't yet. That's why they're racist: they still argue that Black people are inferior to white people and blame them for inequality. Throughout history, many celebrated Black leaders and civil rights policies have actually been assimilationist, not antiracist. For instance, Booker T. Washington believed in "uplift suasion," the assimilationist idea that Black people ought to imitate white people in order to improve their status (rather than fighting racism). This shows why assimilationism is so morally complicated: unlike segregationists, assimilationists often care about fixing racism and believe that they're helping Black people. Sometimes they *do* help. But Reynolds and Kendi believe that the antiracist alternative is always better, because attacking inequity at the root requires attacking racism, not telling Black people to try harder. Assimilationist ideas and policies tend to mostly benefit the Black elite, who have the resources and education necessary to better fit into white society. Fortunately, when they realized this, many activists—like William Lloyd Garrison, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr.— turned from assimilationism to true antiracism. For instance, while Dr. King is best remembered for fighting segregation, he actually spent his last years working on the Poor People's Campaign for economic justice, because he realized that desegregation only benefited a minority of Black people. This shows why anti-segregationism isn't necessarily antiracism—but also how assimilationists can become antiracists.

Finally, *antiracists* believe that all racial groups are equal, which means that any differences between them have to be caused by racism. Reynolds and Kendi argue that this view is morally, scientifically, and historically correct. In fact, they present evidence virtually every religious and philosophical theory of morality agrees with antiracism's basic principle: all people are naturally equal. Scientists agree that race has no biological or genetic reality; it's impossible for one race to be better than another because there's simply no measurable difference between them. Therefore, while racists run from the truth about human nature in order to hold onto their own advantages, antiracists embrace the truth and try to create an equal world for everyone. Whereas racism is essentially based on self-interest, antiracism is essentially based on love and empathy. Antiracists believe that everyone deserves the same rights and opportunities in life. So, historical antiracist activists like the Pennsylvania Quakers (who published the first American antislavery pamphlet in 1688) as well as contemporary Black leaders like Angela Davis and the women who founded the #BlackLivesMatter movement actively fight to create those rights and opportunities for others. *Stamped* suggests that this is the right way forward, from both a scientific and moral standpoint.

Kendi and Reynolds attest that everyone gets to choose whether to be a segregationist, assimilationist, or antiracist, every day. Segregationism and assimilationism let powerful people enjoy their privileges and avoid acting to help others. But Kendi and Reynolds are adamant that the most courageous, ethical, and scientifically accurate choice is antiracism. It's not easy: it requires love, and love requires vulnerability. Antiracists have to take action, even when it means putting themselves on the line for justice. Nevertheless, Kendi and Reynolds hope that their readers will make the right choice.

HISTORY AND THE PRESENT

Throughout *Stamped*, Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds repeatedly promise that "this is *not* a history book." Yes, it's a book about history, but its point is to help the reader understand the *present*. Kendi and Reynolds don't want young people to read this book because they care about how racism looked 200 years ago, but because they care about how racism affects their lives and communities *today*. History is just the present's backstory. So, by learning about the history of race and racism in the United States—which is first and foremost a history of anti-Black racism—students can better understand why Black men are 21 times more likely to be killed by the police than white men, why the U.S. incarcerates Black people five times as often as white people, and why, at the exact same time, so many people insist that racism is over. These problems weren't caused by an unspeakable evil in people's hearts: rather, they are the result of policies and ideas that have created racial inequities over the last 400 years of U.S. history. Therefore, Kendi and Reynolds argue that understanding the *history* of racism and antiracism is the key first step to becoming an effective antiracist in the 21st century.

Kendi and Reynolds begin by saying that the best way to understand racism today is to understand racism's history. To Kendi and Reynolds's audience of young people, many of the racial inequities that plague American society today can feel impossible to overcome. But by learning about their history, young people can see that these inequities aren't inevitable: they have specific historic causes, and they can be undone. To take one prominent example, police violence and mass incarceration are the most visible forms of systemic racism in the U.S. today. Many Americans might just blame racist police and prosecutors, but Kendi and Reynolds show that these inequities have a much longer history. For instance, in the 1980s, President Regan began pushing for harsher anti-drug laws and targeting Black people for arrest and incarceration. This let him publicly demonize Black people and justify redirecting resources away from programs that help them and toward things like policing, incarceration, and tax cuts, which primarily benefit white elites and middle-class workers. This historical precedent helps explain why the police arrest and kill so many Black people today: the government specifically taught them to over-police Black neighborhoods and view young Black men as dangerous criminals. The problem is systemic, but it's also fixable through systemic policy change.

Next, Kendi and Reynolds argue that the best way to fight racism today is to understand how people have successfully fought it in the past. Conflicts between racists and antiracists follow a predictable pattern, so antiracists should learn about the history of racism and antiracism in order to fight more effectively for justice. First, both racists and antiracists constantly recycle the same ideas and policies throughout history. For instance, racist scholars have constantly looked for some silver bullet argument that will prove that there's some inherent biological difference between racial groups. In the 1600s they looked at the Bible, in the 1800s they looked at people's skulls, and today they look at genes and IQ. They always fail, because the conclusion that they want to prove is false. But they'll always keep trying. By understanding the history of racist scholarship, antiracists can better plan to counter it in the future. Similarly, antiracists' policies and ideas have always been based on a single basic principle: that all people are equal. This idea is appealing largely because it's scientifically true and supported by most major philosophies and religions, so it hasn't changed much over history. Nevertheless, antiracists have adapted it to every era. In the 1600s, Pennsylvania Quakers compared racism to the religious persecution they faced in Europe. In the 1800s, abolitionists held up "**extraordinary Negroes**" like Frederick Douglass to

show that Black people were capable of the same things as white people. In the 1970s and 1980s, the antiracist movement's guiding slogan was "Black Power," and today it's the #BlackLivesMatter movement. The most effective antiracists learn to identify and adapt to new racist ideas—which are always just the same old racist ideas, just presented in different ways.

After major policy changes, Kendi and Reynolds point out, racists and antiracists also tend to clash in predictable ways. Usually, there's a rebellion and a backlash. For instance, after the American Civil War, World War I, and the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s, white racists violently attacked Black communities. After the Civil War, abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison weren't prepared to stop them, but after World War I, scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois documented how Black soldiers were treated better in Europe. And decades later, after the backlash to the civil rights movement, Black Americans launched the Black Power movement and started fighting the War on Drugs and mass incarceration. This shows how antiracists have learned from history and started responding more effectively to racist backlash.

In fact, Kendi and Reynolds focus on historical figures because they're the best role models for modern-day people. By understanding how Thomas Jefferson consistently put his self-interest before his sense of morality, Abraham Lincoln learned to view Black people as equals only at the end of his life, and William Lloyd Garrison spread antislavery ideas far and wide before fully coming around to antiracism, assimilationists can assess their own beliefs and learn to become antiracists sooner rather than later. And by learning how antiracists like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Marcus Garvey, and Angela Davis have constantly called for justice and pushed for policy change, modern-day antiracists can learn to do the same.

POWER, PROFIT, AND PRIVILEGE

Throughout *Stamped*, Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds emphasize how the racist policies that cause inequality relate to the racist ideas that support those policies. While most Americans assume that powerful people create racist policies because they believe in racist ideas, it's actually the other way around. Racist ideas don't cause racist policies: self-interest does. Throughout U.S. history, specific groups of people—usually powerful white men—have implemented racist policies in order to make money, gain political power, and defend their place at the top of the social hierarchy. The racist ideas come later—they're just a way to defend the racist policies. By explaining how self-interest motivates racism, Kendi and Reynolds show their readers that undoing racism requires changing policy, not just changing ideas.

Historically, Kendi and Reynolds show, racial inequality has come from racist policies, which are motivated by power, profit, and privilege. This is clear from the earliest racist policy: the transatlantic slave trade. While slavery was common before Europeans started enslaving Africans in the 1400s, it wasn't tied to race—actually, the concept of race didn't even exist yet. In the 1400s, Portuguese slave traders realized that skin color became a way to easily distinguish free people from slaves, and they could make more money if they could enslave people directly from West Africa, rather than buying and selling them through middlemen. Therefore, it was profitable for them to view people with dark skin as a distinct—and inferior—group. This is a classic example of how powerful people create racist policies in order to benefit themselves. Similarly, the essential motive for American slavery was profit, as slavery gave wealthy white planters a source of low-cost labor. This self-interest helps explain why even Thomas Jefferson, who famously wrote that "all men are created equal" and even campaigned against slavery, continued to enslave people and run a plantation on enslaved labor: he wanted the money. In fact, he got himself in so much debt that he needed the money to avoid bankruptcy. Therefore, he refused to free the people he enslaved because he put his self-interest above his ethical beliefs.

Kendi and Reynolds then go on to show that, today, racism is still about power, profit, and privilege. For example, politicians like Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton attacked Black communities because they knew this would win them white racists' votes. Namely, they understood that many white Americans' sense of self is closely tied to their feeling of superiority over Black people. They also understand that this feeling of superiority is based on the social, economic, and political privileges that white people enjoy—like working, voting, and accumulating wealth freely, without facing discrimination. Therefore, they propose racist policies, which harm Black people, in order to appeal to white voters. Of course, this explanation is hard to swallow. It's much easier to think that politicians pass racist policies simply because they're ignorant or full of hatred. But the truth is that they understand how racism will win them power—because, whether or not they admit it, many white Americans know that racism is the source of their privileges.

Once racist policies have been put into place, Kendi and Reynold's argue, the purpose of racist ideas is to defend and reinforce those policies. In fact, the first racist idea directly followed the first racist policy and was designed to defend it. After Prince Henry started enslaving Africans, the Portuguese chronicler Gomes de Zurara wrote a book about Henry's conquests, in which he argued that the Portuguese were really using slavery to civilize African "savages." Zurara's racist idea was simply a justification for Henry's profitable racist policy. This became a pattern throughout history: whenever powerful people invented a new racist policy for their own benefit, a new racist idea popped up to defend that policy. For instance, racists often argue that Black men are inherently hypersexual and

aggressive. When pressed for evidence, they tend to point to successful Black entertainers and athletes. They have used this idea to justify racist policy and violence, ranging from lynching to the U.S. government's failed response to Hurricane Katrina. This shows how racist ideas are powerful tools for defending and justifying racist policies. Today, the reigning racist idea is "color blindness"—or the idea that race no longer matters because the U.S. has already overcome racism through civil rights reform and the election of Barack Obama. But the U.S.'s severe racial disparities in health, wealth, poverty, policing, education, and more show that American racism is still alive and well. The racist idea of color blindness is just racists' excuse for doing nothing—and continuing to benefit from racist policies and inequities.

Since policy is the root cause of racism, Kendi and Reynold's point out, overcoming racism requires replacing racist policies with antiracist policies. The U.S. has successfully done this in the past—most notably, by replacing slavery with emancipation. But the first step toward defeating racist policies is still to defeat the racist ideas that support them. For instance, abolitionists needed to persuade the American public that slavery was evil—and Black people were human—before they could convince them to support abolition. Today, antiracists are fighting different battles, focused on issues like police brutality, mass incarceration, and environmental racism. But as in any era, they have to fight the racist ideas that justify these policies in order to change them. Specifically, antiracists have to pull back the veil of racist ideas in order to undo the racist policies that continue to concentrate profit, power, and privilege in the hands of a few white men.

HOW RACIST IDEAS SPREAD

Throughout *Stamped*, Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds point out that even though racist ideas are prejudiced and illogical, they actually seem like common sense to most people. White schools taught segregationist myths for centuries, and even prominent Black leaders publicly defended assimilationism, or the idea that Black people should focus on convincing white people that they deserve equality. Racist ideas are so common because they serve the interests of the people with the greatest power to spread them. Therefore, it's no surprise that powerful people and academic, political, and religious institutions frequently push racist ideas. However, the main path for spreading racist ideas is usually the most popular kind of media at any given point in history: for instance, religious books and pamphlets in the 1600s, pop music in the 1970s, or social media today. At the same time, these media are also the best way to spread antiracist ideas and fight racism. Therefore, antiracists should understand how racist ideas spread through scholarship, politics, and popular media if they want to fight them by spreading antiracist ideas through the same channels.

First, Kendi and Reynold's note, scholars and scientists have been some of the most powerful promoters of racist ideas. In fact, the Portuguese writer Gomes de Zurara, who chronicled Prince Henry's slave-trading voyages, was the first person to publish a racist idea: that Africans were "savages" who needed to be civilized through slavery and Christianity. His idea spread quickly in intellectual circles, and it soon became Europeans' main justification for slavery. Ever since, many scholars—especially theologians and biologists—have tried to justify segregationist policies by arguing that there are essential differences between races. For instance, in the 1600s, Cotton Mather argued that God made white Puritan men superior to everyone else. Centuries later, in the 1994 book *The Bell Curve*, two Harvard scientists blamed racial inequality on bogus evidence that Black people naturally have low IQs. More than 300 years later, these scientists used the same racist strategy that Mather did in the 1600s: they identified a racial difference, then argued that this difference makes inequality natural and justified. But scholars can also make most powerful *antiracists*. Their work can demystify racist ideas, policies, and inequities. An obvious example is Kendi's research into racist ideas for his book Stamped from the Beginning, which is the basis for *Stamped*. But he and Reynolds also point the reader to many other examples, like Angela Davis's research into the U.S. criminal justice and prison systems. The numerous antiracist scholars working today expose how racists have used scholarship to advance their agenda—and they use the same tools for antiracist ends instead.

The next step in Kendi and Reynold's argument is that politicians and activist leaders don't just push for racist and antiracist *policies*: they also set the terms of debate about policy by spreading racist and antiracist *ideas*. Thomas Jefferson is an early example—even though he supported slavery and colonization, he also spread assimilationist and even antiracist ideas throughout his life. Today, he's best remembered for writing that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence. While contradictory, his ideas about human equality impacted national debates over slavery, segregation, and racism for centuries after his death. Kendi and Reynolds also show how almost every president from Kennedy to Obama has shaped the national conversation on race. For instance, after Black Americans won equal voting rights in the 1960s, presidents like Nixon and Reagan used the "southern strategy" to spread racist ideas while pretending not to talk about race. Even if he mostly governed as an assimilationist, President Obama also brought powerful antiracist ideas into the political mainstream. This shows that politicians play a central role in spreading racist and antiracist ideas.

Finally, Kendi and Reynold's note how popular media—ranging from novels and newspapers to television and social media—have also been a powerful source of racist and antiracist ideas. For centuries, novels were the most common

form of popular entertainment, so they also shaped Americans' beliefs about race. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* famously spread the assimilationist idea that Black people are naturally better Christians (although it actually used this idea to *fight* slavery). In contrast, the *Tarzan* novels tried to show that white people are genetically superior by depicting a white man beating stereotypical African savages at hunting, fighting, and attracting women. Whether openly or implicitly, literature has shaped people's ideas about race for as long as people have had ideas about race. Modern movies and television have done the same. For instance, Kendi and Reynolds show how movies like *Rocky* and *Planet of the Apes* are based on many of the same racist tropes as *Tarzan*. These ideas—African savagery, the white forces of good fighting against the Black forces of evil, and so on—are so common that viewers might not even recognize them as racist. But they are, and they still shape the way most Americans think about Black people. But the media can also spread antiracist ideas. For instance, William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* newspaper got the public to think about slavery as a moral issue rather than a political one, and James Brown's 1968 hit song "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud" helped launch the Black Power movement. Antiracists have always harnessed popular media to fight racist propaganda and spread the basic truth that all people are equal and racial groups deserve equality.

Kendi and Reynolds show that while racists have used scholarship, politics, and media to spread their ideas far and wide, these tools aren't evil or racist in and of themselves. They also aren't necessarily separate—they can work together. For instance, when President Woodrow Wilson screened the pro-KKK film *The Birth of a Nation* in the White House, he was combining the power of the presidency with the power of popular culture. This is why Kendi believes that scholars, politicians, activists, and artists have to work together to build an antiracist future. And it's also why Kendi and Jason Reynolds collaborated on this project to bring Kendi's rigorous historical research to young adult readers who may not learn about it otherwise.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

"EXTRAORDINARY NEGROES"

The trope of the "extraordinary Negro" that Reynolds and Kendi describe shows how segregationists and assimilationists ignore evidence in order to maintain their racist beliefs. ("Negro" is now widely considered to be an outdated and offensive term for a Black person.) Throughout U.S. history, white people have struggled to understand successful Black artists, writers, activists, and business leaders, ranging from Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass to W. E. B. Du Bois and Barack Obama. The public often turns them into celebrities and depicts them as "extraordinary Negroes" who are not like other Black people. But the idea of the "extraordinary Negro" really just lets racists continue to believe in Black inferiority.

For instance, when Phillis Wheatley published a book of eloquent poetry in the 1770s, this challenged the common racist belief that Black people are inherently unintelligent. Racists responded in two ways: some looked for a new racist idea, like the assimilationist idea that *slavery* made Black people unintelligent. Others argued that Phillis Wheatley was just an "extraordinary Negro"—an exception to the rule of Black stupidity. Later, in the 19th century, assimilationists pointed to the Black elite to argue that Black people can rise to white people's level if they learn to improve themselves.

Thus, segregationists and assimilationists both dismiss successful Black people as "extraordinary Negroes" in order to protect their pre-existing racist beliefs. But what Black success *really* proves is that Black people are capable of accomplishing the same things as anyone else. In other words, it proves the antiracist principle that Black people are equal to every other racial group.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Little, Brown Books for Young Readers edition of *Stamped* published in 2020.

Introduction Quotes

I don't think I'm a great writer like Jason, but I do think I'm a courageous writer. I wrote *Stamped from the Beginning* with my cell phone on, with my television on, with my anger on, with my joy on—always thinking on and on. I watched the televised and untelevised life of the shooting star of #Black Lives Matter during America's stormiest nights. I watched the televised and untelevised killings of unarmed Black human beings at the hands of cops and wannabe cops. I somehow managed to write *Stamped from the Beginning* between the heartbreaking deaths of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin and seventeen-year-old Darnesha Harris and twelve-year-old Tamir Rice and sixteen-year-old Kimani Gray and eighteen-year-old Michael Brown, heartbreaks that are a product of America's history of racist ideas as much as a history of racist ideas is a product of these heartbreaks.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Jason

Reynolds

Related Themes:

Page Number: xi

Explanation and Analysis

In the introduction to *Stamped*, which is an adaptation of his book *Stamped from the Beginning*, Ibram X. Kendi explains why the history of racist ideas is relevant to the present day. Today's racial inequities—and the racist policies that create them—all rely on a few basic racist ideas, which have been recycled and adapted for hundreds of years. Without these racist ideas, people would be able to clearly see racism for what it is—and they'd be better equipped to fight it.

In the late 2010s and early 2020s, police violence against Black people is the most publicized—and most politically controversial—kind of racial inequity in the U.S. Virtually everyone reading this book will know about the #BlackLivesMatter movement that has grown in response to the tragic deaths of Black people like Eric Garner and George Floyd at the hands of the police. Meanwhile, young Americans—and especially the young Black Americans for whom Kendi and Reynolds are primarily writing—have watched "cops and wannabe cops" murder their innocent peers, like Trayvon Martin and Darnesha Harris. The issue is urgent and heart-wrenching.

It's also closely related to the history of racist ideas, which explain how police violence against Black people became so commonplace. When Kendi says that these "heartbreaks that are a product of America's history of racist ideas as much as a history of racist ideas is a product of these heartbreaks," he's saying that the racist idea that Black people are inherently dangerous and criminal is partially responsible for police violence, but violence and inequity also help spread racist ideas. This book is designed to explain where these racist ideas came from, how they support a dangerous set of racist policies, and where movements like #BlackLivesMatter fit into the centuries-long legacy of antiracist activism in the U.S.

But like all antiracist movements, Kendi makes clear, #BlackLivesMatters has to convince people to shed their racist ideas in order to get them to support policies that would create racial equity. Fortunately, the truth is on its side: all the available scientific and historical evidence shows that all racial groups are equal. For centuries, racists have been trying to show that one group is better than another, but antiracists have always been able to win people over by teaching them accurate science and history. Kendi wants this book to become part of that tradition, a first step towards antiracism.

> The segregationists and the assimilationists are challenged by antiracists. The antiracists say there is nothing wrong or right about Black people and everything wrong with racism. The antiracists say racism is the problem in need of changing, not Black people. The antiracists try to transform racism. The assimilationists try to transform Black people. The segregationists try to get away from Black people. These are the three distinct racial positions you will hear throughout *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*—the segregationists, the assimilationists, and the antiracists, and how they each have rationalized racial inequity.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: xiii

Explanation and Analysis

In *Stamped*, Kendi and Reynolds present the history of racism in the U.S. as the story of a conflict between three different groups: segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists. Throughout U.S. history, all three groups have pushed different ideas and supported different policies, depending on the historical conditions they lived in. But each group's core beliefs always stayed the same. Today, then, the debate about racism looks similar to how it did in the past. And it will continue to look similar in the future.

Although these terms might be intimidating at first, Kendi clearly defines them for his readers here, and Reynolds tries to explain these definitions in a relatable way throughout the book.

Segregationism and assimilationism are, as defined by Kendi and Reynolds, the two main kinds of racism. They're both racist because they both assume that some groups of people are inherently better than other groups of people. In the context of this book, which is about anti-Black racism, segregationists and assimilationists both think that white people are superior to Black people. The difference is *why* they think this: segregationists say that this racial hierarchy is inherent and unchangeable, while assimilationists say that it depends on circumstances and therefore *can* be changed. More concretely, segregationists say that Black people are naturally inferior to white people, this can never change, and therefore white people should separate themselves from Black people and rule over them. Assimilationists say

that Black people are worse than white people, but can change their behavior in order to become equals. But both segregationists and assimilationists say that white and Black people are unequal in American society because there's something wrong with Black people.

In contrast, antiracism is based on the idea that there's nothing wrong with any racial group. No group is better than any other, and *racism* is responsible for the inequities between them. It's a simple idea, and all the available historical and scientific evidence supports it. But since it implies that different racial groups ought to be equal, it's a difficult and courageous idea to defend in the United States. Kendi and Reynolds hope that, over the course of *Stamped*, their readers can learn to accept it.

❝ When I was in school and first really learning about racism, I was taught the popular origin story. I was taught that ignorant and hateful people had produced racist ideas, and that these racist people had instituted racist policies. 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.

[...]

If you make a lot of money enslaving people, then to defend your business you want people to believe that Black people are fit for slavery. You will produce and circulate this racist idea to stop abolitionists from challenging slavery from abolishing what is making you rich. You see the racist policies of slavery arrive first and then racist ideas follow to justify slavery.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: xiii-xiv

Explanation and Analysis

Most people assume that ideas cause actions, so racist people create racist policies (which create racial inequities). But, after spending years researching the history of racist ideas, Ibram X. Kendi realized that it's actually the other way around. Racist policies create racial inequities. *Then*, racist ideas pop up to defend those inequities by saying that they're natural, necessary, or right. Therefore, fighting racist ideas isn't enough to stop racism: antiracists have to fight racist ideas and then replace racist policies with antiracist ones.

But Kendi's explanation of racist ideas and policies leaves one important question unanswered. If people don't start out racist, why would they impose racist policies at all? In other words, why would someone discriminate against people they don't already hate?

The answer, Kendi explains, is *self-interest*. People discriminate in order to get power, privilege, and profit for themselves. Anti-Black racism, in particular, was very profitable for white people because it justified slavery. And slavery was very profitable because it's the cheapest possible form of labor. Therefore, by spreading the racist idea that Black people were inferior and destined for slavery, enslavers justified an economic system that gave them immense power and profit, at the expense of the millions of people whose freedom they robbed and humanity they denied.

❝ The first step to building an antiracist America is acknowledging America's racist past. By acknowledging American racist past, we can acknowledge America's racist present. In acknowledging America's racist present, we can work toward building an antiracist America.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: xv

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of his introduction to *Stamped*, Ibram X. Kendi clearly explains why learning about the history of racist ideas and policies is the first step to creating a free, equal, and just society. Antiracist policies—or policies that create equity between different racial groups—are the key to creating a better society. But to defeat racist policies with antiracist ones, activists first have to stop the racist ideas that justify those racist policies. Fortunately, the path to defeating racist ideas is easy: tell the truth. Racist ideas depend on lies, distortions, and manipulation, while all scientific evidence and moral principles back the core antiracist idea that all racial groups are inherently equal and deserve equal status in any society. By learning about history, young people can at once see that different racial groups are inherently equal, learn how racism has forced them to live in unequal circumstances, and understand which policy changes are necessary to fix these inequities in

the future.

Chapter 1 Quotes

This book, this *not history* history book, this present book, is meant to take you on a race journey from then to now, to show why we feel how we feel, why we live how we live, and why this poison, whether recognizable or unrecognizable, whether it's a scream or a whisper, just won't go away.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 1: The Story of the World's First Racist 3

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the first chapter of *Stamped*, Jason Reynolds makes the same point that Ibram X. Kendi did in the introduction: this book isn't really about history; it's about the present. History is really just the story of how the world got to be the way it is, so by learning about it, Americans can understand "why we feel how we feel" and "why we live how we live." Racism shapes the U.S. so strongly because it's been baked into American ideologies, policies, and institutions. But America isn't inherently racist; it's just been ruled by racist policies and filled with racist ideas for a very long time. If Americans can understand how racism has "poison[ed]" the U.S., antiracists can fight it—and win. That's the purpose of *Stamped*: by showing young people where racism comes from, Kendi and Reynolds hope to show them that racism *isn't* inevitable. It's a formidable foe, but it hasn't always existed, and it doesn't have to exist in the future. It's up to antiracists to win or lose the battle.

Segregationists are haters. Like, *real* haters. People who hate you for not being like them. Assimilationists are people who like you, but only with quotation marks. Like…"like" you. Meaning, they "like" you because you're like them. And then there are antiracists. They *love* you because you're like you.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 1: The Story of the World's First Racist 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the introduction to *Stamped*, Ibram X. Kendi presented the three groups who have fought over race throughout U.S. history—segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists—by explaining each group's policies and ideas. Here, in the first chapter, Jason Reynolds introduces the same three groups in less technical, more relatable language for his young readers. They're just like the different kinds of peers young people might meet at school: haters, false friends, and true friends.

Segregationists think that other racial groups are inherently inferior to them, just like haters hate people who aren't like them. Assimilationists think that other racial groups *could* become their equals by imitating them, just like fake friends only "'like' you because you're like them." And antiracists don't rank people by worth or value: they love and accept other people for who they really are.

Reynolds uses this explanation to help his readers understand the choices they can make between segregationism, assimilationism, and antiracism. It's just like choosing what kind of friend to be. Everyone can decide whether to reject, embrace, or silently judge people who aren't like them—just like everyone can refuse to believe in racial equality (and become a segregationist), embrace the idea of racial equality (and become an antiracist), or say that racial groups *could* be equal while believing that they really aren't (and become an assimilationist). Every day at school, young people choose how to treat their peers. They have the opportunity to be a source of comfort, stability, and acceptance for those peers. And even though they probably don't realize it yet, they can also choose how to think about race every day, and they also have the opportunity to join the struggle for justice and equality by committing to antiracism.

Zurara was the first person to *write* about and *defend* Black human ownership, and this single document began the recorded history of anti-Black racist ideas.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Gomes Eanes de Zurara

Related Themes:

Page Number: Chapter 1: The Story of the World's First Racist 7

Explanation and Analysis

Many readers probably assume that racism has always existed and will always exist. But Kendi and Reynolds upend this idea. Racism—at least anti-Black racism—really started in the 1400s, when it turned out to be a convenient justification for slavery. According to the available historical record, the Portuguese writer Gomes Eanes de Zurara was the first person to justify slavery by arguing that Black people are inferior to white people. Versions of his ideas have been repeated and recycled throughout history. This is why Kendi and Reynolds call him "the world's first racist."

In addition to showing that racism hasn't always existed, Zurara's case also illustrates how it's different from other kinds of prejudice. Slavery existed before Zurara, but slave traders didn't specifically target Africans for slavery before Zurara's leader, Prince Henry the Navigator, started doing so in the early 15th century. Yes, different groups of people have always fought with each other, and they've probably also always enslaved each other. But they didn't always single out a specific group of people by their skin color and appearance—like Zurara did with Africans—and then argue that those other groups are naturally inferior to their own. For instance, people from Western Europe had long enslaved people from Eastern Europe, and they might not have particularly liked those people, but they didn't come up with racist ideas about Eastern Europeans being a distinct species-like group of people, being inherently inferior to other groups, or deserving to be enslaved. This is what makes Zurara the first racist: he didn't just defend slavery, but rather he argued that slavery was *right* because the people he was enslaving were a distinct and inferior species of human beings.

Chapter 2 Quotes

And just like that, the groundwork was laid not only for slavery to be justified but for it to be justified for a long, long time, simply because it was woven into the religious *and* educational systems of America. All that was needed to complete this oppressive puzzle was slaves.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), John Cotton and Richard Mather

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Racism always involves the marriage of racist ideas with racist policies, and racism in early colonial North America was no exception. Men like John Cotton and Richard Mather founded institutions—like Puritan churches and Harvard University—based on racist ideas about white people's superiority over other racial groups. They provided the racist ideas. Planters in the mid-Atlantic and South provided the racist policy—slavery. They started enslaving people and trading enslaved people, then forcing them to work on tobacco plantations. These ideas and policies fit perfectly together: churches and universities taught that white men deserved to rule the world, so white men started building wealth and power, using them to take Native American land and exploit Black workers, and amassing even more wealth and power as a result. In one form or another, this marriage between racist ideas and racist policies has always maintained white men's rule over the United States.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Once the witch hunt eventually died down, the Massachusetts authorities apologized to the accused, reversed the convictions of the trials, and provided reparations in the early 1700s. But Cotton Mather never stopped defending the Salem witch trials, because he never stopped defending the religious, slaveholding, gender, class, and racial hierarchies reinforced by the trials. He saw himself as the defender of God's law and the crucifier of any non-Puritan, African, Native American, poor person, or woman who defied God's law by not submitting to it.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Cotton Mather

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

The New England minister Cotton Mather was one of colonial North America's most prolific writers and most influential thinkers. He used his powerful platform to spread a simple, bigoted idea: white Puritan men are God's chosen people, so they deserve to rule the world. He helped kick off a long tradition of hierarchical, segregationist racist ideas in the U.S.—and he also helped kick off the infamous Salem Witch Trials of 1692-3.

The Witch Trials might seem to have nothing to do with race, Reynold's acknowledges, but he asserts that they're based on the same basic kind of delusional, hierarchical thinking as Mather's racism. In the 1690s, the New England

masses were rebelling against the Puritan elite, and Cotton Mather saw that they posed a threat to his power and privilege. Rather than blaming inequality for the commoners' uprisings, he blamed witches (who he thought had to be Black). This is why witchcraft was just like a racist idea: it allowed Mather to explain social hierarchies by saying that certain people just were inferior or evil, rather than admitting that people like him—powerful white men—imposed those hierarchies on others in order to gain still more power and privilege.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Slavery wasn't about people, it was about profit. Business.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

This short passage captures the core of Kendi and Reynolds's argument about racist policies. At least at first, people don't discriminate because they hate certain groups of people: they do it because it's good for business. Later, some people might discriminate because of prejudices they've learned, but the core motive behind racist policies is always self-interest. From the slave trade in the 15th century to the War on Drugs today, powerful people have imposed racist policies in order to increase their power, privilege, and wealth.

This also explains one of the core contradictions in American history: how Thomas Jefferson could believe in human equality while enslaving numerous people on his plantation. His self-interest contradicted his morals, and like so many other powerful people throughout history, he chose his business first. This also shows why powerful, privileged, and wealthy people like Jefferson often struggle to be antiracists: the fight for equality frequently requires them to give up their power, privilege, and wealth.

Chapter 6 Quotes

A QUICK RECAP OF RACIST IDEAS (SO FAR):
1. Africans are savages because Africa is hot, and extreme weather made them that way.
2. Africans are savages because they were cursed through Ham, in the Bible.
3. Africans are savages because they were created as an entirely different species.
4. Africans are savages because there is a natural human hierarchy and they are at the bottom.
5. Africans are savages because dark equals dumb and evil, and light equals smart and… White.
6. Africans are savages because slavery made them so.
7. Africans are savages.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49-50

Explanation and Analysis

The short sixth chapter of *Stamped* briefly recaps the different racist ideas that powerful white people developed up to the late 1700s in Europe and North America. From the climate theory and the curse theory to Cotton Mather's strict human hierarchy, all of these racist ideas look absurd and delusional to modern readers. But in their time, they all seemed plausible. More importantly, they were all *useful* because they justified an extremely profitable, extremely violent racist policy: slavery. This reflects the way that racist policies and ideas *really* work: the racist policies come first, and the racist ideas pop up later as justifications for the policies.

Reynolds ends the list with "Africans are savages" to point out how all these early racist ideas follow the same basic logic and arrive at the same basic racist conclusion: white supremacy and Black inferiority. In fact, these early racist ideas also provided a template for all the racist ideas that came later—many of which just recycled the same basic racist principles in new, more sophisticated forms. Almost all of the racist ideas that circulate today still ultimately come down to "Africans are savages because…"

Chapter 8 Quotes

Say it with me: All men are created equal.

But were slaves seen as "men"? And what about women? And what did it mean that Jefferson, a man who owned nearly two hundred slaves, was writing America's freedom document? Was he talking about an all-encompassing freedom or just America being free from England?

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Thomas Jefferson

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 56-57

Explanation and Analysis

Even more than for his presidency, Thomas Jefferson is famous for writing the Declaration of Independence, in which he boldly declared that "all men are created equal." At the same time, he lived in, governed, and reinforced a starkly unequal society, in which wealthy white men controlled the political system, economy, and civil society. Most starkly, he enslaved hundreds of people, forced them to work their entire lives on his plantation, and pocketed the fruits of their labor for himself. This jarring contradiction haunts Jefferson's legacy. How, Reynolds asks, could Jefferson claim to believe in human equality but still enslave people? Did he see the contradiction between his actions and his values?

The answer is that Jefferson *did* care about morality, but he cared *even more* about his self-interest. This is significant, because it means that antiracists shouldn't think of their opponents as evil, corrupt, and immoral—rather, they're ordinary people with extraordinary power, who aren't willing to put the common good above their own interests. In fact, Reynold's states, Jefferson reflects the broader contradictions in American history: the U.S. has always proclaimed certain values, like freedom and equality, that it flatly denies to Black people (and most other nonwhite racial groups). There's a significant difference between *believing* in equality and *fighting* for it. This means that becoming an antiracist is more complicated than simply committing to racial equality in the abstract: it also requires understanding racism and dedicating oneself to overcoming it.

This three-fifths-of-a-man equation worked for both the assimilationists and the segregationists, because it fit right into the argument that slaves were both human *and* subhuman, which they both agreed on. For the assimilationists, the three-fifths rule allowed them to argue that someday slaves might be able to achieve five-fifths. Wholeness. Whiteness. One day. And for segregationists, it proved that slaves were mathematically wretched. Segregationists and assimilationists may have had different intentions, but both of them agreed that Black people were inferior. And that agreement, that shared bond, allowed slavery and racist ideas to be permanently stamped into the founding document of America.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

In the famous Three-Fifths Compromise, the framers of the U.S. Constitution agreed to count each enslaved Black person as three-fifths of a human being when calculating each state's population and representation in the House of Representatives. The South wanted to count enslaved people towards their population, so that they could have more representatives, but they also didn't want to pay more taxes to the federal government based on those enslaved people. The North wanted just the opposite: to limit the South's political power and increase its tax contributions.

The Three-Fifths Compromise is one of the best-known racist policies in U.S. history, but it's far from unique. In fact, Reynolds argues, it represents the marriage between assimilationism and segregationism that has governed racist policy throughout U.S. history. Three-fifths represents the way segregationists see Black people as "mathematically wretched" sub-humans and assimilationists see them as capable of "achiev[ing] five-fifths," or rising to white people's level. But both options are racist. In fact, there have generally been two party choices throughout American history, but they've seldom (if ever) been racist versus antiracist. Rather, racism has been a political consensus for most of American history—even during eras like the Civil War and the 1960s. If anything, the conflict has been between segregationists versus assimilationists.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ [Uplift suasion] would be the cornerstone of assimilationist thought, which basically said:
Make yourself small,
make yourself unthreatening,
make yourself the same,
make yourself safe,
make yourself quiet,
to make White people comfortable with your existence.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout U.S. history, activists and race leaders have long told Black people to change their behavior in the hopes of convincing white people to back racial equality. This assimilationist theory is called uplift suasion: if Black people lift themselves up socially and economically—meaning they start to imitate and work with white people—then they will persuade white people to abandon racist ideas and change racist policies.

But uplift suasion has never worked, even in the capable hands of leaders like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. This is because appealing to powerful white people's good will and disproving their racist ideas is not enough to defeat racist policies. Such policies are based on self-interest, not racist ideas about Black people. In fact, those ideas are the effect, not the cause, of racist policies. So to beat racist policies, activists have to make racial equality align with powerful white people's self-interest—not show them that Black people can do all the same things as white people. In other words, effective social change comes from antiracism, not uplift suasion.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Black people didn't want to go "back" to a place they'd never known. They'd built America as slaves and wanted to reap the benefits of their labor as free people.

America was now their land.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, white leaders started promoting a policy they called "colonization"—they wanted to free enslaved Black people, but then force them to move back to Africa. In fact, they imagined that Black Americans would colonize Africa the same way they believed white people colonized North America. And since Black Americans were exposed to white people's supposedly superior culture in North America, these white leaders arrogantly thought, they'd be able to "civilize" Africa when they went back.

Needless to say, Black Americans weren't excited about the prospect of being forced to migrate across the Atlantic *again*. As Reynolds explains here, they had already put down roots in the U.S. and become as American as the white people who surrounded them. They had also worked for generations to build the U.S.'s wealth and infrastructure.

Although it was a short-lived and relatively unsuccessful movement, colonization also exposes some of the deep contradictions in early American society and racism. Namely, even when they opposed slavery, white leaders didn't want to repair its damage by paying Black people for their unfree labor or giving them equal political rights. They weren't even assimilationists, but segregationists—they wanted to keep Black people as far away as possible while keeping the U.S. a white-ruled, white-majority nation.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Mike didn't always get it right, but he was always open to learning and was never afraid to try.

The abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was like that—a man with power and privilege, not afraid to try.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), William Lloyd Garrison

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Reynolds introduces William Lloyd Garrison, the third of the five major figures in *Stamped*. First, Cotton Mather demonstrated how early racist ideas, like segregationist hierarchies and assimilationist ideas about religious conversion, took hold in the U.S. Second, Thomas Jefferson exemplified the contradictions between American values and American slavery. Like these earlier men, Garrison was

powerful, privileged, and often very racist. But unlike them, he used his power and privilege for good, and he became an antiracist by the end of his life.

Reynolds compares Garrison to his own high school friend Mike, a star football player who also kept in touch with his creative side and constantly pushed himself to learn and improve. Garrison was similar because he was honest, humble, and always open to new ideas. In fact, these traits made him into the U.S.'s most influential abolitionist—he let scholars and activists like David Walker persuade him to oppose slavery and demand racial equality.

Garrison therefore shows how even the unlikeliest of people—the kind of powerful white people who generally benefit from racial inequity—can become antiracists if they open their hearts and minds to others. In fact, he also shows how such people can become the most effective antiracists, because their power and privilege gives them a platform for spreading antiracist ideas.

❝ Garrison was influenced greatly by Walker's ideas and carried them on, spreading them by doing what everyone had done before him: Literature. Writing. Language. The only difference was that Garrison's predecessors in propaganda always spread damaging information. At least about Black people. They'd always printed poison, narratives about Black inferiority and White superiority. But Garrison would buck that trend and start a newspaper, the *Liberator*. The name alone was a match strike. This paper relaunched the abolitionist movement among White people.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), William Lloyd Garrison

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86-87

Explanation and Analysis

More than any other activist described in this book, William Lloyd Garrison understood how public opinion works and how new technologies can influence it to enable social change. His great insight was that, in the 19th century, newspapers were a uniquely powerful tool for spreading ideas—and racists were already taking advantage of them. But he also knew that antiracists could beat racists at their own game.

Antiracists' greatest advantage is that the truth is on their side. Racism depends on misleading people about the relative value of different racial groups, whereas antiracism depends on the simple truth that all groups are fully human and therefore equally worthy of health, wealth, freedom, and happiness. By circulating antiracist ideas in the same places as racist ideas, Garrison ensured that the public was exposed to both sides of the debate and had the chance to compare the antiracist truth with racist propaganda.

Garrison's success shows how the media is one of antiracism's most powerful tools for driving social change. He also shows how antiracists are most effective when they adapt their tactics to respond to the social context they live in—whether by harnessing new technologies, identifying the right messaging, or countering the specific racist ideas that people are most likely to hear.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ On one hand, he wanted slavery gone. Black people liked that. On another hand, he didn't think Black people should necessarily have equal rights. Racists loved that. And then, on a third hand (a foot, maybe?), he argued that the end of slavery would bolster the poor White economy, which poor White people loved. Lincoln had created an airtight case where no one could trust him (Garrison *definitely* didn't), but everyone kinda… wanted to. And when Lincoln lost, he'd still made a splash as his party, the Republican Party, won many of the House seats in the states that were antislavery. So much so, that Garrison, though critical of Lincoln, kept his critiques to himself because he saw a future where maybe—*maybe*—antislavery politicians could take over.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), William Lloyd Garrison, Abraham Lincoln

Related Themes:

Page Number: 101

Explanation and Analysis

Like Thomas Jefferson, Reynold's describes how Abraham Lincoln was a much more complicated and contradictory figure than many Americans tend to think. Yes, he did oversee the Civil War and the emancipation of enslaved people in the American South—but he didn't believe in racial equality or defend Black people's political interests. In fact, when he originally ran for the Senate and Presidency on an anti-slavery platform, he wasn't thinking about how freedom would benefit Black people. Instead, he was thinking about how getting rid of a forced labor system would benefit *white* workers, whom wealthy planters didn't hire because enslaving Black workers was cheaper.

Like William Lloyd Garrison, Lincoln was a master of triangulation. He saw where different groups of people with very different interests could agree on specific policy measures, like the abolition of slavery. So where Garrison built diverse coalitions in order to fight slavery, Lincoln merely fought slavery as part of his coalition-building strategy—which was really designed to win power in the national government. As Reynolds explains here, Garrison reluctantly aligned with Lincoln for the same reason that Lincoln reluctantly aligned with Black people: although their values strongly differed, they knew that their policy interests overlapped. Both are excellent role models for modern antiracist activists, who have to show a wide variety of people from a wide variety of racial, ethnic, and class groups how antiracism will benefit them.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Turned out, freedom in America was like quicksand. It looked solid until a Black person tried to stand on it. Then it became clear that it was a sinkhole.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

After the end of the Civil War, racists immediately set about overturning Lincoln's legacy and putting an end to the brief period of relative racial equality known as Reconstruction. They passed racist segregation and voting laws to limit Black people's political power and civil liberties. And they created a new society nearly as unequal as the slave society it replaced. This is why freedom turned out to be a false promise after the Civil War: racists struck back against emancipation.

In fact, Reynolds and Kendi show that racists and antiracists have always dueled throughout American history. Both groups constantly develop their ideas, policies, and tactics to win power and reshape the nation in their own image. Many Americans learn to think of American history as a constant march of progress toward equality and justice. But this is actually a dangerous myth. Antiracists make progress, but so do racists. Instead of buying into the myth of steady progress, which encourages them to sit back and wait for history to take its course, young people should think of American history as a constant battle between racist progress and antiracist progress. Even today, there is a racist backlash to every antiracist policy and an antiracist backlash to every racist policy. No victory is permanent, and there is always more work for activists to do.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Du Bois believed in being like White people to eliminate threat so that Black people could compete. Washington believed in eliminating thoughts of competition so that White people wouldn't be threatened by Black sustainability. And there were Black people who believed both men, because, though we're critiquing their assimilationist ideas in this moment, they were thought leaders of their time.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122-123

Explanation and Analysis

The fourth of the five main characters in *Stamped* is famous Black activist and scholar W. E. B. Du Bois. Although he's widely remembered for his feud with the assimilationist Booker T. Washington in the early 20th century, Reynolds and Kendi explain, he actually started his own career as a racist and assimilationist. He thought that more Black people should be like him: they should get educated, preferably at white institutions, and strive to compete with white people as social and economic equals. By proving their equality, Du Bois thought, the Black elite could win its rightful place in the broader American elite, and it could win more opportunities for the Black masses. (Unfortunately, he turned out to be wrong, and he soon changed his beliefs.)

Du Bois's plans were actually much more similar to Booker T. Washington's than many young people today realize. Namely, both were assimilationist: like Du Bois, Washington thought that Black people's best bet was to work hard and convince the white people who held political and economic power in the U.S. to make them equals. There were key differences—Washington wanted Black people to accept segregation and inequality, while Du Bois wanted to challenge them. As Reynolds points out here, Du Bois wanted to try and soften white people's racism, while Washington wanted to accommodate it. But, like at countless other points in U.S. history, neither option was truly antiracist.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ For racists, athletes and entertainers could be spun into narratives of the Black aggressor, the natural dancer, etc. Like, the reason Black people were good wasn't because of practice and hard work but because they were born with it. […]

For Black people, however, sports and entertainment were, and still are, a way to step into the shoes of the big-timer. It was a way to use the athlete or the entertainer—Johnson being both—as an avatar. As a representative of the entire race. Like human teleportation machines, zapping Black people, especially poor Black people, from powerlessness to possibility.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Jack Johnson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

The Black world champion boxer Jack Johnson thrilled and shocked the world with a series of high-profile wins in the early 1900s. To Black Americans, he was striking back against racism; to white Americans, he was threatening to tip the balance of power away from white supremacy.

Jack Johnson was easily one of the best-known Black Americans in U.S. history, but the complicated symbolism around his fame wasn't unique. Reynolds explains that Black athletes—like Black artists—often become lightning rods for racism and public conversations about it.

Reynolds comments that readers can probably recall several examples of prominent Black athletes and entertainers in the 21st century who became "avatars" for all Black people, just like Johnson. Because both Black and white people view them as stand-ins for the Black community more broadly, they face heightened scrutiny, and their actions often cause huge political controversies. In fact, racists use these Black artists and athletes, who tend to be the most prominent Black public figures, to justify racist ideas about Black people's innate abilities or dispositions.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ But not everyone was kissing Du Bois's assimilationist feet. There was a resistant group of artists that emerged in 1926 who called themselves the Niggerati. They believed they should be able to make whatever they wanted to express themselves as whole humans without worrying about White acceptance. […] They wanted to function the same way as the blues women, like Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, who sang about pain and sex and whatever else they wanted to. Even if the images of Blackness weren't always positive. W. E. B. Du Bois and his supporters of uplift suasion and media suasion had a hard time accepting any narrative of Black people being less than perfect. Less than dignified. But the Niggerati were arguing that, if Black people couldn't be shown as imperfect, they couldn't be shown as human.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), W. E. B. Du Bois

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

In the 1920s, W. E. B. Du Bois started to feud with a group of antiracist Harlem Renaissance artists, who didn't want to soften their tone or weaken their ideas in order to appease white people. This conflict clearly represents the basic differences between assimilationism and antiracism identified by Reynolds and Kendi: assimilationists work, act, and write for a white audience; antiracists do so for their own racial group.

The Harlem Renaissance artists believed they had a right to freely and authentically express themselves, as much as any white artist did, and they saw Du Bois's narrow expectations as limits on their free speech. Whereas Du Bois wanted them to focus on fighting racist ideas, they knew that authentic art would automatically let them spread antiracist ideas—namely, the idea that Black people are totally equal to white people, despite all their individual faults and imperfections. Today, this fight continues to play out between artists and entertainers who focus on improving Black people's image—even though that image is a product of white people's imaginations—and those who simply focus on producing art.

It was 1933. Du Bois's life as an assimilationist had finally started to vaporize. He just wanted Black people to be self-sufficient. To be Black. And for that to be enough. Here he argued that the American educational system was failing the country because it wouldn't tell the truth about race in America, because it was too concerned with protecting and defending the White race. Ultimately, he was arguing what he'd been arguing in various different ways, and what Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Marcus Garvey, and many others before him had argued ad nauseam: that Black people were human.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

Like many other leaders and activists, W. E. B. Du Bois didn't stick to the same political program throughout his life. Rather, his beliefs and proposals evolved along with his thinking. By the end of his life, he realized that assimilationism wouldn't work: racists were too resilient and too self-interested to simply give in and agree to change when antiracists proposed it. This is a familiar pattern: Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Abraham Lincoln before Du Bois—and Martin Luther King, Jr., among others, after him—also became more antiracist the more they learned and the more they saw assimilationist tactics fail.

To truly achieve equality in the U.S., Du Bois realized, activists have to stop trying to prove that they deserve it and start simply demanding it. Rather than continuing to debate their own humanity with racists, Black people had to simply start asserting it. This is much simpler than assimilationism, but also much harder to do successfully. It required telling the truth in a sea of lies. For instance, it required reforming the education system—not just succeeding within it. Most of all, it required hammering home the undeniable truth and core antiracist truth "that Black people were human."

Chapter 20 Quotes

King closed the day with what's probably the most iconic speech of all time—"I Have a Dream." But there was bad news. W. E. B. Du Bois had died in his sleep the previous day.

Indeed, a younger Du Bois had called for such a gathering, hoping it would persuade millions of White people to love the lowly souls of Black folk. And, yes, the older Du Bois had chosen another path—the antiracist path less traveled—toward forcing millions to accept the equal souls of Black folk. It was the path of civil disobedience that the young marchers [...] had desired for the March on Washington, a path a young woman from Birmingham's Dynamite Hill was already traveling and would never leave.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Martin Luther King Jr., Angela Davis, W. E. B. Du Bois

Related Themes:

Page Number: 164-165

Explanation and Analysis

Along with the Emancipation Proclamation, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington in 1963 is probably the best-known event in the history of Black America. But too often, Reynolds says, young people learn about King's speech as a singular, world-changing event. Instead of taking in the broader context of the civil rights movement—the decades of struggle and millions of supporters who made social change possible—they just learn about one man, Dr. King. When they replace the complex, collective, cooperative truth with a simple story about Dr. King overcoming adversity, they misunderstand how social change works and how they can contribute to it. They learn to wait for a charismatic savior rather than organizing with others to create change. And they overlook the millions of people who dedicated themselves to the struggle for civil rights just as hard as Dr. King did.

To fight this collective memory loss, Reynolds connects King's "I Have a Dream" to the past, future, and collective. He connects King to the history of civil rights activism by showing how King was fulfilling W. E. B. Du Bois's legacy and the future of it by showing how Angela Davis, the "young woman from Birmingham's Dynamite Hill," became a scholar and revolutionary through her participation in the civil rights movement. He emphasizes the collective nature of the March on Washington, more than the individual nature of Dr. King's speech, and reminds his readers that there are two ways to interpret the March. Assimilationists might see it as an attempt to persuade white people—and, in fact, this

is how it's most often remembered in schools and public memory. But antiracists see it as a sign of Black people banding together to show their power and demand change. Readers and activists today can choose which model of organizing they wish to follow. But learning about the past is the key to following the right model—the antiracist one—in the future.

Chapter 21 Quotes

[Malcolm X's] ideological transformation, from assimilationist to anti-White separatist to antiracist, inspired millions. He argued that though White people weren't born racist, America was built to make them that way. And that if they wanted to fight against it, they had to address it with the other racist White people around them. He critiqued Black assimilationists. Called them puppets, especially the "leaders" who had exploited their own people to climb the White ladder. Malcolm X stamped that he was for truth—not hate—truth and truth alone, no matter where it was coming from. His autobiography would become antiracist scripture. It would become one of the most important books in American history.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Malcolm X

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Like so many other major figures in Black American history, the civil rights leader Malcolm X is often polarizing and misunderstood. Reynolds explains hwo Americans often view him as an anti-white militant willing to win Black supremacy by any means. Some intentionally misrepresent his politics in order to push a racist agenda, while others simply learn a distorted version of his story. But learning a more accurate version is as easy as reading his famous autobiography.

Reynolds acknowledges that Malcom X *was* an anti-white separatist for part of his activist career. But just like the Black leaders who grow out of assimilationist racism to become antiracists, Malcolm X grew out of his anti-white politics to become an antiracist and preach equality. Similarly, Americans often associate Malcolm X with the idea that white people are inherently racist and the U.S. is an inherently racist country, but this wasn't his belief at all. Like Kendi and Reynolds, he saw that nobody and no country is inherently racist or antiracist: everyone gets to choose which side to join. And everything that white people learn growing up in the U.S. pushes them to the racist side—even when that works against their interests. Most of all, many Americans assume that Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't get along or agree on anything. But actually, they respected each other and advocated similar tactics at the ends of their lives.

Chapter 22 Quotes

What Stokely Carmichael meant by Black Power:
BLACK PEOPLE OWNING AND CONTROLLING THEIR OWN NEIGHBORHOODS AND FUTURES, FREE OF WHITE SUPREMACY.
What (racist) White people (and media) heard:
BLACK SUPREMACY.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Stokely Carmicheal

Related Themes:

Page Number: 181

Explanation and Analysis

The Black Power movement launched antiracism to the forefront of national politics in the 1970s and 1980s. Like every other Black political movement throughout U.S. history, it was controversial and caused a strong racist backlash. Many white people believed that the Black Power revolutionaries wanted Black supremacy, not Black self-sufficiency and racial equality.

In fact, Reynolds shows, this kind of misrepresentation also has a long history. Whether out of malice or misplaced fear, white racists have long misrepresented Black antiracists' intentions in order to make themselves sound like the victims and justify further attacks on the Black community. Lynching is a classic example: white people falsely accused Black men of sexual assault in order to justify murdering them.

This poses a challenge for antiracists: in order to win equality, they have to deal with racist backlash and misrepresentation from people who mistake equality for their own oppression. They are attached to white supremacy, which feels normal to them, and they expect—in many cases, rightly—that they will lose their power and privilege under a racially equal system. This is why, Kenid and Reynolds argue, antiracists have to win power, not merely persuade powerful people to give it up.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ And the media, as always, drove the stereotypes without discussing the racist framework that created much of them. Once again, Black people were lazy and violent, the men were absent from the home because they were irresponsible and careless, and the Black family was withering due to all this, but especially, according to Reagan, because of welfare. There was no evidence to support any of this, but hey, who needs evidence when you have power, right?

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Ronald Reagan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

Like other politicians throughout U.S. history, Ronald Reagan knew that racism was a powerful tool for winning white votes. Kendi and Reynolds argue that he launched the War on Drugs for both political and economic reasons. Politically, he targeted Black people for arrest and incarceration to show white voters that he was on their side and ensure that many Black people lost their voting rights when they were convicted of drug crimes. Economically, the War on Drugs allowed Reagan's administration to divert resources away from programs that *helped* Black communities and toward policing, mass incarceration, and austerity programs that *harmed* them (while benefiting the rich).

But, as it has also done throughout U.S. history, the white establishment also blamed Black people for the policies targeting them. This is the classic racist tactic: racists attack minority groups, use their injuries as evidence of their inferiority, then use this idea to justify further attacks. Actually, the War on Drugs is also a classic example of how racist ideas pop up after the fact to justify racist policies.

This passage points out how the media recycled and spread harmful stereotypes in order to justify the War on Drugs. Many of these stereotypes still circulate in the 21st century. But they're based on a mix-up between cause and effect. Black people aren't lazy and violent: during the War on Drugs, the police were arresting them disproportionately for crimes that white people committed at the same rate, so it was easy to think that more of them were criminals and fewer of them worked ordinary jobs. Later, convicted felons struggled to find work, so they sometimes *did* turn to crime. Similarly, Black fathers weren't absent from the home because of personal moral failings: they were absent because the government put them in prison.

All these racist ideas blame the results of policy on Black people's personal, cultural, and even biological failures. The principle behind these ideas, and all racist ideas, is simple: "who needs evidence when you have power?" A convenient lie is usually more appealing than an inconvenient truth, and politicians and the media know that.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ Angela Davis. She was the conference's closing speaker. She was certainly the nation's most famous Black American woman academic. But, more important, over the course of her career, she had consistently defended Black women, including those Black women who even some Black women did not want to defend. She had been arguably America's most antiracist voice over the past two decades, unwavering in her search for antiracist explanations when others took the easier and racist way of Black blame.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Angela Davis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216-217

Explanation and Analysis

The fifth and final of the main protagonists in *Stamped* is Angela Davis, the Marxist, feminist, and antiracist scholar who shot to national prominence when the government tried to fire her for her beliefs in the late 1960s and unsuccessfully tried to imprison her for a murder she didn't commit in the early 1970s. Beyond her national fame, however, Kendi and Reynolds highlight her commitment to merging the antiracist movement and feminist movement. If W. E. B. Du Bois represents the shift from assimilationism to antiracism in the 20th century, Angela Davis represents the shift from single-minded antiracism to a broader understanding of how race, gender, class, nationality, and other forms of oppression work together. Active from the civil rights movement of the 1960s well into the 21st century, Davis's example shows how antiracism continues to evolve, adapt, and embrace wider and wider groups of people.

Chapter 26 Quotes

❝ What scholars were arguing is that intelligence is so relative, it's impossible to actually measure fairly and without bias. Uh-oh. This notion virtually shook the foundations of the racist ideas that Black people were less intelligent than White people. Or that women were less intelligent than men. Or that poor people were less intelligent than rich. It shook the idea that White schools were better, and even poked at the reason White students were perhaps going to wealthy White universities—not because of intelligence but because of racism. In the form of flawed and biased standardized testing.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 219-220

Explanation and Analysis

Reynolds and Kendi argues that, over the centuries, science has always been a thorn in racists' side because it consistently disproves their racist ideas and forces them to go searching for new ones. In the 1990s, it was becoming clear that one of the oldest kinds of pseudoscientific racism—the intelligence hierarchy—also wouldn't stand up to scrutiny anymore. For centuries, white racists have argued that Black people have less wealth, health, and resources in the U.S. because they're simply less intelligent. They assumed that intelligence was some inherent trait that could be easily measured, didn't change over time, varied along with race, and determined people's fundamental worth as human beings. Basically, they argued that people who score higher on IQ tests deserve to rule over people who score lower.

This racist idea doesn't make sense for several reasons, but it didn't need to: racists just needed any excuse they could find for their relative power, wealth, and privilege. The idea of a racial intelligence hierarchy only became unsustainable once scientists admitted that even intelligence tests weren't totally reliable: there are many kinds of intelligence, and IQ tests don't measure most of them. As always, when this racist idea came crashing down, racists lost their justification for the U.S.'s starkly unequal education system. They had to confront the truth: unequal resources drives unequal outcomes, not unequal ability. There's no such thing as "equality of opportunity" and "equality of outcomes" for whole racial groups: differences between them are *always* because of unequal opportunities.

❝ Personal responsibility… hmmm.

This was another one of those *get-overs*.

The mandate was simple enough: Black people, especially poor Black people, needed to take "personal responsibility" for their economic situation and for racial disparities and stop blaming racism for their problems and depending on the government to fix them. It convinced a new generation of Americans that irresponsible Black people, not racism, caused the racial inequities. It sold the lie that racism has had no effect. So Black people should stop crying about it.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

In the 1990s, "personal responsibility" became a new Republican refrain. The idea was that Black people were responsible for their own poverty, so they should fix it themselves, rather than looking to the government for help. This racist idea, like all other racist ideas, was really a propaganda tool for defending a racist policy: pulling resources out of Black communities. Suddenly, the Republicans argued that the government had no responsibility to Black people—even though it's actually designed to represent and protect the intrests of all Americans, including Black Americans. (Not to mention that the federal government consistently bails out powerful white-run institutions like Wall Street banks.)

The racist idea of "personal responsibility" is significant not only because it resembles so many similar racist ideas from the past, but also because it still lives on in the 21st century. It shows how much of the history in *Stamped* continues to affect the present day. And it gives readers an opportunity to look behind the curtain and see where many of the ideas they hear on a day-to-day basis—like "personal responsibility"—actually come from. In short, the racist idea of "personal responsibility" is a clear example of how young people today can and should learn from history.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ Craig Venter, one of the scientists responsible, was more frank than Clinton in how he spoke about it. "The concept of race has no genetic or scientific basis," Venter said.

Related Characters: Craig Ventner, Jason Reynolds (speaker), Bill Clinton

Related Themes:

Page Number: 227

Explanation and Analysis

One of the most stubborn racist ideas is that race has some biological basis. Many Americans—perhaps most of them—think that there's some specific genetic sequence that makes someone white, Black, Asian, or any other race. They assume that Black people share a certain set of traits that white people don't—after all, that seems like the easiest explanation for differences in skin color.

But this idea isn't true—not even a little bit. There is *zero* genetic basis for race. As Kendi has noted in his other work, most people from West Africa are genetically closer to people from Europe than to people from East Africa. Race is a social category—a shared idea, not a biological reality. People's race can even change over time, from place to place, and from one generation to the next. The idea of race has powerful real-world effects because people developed it in order to discriminate against others.

Science says the races are biologically equal. So, if they're not equal in society, the only reason why can be racism.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

When people abandon the racist idea that race has a biological or genetic basis, Reynold's notes, they have to confront the difficult truth: the racial differences in American society are all because of racism. This reflects the fundamental difference between racists and antiracists: how they match causes to effects. When they see inequities, racists blame the people who suffer from them—they assume that Black people must be *doing* worse in society beaucse they somehow *are* worse, inherently.

Meanwhile, antiracists know that all groups of people are equal—all people have the same moral worth, and although individuals obviously differ in their interests, abilities, and personalities, when averaged over large groups (like all white people and all Black people), there's no significant difference in people's natural abilities. Based on this basic commitment to human equality—which isn't just an opinion, but rather a conclusion supported by all the available scientific and historical evidence—antiracists see that the only reasonable explanation for racial inequities is racism itself. So whereas racists assume that the world is working as it should, and inequities are natural, antiracists courageously recognize that the world is far from perfect—but they also find the optimism to fight to improve it.

Chapter 28 Quotes

In the book, he claimed to be exempt from being an "extraordinary Negro," but racist Americans of all colors would in 2004 begin hailing Barack Obama, with all his public intelligence, morality, speaking ability, and political success, as such. The "extraordinary Negro" hallmark had come a mighty long way from Phillis Wheatley to Barack Obama, who became the nation's only African American in the US Senate in 2005. With Phillis Wheatley, racists despised the capable Black mind, but with Obama, they were turning their backs on history so that they could see him as a symbol of a post-racial America. An excuse to say the ugliness is over.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Phillis Wheatley, Barack Obama

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 235-236

Explanation and Analysis

Barack Obama shot to national prominence after giving a powerful speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. But he was far from the first Black person to become an overnight celebrity in the U.S. Actually, Kendi and Reynolds explain, he was just the latest in a long line of Black people whom the public named "extraordinary" and started treating as stand-ins for the whole Black population.

From Phillis Wheatley, whose amazing poetry challenged racist ideas about Black people's intelligence, to Jack Johnson, whose fighting ability and white wife riled up the public, "extraordinary" Black people have always meant different things to segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists. Obama is no exception.

To segregationists, all "extraordinary" Black people are exceptions to the rule. Better yet, they're exceptions that *prove* the rule. For instance, segregationists use Obama's intelligence, charisma, and morality to argue that he isn't

truly Black or doesn't truly represent Black people (who they think are unintelligent, buffoonish, and immoral). Obama might challenge these segregationists' perceptions, but only for a moment—until they find a new racist idea to latch onto.

Meanwhile, for assimilationists, "extraordinary" Black people like Obama prove that Black people can rise to the level of white people. But many continue to believe in white supremacy and Black inferiority. For instance, assimilationists might believe that Obama is better than most Black people because, like the segregationists, they believe that most Black people are immoral and unintelligent. In Obama's case, however, most assimilationists turned in a different direction. They argued that, if the U.S. can have a Black president, then racism is obviously over. In other words, they argued that Black people have *achieved* assimilation and finally *become* equals. But antiracists know that they have always been white people's equals, and they continue to receive unequal treatment because of racism.

Meanwhile, the antiracist view of Obama is as simple and clear as ever. He is brilliant and charismatic because there are brilliant and charismatic individuals of every race. His success says nothing about Black people's inherent qualities or abilities, because Black people have no inherent qualities or abilities that are different from anyone else's. But racists' responses *do* show that the U.S. has often been too unwilling to recognize or reward Black excellence. Obama's presidency is a start, but he doesn't represent the end of racism—only the beginning of the latest national reckoning with it.

❝ Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi founded #BlackLivesMatter as a direct response to racist backlash in the form of police brutality. From the minds and hearts of these three Black women—two of whom are queer—this declaration of love intuitively signified that in order to truly be antiracists, we must also oppose all the sexism, homophobia, colorism, ethnocentrism, nativism, cultural prejudice, and class bias teeming and teaming with racism to harm so many Black lives. […] In reaction to those who acted as if Black male lives mattered the most, antiracist feminists boldly demanded of America to #SayHerName, to shine light on the women who have also been affected by the hands and feet of racism. Perhaps they, the antiracist daughters of Davis, should be held up as symbols of hope, for taking potential and turning it into power. More important, perhaps we should all do the same.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker), Angela Davis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242-243

Explanation and Analysis

Having explored antiracist activism's long history in the U.S., Kendi and Reynolds end by reminding their readers that this activism continues in the present. Every generation or so, a new movement takes over to lead the never-ending fight for racial progress. And since 2013, this torch-bearer has been #BlackLivesMatter. The movement has learned from its predecessors, like Black Power, the civil rights movement, and the assimilationist movements of the early 1900s. It has learned from these earlier movements' leaders and role models, like Angela Davis, Malcolm X, and W. E. B. Du Bois. And it has evolved by ditching assimilationism and embracing feminism.

But racists have also evolved: they've become more creative than ever. Now, they impose racist policies while claiming to be "not racist" and argue that white people are the *real* victims of racism. To win, antiracists have to *keep* improving, building power, and replacing racist ideas with antiracist ones. It's not enough to sit back and wait for leaders like Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi to do all the work; if they care about racial justice, readers have to get involved and find their own place within the movement. This might take awhile: first, young people have to learn about the history of racism and unlearn their racist ideas, but, Kendi and Reynold's note, they've already taken the first step by reading *Stamped*.

Afterword Quotes

❝ [It all] leads back to the question of whether you, reader, want to be a segregationist (a hater), an assimilationist (a coward), or an antiracist (someone who truly loves).
Choice is yours.
Don't freak out.
Just breathe in. Inhale. Hold it. Now exhale slowly:
N O W.

Related Characters: Jason Reynolds (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 248

Explanation and Analysis

At the very end of *Stamped*, Jason Reynolds sums up what

the long history of American racism and antiracism means for young people in the 21st century. Segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists have always fought to set the U.S. racial agenda, just like haters, cowards, and true friends quarrel in the school cafeteria. This pattern—a conflict among three different sides—is more or less set in stone. But the question of who will win this conflict *isn't* set in stone. It depends on what each generation chooses and how effectively each group fights for its goals. In other words, it's up to young people today to shape the future of racism and racial inequity. *Stamped* is designed to help young people navigate this responsibility and choose a side. But ultimately, the choice is up to them: nobody (not even Kendi and Reynolds) will force them to be racist or antiracist, to care or not care, to fight or not fight.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION

Ibram X. Kendi explains that learning about the history of racism is the best way to understand the racism that exists today. This book is Jason Reynolds's remix of Stamped from the Beginning, Kendi's book about the history of racist ideas. An idea is racist if it suggests that one racial group is superior to another, and an idea is antiracist if it suggests that all racial groups are inherently equal. Europeans first invented racist ideas in the 1400s, and they have influenced all of U.S. history.

Many young people know that racism is a major problem in the world around them—but they don't understand why it exists or where it comes from. To get these answers, Kendi explains, they have to learn about the history of racism. Kendi wrote Stamped from the Beginning *to explain this history—but it's a 500-page scholarly behemoth, so it's hardly appropriate for young adult audiences. This is why Kendi asked Reynolds to paraphrase his research for young people in* Stamped. *Though racist* policies *are the true engine of racial inequity, Kendi focuses on racist* ideas *because, he argues, racist ideas blind people to racist policies. Young people have to correct their racist ideas before they can understand or fight racial inequities.*

When Ibram X. Kendi was young, he didn't read history books about racism. They were just too boring. But Jason Reynolds is a brilliant writer, and he has made this book interesting and relatable. When Kendi wrote Stamped from the Beginning, the #BlackLivesMatter movement was just starting. It broke Kendi's heart to watch "cops and wannabe cops" kill so many young Black people, but he also saw how his research could help. Racist ideas explain how Americans see innocent Black teenagers like Trayvon Martin as dangerous criminals.

While the U.S. has seen anti-Black police violence for centuries, #BlackLivesMatter has made it the most important antiracist policy issue of the early 21st century. All young Americans have to figure out where they stand on this issue, and most probably struggle to understand it. Learning about history is the key to understanding it, but Kendi knows that a boring, dry textbook won't do the job. Instead, he wants to give young people an opportunity that he never had: the chance to learn about the history of racism in an accessible, interesting way.

The American police kill young Black men at 21 times the rate of young white men, and the U.S. incarcerates Black people at five times the rate of white people. But such inequities have always existed in the U.S., and three groups have always fought over them: segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists. Segregationists and assimilationists blame Black people for inequity, while antiracists blame racism. Segregationists want to separate themselves from Black people, assimilations want to change Black people, and antiracists want to change racism.

Kendi argues that all ideas about race are either segregationist, assimilationist, or antiracist, and that these three positions get recycled over and over again throughout history. Learning to identify them is the best way for young people to prepare for present and future debates about race. For instance, these categories are helpful for understanding the debate about police violence and mass incarceration. Segregationists and assimilationists think that Black people are more likely to go to jail or get killed by the police because they're more likely to be violent criminals. Segregationists think this is an inherent nature or biological defect, and assimilationists think it's the result of Black people's deficient culture or moral failings. Thus, segregationists would propose separating Black people from the rest of society, while assimilationists would propose that Black people change themselves to stop getting killed and arrested by the police. Meanwhile, antiracists see that racism—and specifically racist policy*—has caused mass incarceration and police violence. This isn't just an opinion: it's a conclusion based on all the available scientific and historical evidence. But people would never know this if they didn't learn about history. Again, argues that this is why young people have to learn about the history of racism if they really want to become antiracists.*


In school, Kendi learned that hateful people came up with racist ideas and then created racist policies based on them. But when he started researching racism, he realized that it's actually the other way around. Racist policies help certain groups of people, who then create racist ideas to defend their privilege. For instance, white slaveholders didn't enslave Black people because they thought they were inferior: they believed that Black people were inferior because their business depended on it. Racist policies lead to racist ideas, which lead to ignorance and hate.

Most people think the same way that Kendi used to: they believe that racist people have racist ideas, then act on those ideas and create racial inequities. It took Kendi years of research to realize that this is backwards. Racism is really about self-interest. Racist policies are profitable because racist ideas are a very effective justification for inequality. For instance, if a group enslaved everyone, they would also risk getting enslaved themselves. Plus, they would struggle to justify slavery to a population that fears being enslaved. But by only enslaving African *people—and claiming that Black people are a distinct race who were* designed *for slavery—white slaveholders draw a clear line between "us" and "them."*

Racist ideas are everywhere—even Kendi used to believe in plenty of them. But Americans can understand and reject them if they learn about American history. Then, they can work together to build an equitable, antiracist society.

Kendi emphasizes that the point of this book isn't to judge people: it's to improve them. It's impossible to be a morally pure, perfect antiracist. Growing up in the U.S., everyone automatically learns racist ideas—including Black people and even Black history professors like Kendi. Instead of blaming themselves for their racist ideas, people should learn where those racist ideas came from, replace them with antiracist ideas, and focus on taking action.


CHAPTER 1: THE STORY OF THE WORLD'S FIRST RACIST

Jason Reynolds says that "this is *not* a history book." It's a book that uses history to understand the *present*. People are usually afraid to talk about race, even though it's so important to American history. Today, some people think that racism doesn't exist anymore, while others see that it's hiding everywhere, like a thief waiting to rob people's freedom. *Stamped* explains how racism became this way in the U.S. This story has three main characters: the first is segregationists, who hate other racial groups. The second is assimilationists, who tolerate other groups, but only when they adapt to mainstream white culture. The third is antiracists, who just love other people, period. Of course, people—including the reader—can switch between these identities over time.

Reynolds addresses Kendi's main points from the introduction, but also introduces his own authorial voice. By claiming that "this is not *a history book," he distinguishes* Stamped *from the dry, academic textbooks that students probably remember from school. He wants students to focus less on names and dates and more on the lessons they can learn from history. Yes, he's focusing on history's relevance to the present in order to keep his readers engaged, but he's also trying to bring history out of the classroom and into everyday life, to show that history animates present day life. In a way, he's already doing it when he acknowledges that young people face a particularly difficult "color blind" kind of racism today. Racists now insist that they're not racist, or that racism no longer exists. Reynolds also brings history's lessons to life by describing segregationists, assimilationists, and antiracists in terms that accord with the kind of people readers might encounter in their actual lives.*

The story of racism starts in 1415, with "the world's first racist." The Prince of Portugal was busy pillaging Muslim cities in North Africa, and one of his men, Gomes Eanes de Zurara, wrote a popular book about his conquests. Like many chroniclers, Zurara bragged about enslaving people. But he also argued that the Portuguese were *civilizing* African "savages" through slavery, by converting them to Christianity. This was a totally new idea—Zurara was the first person to specifically defend enslaving *Black* people, as opposed to anyone else. That's why he was the first racist. His ideas spread far and wide—even some Africans believed them. They also became common sense in Europe, which is how they got to the U.S.

The book draws a distinction between conflict between different groups of people and racism, which involves creating a system of categories for human beings and saying that some are inherently better than others. As always, racist ideas really come from self-interested racist policies. It was advantageous for Henry to enslave African people because he could kidnap them directly from Africa: he didn't have to work through middlemen, like most European slave traders in the past. Therefore, Zurara's racist ideas were really just a justification for Henry's racist "business" policies. And readers probably already know that Zurara's idea about Black people has spread far and wide: pop culture is full of depictions of Africans as primitive, animalistic, and savages.

CHAPTER 2: PURITAN POWER

After Zurara, other Europeans invented new racist ideas to defend slavery. Some defended the "climate theory"—that Africans are inferior because of Africa's hot climate. In the 1500s, the "curse theory" became popular: it said that Africans are Black because of the biblical curse of Ham. Slaveholders loved this idea because it said that they were actually good people who cared for their slaves like parents care for their children.

These racist ideas seem so absurd to modern readers because they were excuses for slavery, not genuine scientific theories of race. They were really attempting to justify a foregone racist conclusion: that white people were naturally meant to rule over Black people. When one idea went out of favor, another quickly popped up to replace it. So racist Europeans never truly asked if *Black people were really inferior to white people; they only ever tried to justify* why.

These racist ideas came to the U.S. in the 1600s, when the Puritan ministers John Cotton and Richard Mather set sail for Massachusetts. When they arrived, they founded new churches and the first American university, Harvard. They loved Aristotle, the famous Greek philosopher who believed that Greeks were better than non-Greeks. Since Cotton and Mather believed that Puritans were the chosen people, they used Aristotle's teachings to argue that Puritans were better than everyone else—especially Native Americans and Africans. They taught this idea in church, and they taught Aristotle at Harvard. Therefore, they put racist ideas at the heart of the U.S.'s first religious and educational institutions.

While Cotton and Mather may not have been the first racists to land on North American soil, Kendi and Reynolds believe that they were *the first to create powerful, enduring institutions dedicated to spreading racist ideas. Reynolds is not saying that these institutions are inherently racist, can never change, and have to be torn down. But he is saying that they have to transform if they want to overcome their racist legacies. Cotton and Mather also show how racist ideas are really based on self-interest: by declaring their group better than all other groups, they justified seizing power and privilege for themselves and their allies. Finally, as they borrowed the template for their racist ideas from Aristotle, they also show how such ideas develop and build on each other throughout history.*

Meanwhile, the white colonists who weren't missionaries were farmers. Planters knew that tobacco was a valuable cash crop, but they needed workers to farm it. When pirates robbed a Spanish ship and brought enslaved people to Virginia, the local landowners John Pory and George Yeardley saw an opportunity. They bought 20 men and sent them to work in the tobacco fields. Planters loved slavery because it made them money, while missionaries loved it because it gave them the opportunity to convert more people to Christianity. But many planters refused to baptize enslaved people, who they insisted were too savage for even God's love.

Again, the principal motive behind racism is self-interest, not prejudice or hatred. White planters and missionaries became racists simply because it was profitable for them to oppress and convert Black people, and inconvenient to stand against such ideas. In this way, racism was economically advantageous for the early American planters: it allowed them to feel like they truly deserved their fortunes. Curiously, like many assimilationists throughout history, the missionaries were racist even though they thought they were helping *Black people.*

CHAPTER 3: A DIFFERENT ADAM

Many other Europeans developed creative racist ideas in the 1600s. Richard Baxter said that Africans wanted to be enslaved, John Locke said that white people had superior minds, and Lucilio Vanini developed the theory of polygenesis, which says that Black people are a different species descended from "a different Adam." Meanwhile, in 1688, a group of Pennsylvania Mennonites developed the first antiracist idea by publishing a pamphlet against race-based oppression.

All these 17th-century racist ideas might seem illogical and absurd, but the point is that they continue to exist in different forms today: racists still say that Black people choose to live in poverty, that they have lower IQs, or that they are a biologically distinct category of people. So even though nobody would seriously believe Baxter, Locke, and Vanini's ideas today, these ideas have still deeply influenced the contemporary conversation about race. In short, today's racist ideas are really just recycled, updated versions of racist ideas from the past. However, antiracist *ideas also have a long history: they have battled with racist ideas for almost as long as those racist ideas have been around. They have also been recycled and updated, depending on the era. But their essential point is always the same: racial oppression and inequity is wrong because all people are inherently equal.*

Meanwhile, white colonists were fighting with Native Americans all around the Thirteen Colonies. In 1676, hoping to create problems for the government, the poor Virginia farmer Nathaniel Bacon organized an attack on local Native people. He convinced both poor white people and enslaved Black people to join him, which scared the white elite. After quelling the rebellion, the government wrote certain privileges for white people into the law—like pardons and power over Black people—to prevent poor white people from cooperating with Black people.

Bacon's rebellion further illustrates how racist ideas let powerful people divide and conquer the less powerful. Enslaved Black people and poor white farmers shared a natural enemy: the wealthy white elite. But throughout American history, white elites have used racist ideas and policies to pit poor white people against poor or enslaved Black people, so that they don't work together to redistribute wealth and resources. This shows that anti-Black racism actually hurts poor white *people, too. It's also important to remember that "white privilege" isn't just a feeling, idea, or informal social norm. For centuries, white privileges were actual laws, and they continue to shape the world today.*

CHAPTER 4: A RACIST WUNDERKIND

Back in Massachusetts, the Cotton and Mather families intermarried and had a grandson named Cotton Mather. He was extremely religious, and he became a preacher after studying at Harvard. Meanwhile, poor colonists were rebelling against the British and the rich. Cotton Mather was part of this wealthy elite, so he became upset. To give the people a new enemy, he started writing about witchcraft—he even helped launch the Salem Witch Trials of 1692. During this time, the Puritans described witches, devils, and evil spirits as Black. Even after the trials, Mather spent most of his career defending social hierarchies that put Puritan men on top.

Cotton Mather is the first of the five main characters in Stamped's *history of American racism. His life shows how racist ideas became the norm in colonial America. He learned those ideas from a young age through his education, but he also passed them on when he became a prominent clergyman. Like all the racists mentioned in the book so far, Mather was primarily interested in protecting his group's own power and privilege. Most students probably know about the Salem Witch Trials, but not about their racist metaphors. Mather's crusade against witchcraft was really an attempt to protect the moral purity of his people. But he represented moral purity through the metaphor of racial purity. In other words, he was so used to thinking of white people as good and Black people as evil that Black skin essentially became a shorthand for evilness.*

Cotton Mather's ideas, like Gomes de Zurara's, spread because they helped powerful people justify slavery. And as slavery grew in the U.S., slaveholders created new laws to prevent rebellions. For instance, they banned interracial relationships and legally treated Black and Native people as livestock. Meanwhile, Mather defended slavery as a way to purify—or *whiten*—Black people's souls. His arguments were popular until a few years after his death in 1728.

Mather and Zurara's racist ideas spread for the same reason: powerful people noticed that they could be used to justify racist policies that oppressed less powerful people and, conversely, ensure more wealth and power for the powerful. The ideas about white moral superiority that Mather learned in childhood and preached during the Salem Witch Trials were segregationist, *because they suggested that Black people will always be inherently worse than white people. But at the end of his life, he became more of an assimilationist, because he argued that Black people could improve and even become equal to white people (in their souls, if not in their bodies).*

CHAPTER 5: PROOF IN THE POETRY

In the 1700s, a scientific movement called the Enlightenment swept across the U.S. Benjamin Franklin started a club called the American Philosophical Society and hosted famous racists like Thomas Jefferson, whom Reynolds thinks may have been "the world's first White person to say, 'I have Black friends.'" Growing up, he thought of the people his family enslaved as his friends. And even after his "friends" explained how much his family hurt them, he started his own plantation anyway.

In any historical era, racist ideas have to make sense to powerful people in order to be useful to them. Therefore, as standards of science and truth change throughout history, racist ideas change to conform to them. The Enlightenment is a key example: as scholars started to respect reason and scientific proof more than religious dogma, racist ideas had to start sounding more scientific than religious. After Cotton Matter, Thomas Jefferson is the second main figure in Kendi's history of racism. Reynolds compares him to the familiar kind of white people who "have Black friends" because this shows that racism isn't always about cut-and-dry hatred. Often, it's about denial or delusion. Jefferson thought of himself as a friend to the Black people he enslaved and oppressed because this let him avoid feeling guilt for enslaving and oppressing them.

Meanwhile, in Boston, the Wheatley family bought and educated a Black girl named Phillis, who started writing beautiful poetry. Her intelligence caused a scandal, because white people thought that Black people were inherently stupid. White antislavery activists came up with a new racist idea: Black people weren't naturally savages, but *slavery* made them into savages. Even though this idea is based on good intentions, it's still racist. (Specifically, it's assimilationist.) Phillis Wheatley went to London, where the English published her poetry and used her as an example to campaign against slavery in the U.S.

Phillis Wheatley was the first in a series of "extraordinary" Black celebrities who clearly disproved white people's racist ideas and forced them to look for new ones. While some segregationists always write off these "extraordinary" Black people as exceptions to the rule, assimilationists see them as proof that Black people can *become equal to white people if they work hard enough. Antiracists, meanwhile, know that people like Phillis Wheatley prove that Black people have all the same capacities as white people—but often don't get recognized for them because of racism and the inequities it creates.*

CHAPTER 6: TIME OUT

Jason Reynolds recaps all the racist ideas that have come up so far. White people said that Black people are savages because Africa is too hot, because Ham was Cursed in the Bible, or because they're a different species. They said that Black people are savages because of a natural hierarchy, because dark is evil and white is good, or because of slavery. These ideas repeated throughout history.

All these racist ideas are really just different excuses for inequality. White racists start with the conclusion—that Black people are inferior to white people—and then go searching for a justification to support it. This process continues today: politicians who say Black people are naturally criminals and academics who claim Black people have lower IQs are just looking for a new justification for the same conclusion that racists have supported for centuries. But no justification will ever be good enough, because the conclusion is simply false.

CHAPTER 7: TIME IN

This chapter is just a one-sentence reminder: "Africans are not savages."

Even though they still live on, the racist ideas from the last chapter are all illogical lies. In fact, racist ideas are always *false: all scientific evidence shows that different racial groups are equal in every measurable way. In fact, scientists can't even tell different racial groups apart, because race is just a powerful idea, not a biological reality. There's no specific genetic or biological factor that makes people one race or another.*

CHAPTER 8: JEFFERSON'S NOTES

After England abolished slavery, the Thirteen Colonies still wouldn't. Soon, they declared war on the British. Thomas Jefferson famously started the Declaration of Independence with the words, "All men are created equal." But was he talking about enslaved people, too?

Most students probably don't know that colonists launched the American Revolution in part because they wanted to maintain slavery. Jefferson's words point out the contradiction between the U.S.'s history of racism and enslavement and its lofty ideals of freedom and justice. In fact, nobody embodies this contradiction better than Jefferson himself.

Jefferson was full of contradictions. For instance, he was a slaveowner, and he hated the British for challenging American slavery—but he also thought that slavery was cruel and immoral. And even though he helped start the war, he spent most of it hiding out from the British. During this time, he wrote some notes explaining what he really thought about Black people: they're naturally inferior to white people, they don't feel pain, and they should go back to Africa. Later, he moved to Paris and campaigned to end slavery—while ordering the people he enslaved back home in Virginia to work harder on the plantation.

Jefferson's contradictions show how racism is often based on delusion and self-deception: people can have racist ideas at the same time as they oppose slavery. (It's also possible to have some racist and some antiracist ideas at the same time.) Of course, he took it even further because he campaigned against slavery based on moral principles, while enslaving people for his own financial benefit. This contradiction again shows how material self-interest is the real engine of racism—not racist ideas, which come later.

After the Revolutionary War, the framers of the Constitution agreed to define enslaved people as three-fifths of a human being. The South wanted to count enslaved people for representation in the House but didn't want to have a higher population and pay extra taxes to the federal government. And the North didn't want the South to get more power in the House by counting enslaved people. So, everyone agreed on three-fifths. This number satisfied both assimilationists and segregationists by arguing "that slaves were both human *and* subhuman." Meanwhile, in Haiti, a group of enslaved people overthrew the French government in 1791. This inspired rebellions in the U.S. and scared American slaveholders.

The racist idea that Black people are less than fully human was literally written into the American Constitution. There's no greater metaphor for racism's central role in the U.S.'s economy and history than the three-fifths compromise. Again, this doesn't mean that the U.S. is an inherently racist or evil country: rather, it was founded with racist ideas, and racism has always played a central role in its history. But so has antiracism. In fact, the Haitian Revolution represents the opposite of the American Revolution: a country founded on antiracism. *It showed early American racists that antiracists could win—and today, it's still proof that they can.*

CHAPTER 9: UPLIFT SUASION

In a brief side note, Jason Reynolds points out that white abolitionists tried to turn free Black people into church-going, hard-working, "respectable" citizens. They thought that this would disprove stereotypes and make other white people more comfortable. But this "uplift suasion" theory is racist. White people should accept Black people the way they are, instead of saying that they only deserve freedom if they act like white people.

Even today, political leaders ask Black people to act more "respectable" in order to improve their situation. But uplift suasion is a classic assimilationist idea. It's based on the assumption that Black people are temporarily inferior to white people because of their deficient culture and behavior, but can change and in changing will win white recognition as being equals. There are at least two main problems with uplift suasion. First, it's racist: Black people might have a different culture than white people in the U.S., but it's not better or worse—it's just different. Second, it's based on the wrong theory of political change: it says that Black people can win equality by disproving white people's racist ideas. But as Kendi and Reynolds show throughout Stamped, *racism really comes from self-interest, and the racist ideas come later. So when Black people disprove white people's racist ideas, those white people don't become antiracists—they just look for a new racist idea instead. Therefore, uplift suasion is unlikely to work. Instead of appealing to white people for political change, Kendi and Reynolds think, Black people and other oppressed minority groups should build political power and force racist power to change.*

CHAPTER 10: THE GREAT CONTRADICTOR

In 1800, an enslaved couple named Gabriel and Nancy Prosser planned a huge slave rebellion in Virginia. Even though they failed, their rebellion scared slaveowners, who were starting to favor colonization—or freeing Black people and sending them to Africa. A group called the American Colonization Society even formed to promote the idea. But most Black people weren't interested; they wanted to stay in the U.S., the country they built with their own labor.

The Prossers' rebellion shows that antiracists have always fought racist power through whatever means they can find. Colonization, which is also sometimes called the Back-to-Africa Movement, applies the logic of white racism to Africa—its advocates wanted Black people to colonize Africa just like white people colonized the U.S. But it's also based on the segregationist idea that Black people belong to Africa just because their ancestors lived there. (By that logic, white people wouldn't belong in North America!)

Even though Thomas Jefferson still owned slaves, he liked the idea of colonization. When he became president, he kept contradicting himself. For instance, he passed a law to stop the slave trade, but instead, he started forcing the people he enslaved to have children—and told other slaveholders to do the same. After his presidency, Jefferson publicly apologized for slavery but then went home to his plantation.

Jefferson's contradictions were really about the conflict between his own self-interest—he profited from enslaving and exploiting people—and his moral principles. He tried to have it both ways, and it didn't work. The only way for him to follow his morals would have been for him to free his slaves and ban slavery, but he wasn't willing to do it. This is even more of a reason to believe that assimilationist ideas like uplift suasion will never work: racist elites do not abandon racist policies that benefit them even when they know they are immoral.

Jefferson never stopped pushing for colonization. When sending Black people to Africa started looking unlikely, he proposed the new Louisiana Territory instead. This didn't work either, because nobody could agree whether to legalize slavery in the new midwestern states. This debate ended in the Missouri Compromise: Congress added a slave state (Missouri) and a free state (Maine) at the same time.

Jefferson's colonization plans and the Missouri Compromise show that the middle ground between slavery and freedom is still slavery—just as the middle ground between racism and antiracism is still racism. It's impossible to build a more equal society while also satisfying racist elites, whose power and privilege depends on inequality. In modern terms, Jefferson was willing to recognize and check his privilege, but he was never willing to give it up, so he never became a true antiracist.

Jefferson hoped that Black Americans would civilize Africa by colonizing it, while the U.S. could become "a playground for rich White Christians." On his deathbed, he refused to free the people he enslaved—he needed to sell them to pay off his debt. They ended up being the last people he ever saw. All in all, Jefferson was sometimes a segregationist and sometimes an assimilationist—but never an antiracist.

While Jefferson's debts show how capitalism forces people to exploit others to survive, his lifelong failure to free the people he enslaved also proves that he ultimately chose his personal profit over his moral values. In fact, this is what he wanted for the U.S. too: he hoped the white elite could keep the wealth that enslaved Black people built for them, while kicking Black people out of the country and forcing them to start over.

CHAPTER 11: MASS COMMUNICATION FOR MASS EMANCIPATION

Jason Reynolds remembers his childhood friend Mike, a star football player who also explored his creative side. Like Mike, the white abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison was curious, open to improvement, and willing to use his privilege for good. Garrison became famous when the American Colonization Society hired him to give a speech. But he didn't believe in colonization—he believed in abolition, and he courageously said so in his speech.

Garrison is a key example of how antiracist white people are key to the fight for racial justice. Reynolds makes his courage and dedication relatable to the reader by comparing him to Mike, a familiar type of figure in any high school. Garrison also demonstrates one of antiracism's key principles: people have to build power in order to make change. Garrison knew that he could boost abolitionist ideas through his speech, so he chose to do what was morally right even though it went against the interests of the organization that hired him.

Garrison was dedicated to spreading the ideas of his friend, the Black abolitionist David Walker, and counteracting anti-Black propaganda. He founded a newspaper called the *Liberator* and started writing about the need for an immediate end to slavery. But at first, Garrison didn't believe in immediate *equality*—he believed in uplift suasion. He changed his mind after the enslaved preacher Nat Turner launched a rebellion in Virginia and slaveholders responded by getting crueler than ever before. In response, Garrison wrote an anti-colonization book, founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, and started distributing millions of antislavery pamphlets.

The media has always served to boost and popularize racist ideas, but Garrison saw its power and decided to use it as a force for good instead. However, like Jefferson—and many of the Black leaders who appear in the rest of the book—Garrison was a complicated, contradictory figure. He fought against slavery, but at first, he was still pushing racist ideas when he did so. It took him years to come around and become an antiracist, too. Unlike Jefferson, then, Garrison was willing to admit and learn from his mistakes. This is what made him such an influential antiracist figure and role model for activists today.

CHAPTER 12: UNCLE TOM

Pro-slavery scholars and politicians responded to the abolitionist movement by getting even more extreme. For example, the scientist Samuel Morton started arguing that white people are smarter because their skulls are bigger, even though they're not. In 1844, South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun ran for president on an angry pro-slavery platform. William Lloyd Garrison wanted to strike back by showing white people what slavery was actually like. So, he met Frederick Douglass, an escaped former slave, and published his memoirs. Many other formerly enslaved people started telling their stories, too. Sojourner Truth was one of the first women to do so.

Kendi's research shows that the history of American racism is really like a long series of back-and-forth campaigns between racists and antiracists. Every time antiracists make progress—like in the abolition movement—racists strike back. In this case, they spread new racist ideas, cloaked in new scientific language. And every time racists innovate, antiracists respond in kind: Frederick Douglass told his story to try and make white people empathize with enslaved people instead of slaveholders.

But then, a white woman named Harriet Beecher Stowe outdid everyone else with a book of her own: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In her book, a slave named Tom falls in love with his master's daughter and finds Christianity. Stowe suggested that Black people were better Christians than white people, who were corrupt because of slavery. Her story was racist because it portrayed Black men as weak, but it was also very popular, and it convinced a lot of white people to become abolitionists.

The white public was more willing to read a white woman writing about slavery than the works of actual enslaved people. But while Stowe's assimilationist ideas were racist, they were also very useful in the fight for abolition. Like Garrison's early work, Uncle Tom's Cabin *highlights the difficult truth that racist ideas can actually be a force for good—when deployed in the right circumstances. For instance, when racists won't listen to antiracist ideas, they still might listen to less harmful racist ideas than the ones they already believe.*

CHAPTER 13: COMPLICATED ABE

Americans usually think of Abraham Lincoln as an antiracist "Great Emancipator," but the truth is much more complicated. Like Jefferson, he was "antislavery and not antiracist." After losing a Senate race to a pro-slavery politician named Stephen Douglas, he came up with a clever idea. He argued that the U.S. should abolish slavery because free slave labor was preventing poor *white* people from getting jobs. This idea attracted abolitionists *and* poor white people. When he ran for president, he also appealed to racists by arguing that Black people were inferior and shouldn't be allowed to vote.

Like Thomas Jefferson, William Lloyd Garrison, and pretty much all the other historical figures in this book, Abraham Lincoln is way more complicated than many Americans have been led to believe. He also shows why the abolitionist movement wasn't necessarily antiracist. But why do Kendi and Reynolds focus on showing why historical heroes were actually flawed—and also show the positive side effects of some racism, like Harriet Beecher Stowe's assimilationist ideas in Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Their point is that too many students learn a black-and-white, one-sided view of history, in which major figures acted alone and were completely good or completely evil. But the reality is always more complex. There were usually large social movements behind those individual leaders, shaping those leaders, and nobody is perfect: even the best antiracists and abolitionists usually started out as racists. Again, Kendi and Reynolds think that young people today shouldn't be focused on condemning racists (although sometimes that is necessary). Instead, they should focus on trying to turn racists into antiracists. And they have to start with themselves.*

Lincoln even promised to let the South keep slavery. But when he won the election, Southern slaveholders were up in arms anyway. They seceded from the Union, formed the Confederacy, and started the Civil War. Enslaved people started escaping North to join the Union Army, and Lincoln famously declared that all slaves were now free. But since the Union didn't control the South, he was really just telling Black people to free *themselves* by escaping. Later, after the Union won the war, Lincoln made his boldest move of all—he argued that Black people should get to vote. Three days later, John Wilkes Booth assassinated him.

The biggest misconceptions about Lincoln are that he always opposed slavery and that he singlehandedly freed all enslaved people. But neither is true, and reducing emancipation to Lincoln means overlooking the contributions of millions of activists and enslaved people who seized their own freedom. Lincoln tried to change policy by appealing to racist white people—and like the other assimilationists throughout American history, he failed. While assimilationists like Harriet Beecher Stowe often convinced white Northerners to oppose slavery, getting Southern enslavers to do so was much harder, because it meant getting them to sacrifice their own profits.

CHAPTER 14: GARRISON'S LAST STAND

After Lincoln's death, Garrison decided to retire. Slavery was over, he thought, so his job was done. But actually, President Andrew Johnson was busy stopping Lincoln's plans, helping the South pass racist Jim Crow (racial segregation) laws, and supporting the Ku Klux Klan. Garrison, who was old and sick, decided to stay out of politics and watch from the sidelines. Even though this was a mistake, he was still a great antiracist, because he showed people that slavery was a moral question, not a political one.

Many students learn—or assume—that the government has consistently supported Black civil rights and equality since the end of the Civil War. But the rest of Stamped *will prove this wrong, starting with President Johnson's racist backlash to the great antiracist achievement of emancipation. Garrison's legacy is based on his unparalleled talent for challenging racist ideas and spreading antiracist ideas. While such action isn't enough to change policy on its own, it's an important prerequisite to changing policy. Racist ideas are like the shields that protect white people from seeing racism, so tearing them down can get white people to join the fight for equality. And antiracist ideas are always based on the moral imperative to fight that fight.*

Meanwhile, Black people were founding colleges and political organizations to fight President Andrew Johnson's policies. And in 1870, with the Fifteenth Amendment, they won the right to vote. Black people celebrated all across the U.S., and many of them asked Garrison to give a victory speech. He dedicated his final years to helping Black people escape white terrorists in the South and move to safer places, like Kansas. By the end of his life, he finally came around to demanding immediate racial equality.

Just like John Cotton and Richard Mather enshrined racist ideas in the earliest American institutions, which then perpetuated them, the Black community founded antiracist institutions in order to organize their fight for civil rights. They viewed Garrison as an important activist forefather becuase of his publishing work. While neither his beliefs nor his actions were fully antiracist, he made a huge contribution to the movement for equality, and this was far more important. Reynolds and Kendi arrive at another important lesson: it's better to work hard for progress, but make some mistakes, than failing to act because of perfectionism or a concern with moral purity.

CHAPTER 15: BATTLE OF THE BLACK BRAINS

Everyone has heard of W. E. B. Du Bois, but not everyone knows his story. Growing up in Massachusetts, he faced discrimination and decided that he had to outdo the white kids. He studied at the historically Black Fisk University, then got his PhD at Harvard.

Like the other Black leaders and activists who figure prominently throughout Stamped, *W. E. B. Du Bois first distinguished himself and learned to make sense of his own personal experiences with racism through education. This underlines Kendi and Reynolds's point that learning about history is one of the best ways for young people to understand racism today.*

But even with his fancy education, Du Bois mostly learned racist ideas. He thought that Black people were naturally unintelligent, but that he was an exception because he was biracial. He even blamed Black people for getting lynched—and so did other activists, like Booker T. Washington and even Frederick Douglass. The journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett proved them wrong by showing that most Black lynching victims weren't even *charged* with a crime, not to mention convicted of one.

Since John Cotton and Richard Mather enshrined Harvard's racist ideas in Harvard's curriculum, it's no great surprise that Du Bois learned the same ideas there centuries later. Unfortunately, then, while his education helped him understand history and racism in the U.S., it gave him the wrong kind of ideas about them—this again underlines the need for accurate, antiracist education today. Du Bois imbibed a mix of segregationist ideas—like the idea that Black people are naturally unintelligent—and assimilationist ideas—like the idea that Black people could improve themselves by "whitening" the race and the idea that lynching victims deserved their fate because of their bad behavior. These ideas let him view himself *as better than other Black people—like all racist ideas, they were ultimately self-serving.*

Meanwhile, Booker T. Washington was Black America's other main leader. He told Black people to accept jobs like farming and physical labor, since he thought that would please white people. He was an assimilationist, just like Du Bois, but they weren't friends. Du Bois was an intellectual, while Washington was a "man of the people." In his popular book *Up from Slavery*, Washington thanked white people for "saving" Black people from slavery, which Du Bois couldn't stand. In his own famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois explored Black people's "double consciousness"—they see themselves as Black but also as American. He argued that the best Black people, or the "Talented Tenth," would help win white people's approval.

Many young people learn about the conflict between Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois kind of like the conflict between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. They learn to think that there were only two options, and that each figure totally disagreed with the other. But in reality,Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois's positions were very similar, because they were both assimilationists: they both placed the burden on Black people to fit into a white-dominated society. They just placed this burden on different kinds *of Black people: Washington on the masses and Du Bois on the elite. Even though he was something of an elitist, Du Bois was* closer *to antiracism because he thought the Black community should lead itself to assimilation (rather than following white people's lead). However, in his early life and work, Du Bois wanted to change Black people, not eliminate racism.*

But then, in 1906, an anthropologist named Franz Boas changed Du Bois's mind. He taught Du Bois about African history and showed him that Black people actually *aren't* naturally inferior to white people. Later that year, President Theodore Roosevelt angered his Black supporters by kicking a group of prominent Black soldiers out of the army. Booker T. Washington was one of Roosevelt's biggest supporters, so Black people also turned against him—and toward Du Bois.

Du Bois's main contribution to antiracism is cultural relativism, or the idea that different cultures are all equal and have to be evaluated through their own belief systems. Du Bois was evaluating Black cultures through white cultural values, so it's no wonder that he learned to think of Black people as inferior. When he learned about Black history, he became an antiracist because he saw Black people's potential. This again speaks to antiracist education's great power to transform young people's minds. In contrast, Booker T. Washington's attempt to work with white leaders failed when he confronted the inevitable truth that they didn't have Black people's best interests in mind.

CHAPTER 16: JACK JOHNSON VS. TARZAN

While W. E. B. Du Bois beat Booker T. Washington in their fight for political influence, the famous Black boxing champion Jack Johnson was busy knocking out the world's best white boxers. Actually, racists have always used successful Black athletes to push the racist idea that are naturally aggressive, and Black people have always viewed Black athletes as representatives of the whole community. So, while Black people saw Johnson's victories as wins against racism, white people saw him as a threat. They looked for a "Great White Hope" who could beat him. They chose the retired boxer James J. Jeffries, but he lost.

Jack Johnson was another "exceptional" Black person who Americans viewed as a representative for his entire race. So while W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington were busy looking for ways that white and Black people could peacefully coexist, the American public—white and Black—was more focused on watching white and Black people fight for dominance. Or, more accurately, white people viewed the boxing matches as a fight between white and Black supremacy, while Black people viewed it as a fight between white supremacy and antiracism. *They saw Jack Johnson's victory as a win against white* racism, *not a win against white* people. *This dynamic also gets repeated throughout history: when Black people call for equality, white people think they're calling for Black supremacy.*

White people hated Jack Johnson for his ego and his flashy clothes, but they especially hated that he married a white woman. White men saw this as a threat. After he went on a road trip with a white woman, the government accused him of sex trafficking. For seven years, he lived in exile. Then, he returned to the U.S. and spent a year in jail.

Jack Johnson shows how racism and sexism are inseparable. Sexism is built into racism, and racism is built into sexism. White men's identities often depend on their ability to control white women and have white children, while white women are often defined as weak and needing white men to protect them from non-white men. In fact, this shows that racism harms white women, too. Since racism and sexism are tied together, fighting one has to require fighting both. To be successful, Kendi and Reynolds assert, antiracists have to be feminists, and feminists have to be antiracists.

Meanwhile, Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* novels were white America's answer to Jack Johnson. In the novels, apes raise a white orphan boy in Africa and name him Tarzan (or "white skin"). Because Tarzan is white, he hunts and fights better than all the Africans. And when he grows up, he protects a white woman named Jane from them.

Readers are probably familiar with Tarzan—if not the novels, then the movies or plays. But they likely haven't realized how its depictions of Africans are extremely racist and Tarzan is actually a white supremacist figure. This shows how the media spreads racist ideas—they're built into popular culture. They're so normalized that American children often grow up to believe them without even realizing it.

CHAPTER 17: BIRTH OF A NEW NATION (AND A NEW NUISANCE)

In the early 1900s, the Democrats were the anti-civil-rights, anti-big-government party. President Woodrow Wilson—a Democrat—was the first to hold a film screening at the White House. He showed *The Birth of a Nation*, a popular film that celebrated the Ku Klux Klan for murdering a Black man who attempted to rape a white woman. Rape is a serious crime. But during this time period, white people often falsely accused Black men of rape in order to justify lynching them. This was also during World War I, when Black people were migrating north to escape Jim Crow (racial segregation).

When Wilson showed the infamous racist propaganda film The Birth of a Nation *at the White House, he made his allegiances clear: he supported racism and white supremacist terrorism, and so did the highest levels of the U.S. government. The fact that this was the first film ever shown at the White House again shows how racism is deeply rooted in American institutions and popular culture—but still possible to uproot and undo. In the early 1900s, even if slavery was over, the law was still a powerful instrument for racist oppression. The myth that Black men constantly wanted to rape white women was a powerful racist idea that justified this racist oppression and trivialized real cases of rape and sexual assault.*

CHAPTER 18: THE MISSION IS IN THE NAME

When the Black activist Marcus Garvey moved from Jamaica to New York in 1916, he immediately visited the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). W. E. B. Du Bois and Oswald Garrison Villard, William Lloyd Garrison's grandson, founded the NAACP after both writing biographies of the abolitionist activist John Brown. Garvey noticed that everyone at the NAACP was light-skinned—it seemed like they didn't value all Black people equally. So, Garvey started his own organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

Garvey noticed the NAACP's colorism—or its prejudice for light-skinned people over dark-skinned people. This suggested that the NAACP wasn't really an antiracist organization, interested in pursuing justice for all Black people. Rather, it seemed to be an assimilationist organization interested in helping the Black elite—who were generally light-skinned—succeed in white-dominated American society. This is yet another example of how the most powerful, elite Black organizations end up choosing assimilationism because it's the most advantageous ideology for their members.

Biracialism was a controversial political issue at this time. A group of pseudoscientists called eugenicists were trying to improve people by breeding Black people's genes out of the human population. They said that race caused intelligence, so Black people with more white ancestry were superior.

Racist science always adapts to each era's norms and trends—so it's unsurprising that genetics and intelligence testing were used for racist ends. Eugenics is based on two faulty assumptions. First, it assumes that race correlates with some specific set of genes—it doesn't. Second, it makes the classic assumption that white people are obviously better than Black people. Scientists didn't even seem particularly interested in proving this. They cited biased intelligence tests, but even if the tests were valid, there's no reason to think these results are more genetic than environmental, and, further, there's no reason to think that the specific sort of intelligence tested determines people's inherent worth as human beings.

Meanwhile, Black soldiers were returning to the U.S. from World War I. Du Bois interviewed some of them in Paris and learned that they were treated better in France than they ever were at home. In fact, President Wilson started worrying that they'd fight for equal civil rights in the U.S. When Du Bois heard this, he gave up on assimilationism and started pushing people to fight for equality. In 1919, when the soldiers returned from the war, white terrorists attacked Black communities across the U.S. Du Bois responded by publishing a book of essays about racial equality and Black women's achievements.

Black soldiers fought for their government, but their government clearly wasn't willing to fight for them. This challenged Du Bois's assimilationist beliefs. He used to think that Black people just needed to prove their worth to white people, and then the government would give them equality. But when Wilson treated Black soldiers as threats, not heroes, he made it clear that Black people would never win his approval, no matter how extraordinarily and patriotically they behaved.

But Marcus Garvey still didn't think Du Bois was antiracist enough. He noticed that Du Bois thought of himself as better than other Black people because he was educated and light-skinned. But before Garvey could become popular, the U.S. government deported him for mail fraud.

While he became more of an antiracist than an assimilationist over time, Du Bois still wasn't perfect—he still held onto the racist ideas about biracialism that let him justify his own power and privilege. Garvey's fate is also a reminder of how many committed antiracist activists don't get as much attention as popular assimilationists like Du Bois and Booker T. Washington.

CHAPTER 19: CAN'T SING AND DANCE AND WRITE IT AWAY

In the 1920s, W. E. B. Du Bois befriended many of the young artists who participated in the movement now known as the Harlem Renaissance. He encouraged them to become assimilationists—or focus on impressing white people with their art. But he clashed with a group of antiracist artists who called themselves the "Niggerati." Led by Langston Hughes, the "Niggerati" thought that Black artists should work for themselves, not for white people. This meant depicting Black life honestly, in all its complexity, rather than trying to manage white people's expectations.

Du Bois thought that Black people should create art for a white audience, while Langston Hughes and the other antiracist Harlem Renaissance artists thought that they should create art for other Black people. This is essentially the difference between assimilationism and antiracism: assimilationists focus on winning white people's favor, while antiracists focus on building political power among themselves in order to demand change. This debate lives on today, as artists of color wonder whether they should depict their communities favorably (for white people) or authentically (for themselves).

Three years later, the editor Claude G. Bowers wrote a book rehashing old racist ideas and criticizing Reconstruction, the era after the American Civil War when Black people won more civil rights. In response, Du Bois wrote an accurate history book about Reconstruction and criticized the U.S. education system. He was finally becoming an antiracist, and he was making the same argument as so many other Black activists: "that Black people were human."

Du Bois found that the racism kept coming, no matter how hard he tried to win white people's favor. So he started to fight back with facts. Like Kendi and Reynolds, he saw how a clear understanding of history could help Black people better fight racist oppression. This is an important moment in his path to antiracism because it shows that the underlying principle behind his activism changed. Rather than trying to show how Black people could be as good as white people, he started from the assumption "that Black people were human" and deserved the same education and civil rights as white people, then showed how racist policies held them back. In other words, he stopped blaming Black people for racial inequities (like an assimilationist) and started blaming racism for them (like a true antiracist).

When the NAACP's new leaders pushed even harder for uplift suasion, Du Bois finally decided to quit. He started teaching at Atlanta University and advocating antiracist socialism. He saw how the Great Depression affected Black people particularly hard, and Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal social relief programs didn't include them. He even came to agree with Marcus Garvey, who proposed that Black people should form their own safe spaces to protect themselves from racist policies and ideas.

Ultimately, like Garrison and Lincoln who preceded him, and like many Black activists who followed him, Du Bois also grew and changed over time. He was an influential public figure, so his switch to antiracism and break with the NAACP—which he co-founded—clearly affected the broader conversation in Black and activist communities. In other words, by becoming an antiracist, he automatically started spreading antiracist ideas. Simply put, he started to value equality above inclusion, because he saw that white Americans frequently used inclusion as an excuse for inequality.

CHAPTER 20: HOME IS WHERE THE HATRED IS

During World War II, Black activists like Du Bois wanted to fight racism in the U.S. *and* fascism abroad. After the war, Du Bois participated in international activist meetings that tried to address racism and promote solidarity among people of African descent everywhere. The U.S.'s racism was affecting its global image, so in 1948, President Truman asked Congress to address the problem by passing a civil rights act. This idea infuriated Southern Democrats, who ran the racist candidate Strom Thurmond against Truman. But Truman still won reelection.

Like during World War I, during World War II, Black soldiers had political bargaining power beaucse of their importance to the military. International pressure got the 1948 law passed, which validates one of antiracism's main principles: that equality and justice require building power and changing policies, not just building a following and changing minds. This was also the era of decolonization, when European colonies in Africa and Asia were fighting for their independence. Now that he was an antiracist focused on building political power to change policy, Du Bois clearly saw how Black Americans' and colonized peoples' freedom struggles were linked, so he worked with them to share knowledge and build racial pride.

Two major court cases changed the course of Black history during Truman's next term. First, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the Supreme Court banned racial discrimination in real estate contracts, which let Black people live where they wanted. As a result, scared white people started moving to the suburbs. Second, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the court integrated public schools. However, this was based on the racist idea that Black kids need to study around white kids to succeed. They could also receive a better education if their schools were just better-funded. Regardless, racists were angry about both court cases. A year later, in Mississippi, white men murdered a young boy named Emmett Till for the crime of "supposedly 'hissing' at a White woman."

Like many of the popular abolitionist arguments in the run-up to the Civil War, these two Supreme Court cases advanced antiracist goals, even though they weren't actually antiracist. Instead, they were assimilationist: they focused on letting certain Black people—those who could afford suburban houses and those lucky enough to get into certain schools—access to the same benefits as white people. So they were a huge step forward, but they still essentially just benefitted the elite: they didn't give the majority *of Black people the same rights and benefits as the* majority *of white people. The same pattern from colonial rebellions, the 1870s, and 1919 repeated itself again: racists responded to progress with terrorist violence. Readers should be used to this pattern by now—and they should know to expect it in the future. This is one example of how learning about history can make antiracists into better activists today.*

After Du Bois, the Atlanta preacher Martin Luther King, Jr. soon became the civil rights movement's most visible leader. Meanwhile, Black students led sit-ins at "Whites only" lunch counters and founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which was an antiracist activist group. In 1963, King led a series of protests and wrote his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." However, King also made the mistake of confusing antiracists with anti-white Black separatists, which lost him support. Around this time, Malcolm X was becoming popular as an antiracist alternative to Dr. King.

Virtually every young American has heard of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But Kendi and Reynolds think that his legacy too often gets distorted and too frequently overshadows the rest of the civil rights movement, which was really powered by millions of ordinary people who organized groups like the SNCC and put their own freedom on the line for the sake of justice. They also point out that many of King's ideas were more assimilationist than antiracist, at least early in his career. (So were Malcolm X's—he just came around to antiracism sooner.)

After the Birmingham police violently attacked civil rights protestors, President Kennedy asked Congress to pass another civil rights law. At the March on Washington, Dr. King gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech and led a moment of silence for W. E. B. Du Bois, who died a day before.

These are the best-known events from the civil rights movement—they received national attention and put enough pressure on the government to force it to act. Kendi and Reynolds emphasize that King was not only part of a broader movement, but also part of a broader legacy—past leaders, like W. E. B. Du Bois, set the civil rights movement up to succeed by helping train the people and develop the ideas that fueled it.

CHAPTER 21: WHEN DEATH COMES

In 1963, a college student named Angela Davis learned that a church bombing in her hometown, Birmingham, had just killed four of her childhood friends. Her activist parents had raised her to be an antiracist, and at Brandeis University in Boston, she got to meet some of her idols, like James Baldwin and Malcolm X. She was studying abroad in France when she learned about the bombing. President Kennedy investigated it, but soon got assassinated.

Angela Davis is the fifth and final main character in Stamped. *She had the rare experience of growing up as an antiracist in the U.S. But like all the other major activists Reynolds and Kendi have mentioned throughout American history, she combined her lived experience with higher education in order to hone her understanding of racism.*

Then, President Lyndon B. Johnson took over and helped pass new civil rights legislation. But while Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed racial discrimination, it didn't actually stop it: white people responded by continuing to discriminate, while saying that discrimination didn't exist. Black Americans and activists like Malcolm X questioned whether the bill would do anything. Angela Davis agreed. Why would a racist government enforce antiracist laws?

Antiracists know that getting the government to commit to justice is one thing, but getting it to actually carry it out is a different thing entirely. This is why they keep pressuring the government to pursue justice even when their work seems to be done. Just like racists responded to Reconstruction with terrorist violence and Jim Crow segregation laws, they responded to the civil rights legislation of the 1960s with a new "color blind" form of racism: they kept discriminating, but claimed that racism was over.

Segregationist Alabama governor George Wallace and anti-government conservative Barry Goldwater both tried to defeat President Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1964 election. They both lost, but they won plenty of support from white racists. After his reelection, President Johnson turned against civil rights groups like the SNCC, which started following Malcolm X by focusing on Black empowerment and pride. Then, Malcolm X was assassinated. Leaders like James Baldwin and Martin Luther King, Jr. honored him, and antiracists everywhere mourned him. Alex Haley published Malcolm X's influential autobiography, which showed how he went "from assimilationist to anti-White separatist to antiracist." President Johnson ultimately doubled down on civil rights legislation by passing the remarkably successful Voting Rights Act.

Most students likely learn to view Malcolm X as a more radical and militant alternative to Dr. King, but they were fundamentally part of the same movement, and their beliefs were generally similar. Malcolm X just came around to antiracism a little earlier than King did. But both men underwent a process of change and development through their activist careers. While Johnson waffled back and forth, the civil rights movement's consistent pressure made sure that he ultimately passed influential civil rights legislation. This shows how activists have an important role to play in a healthy democracy: they have to represent the people's voice and constantly pressure the government to act.

CHAPTER 22: BLACK POWER

Americans responded to the Voting Rights Act with new kinds of racist violence and antiracist rebellion. Black people in Los Angeles's Watts neighborhood rebelled in response to police violence. Meanwhile, Angela Davis heading to Germany to study philosophy, and in Denmark, scholars were holding a conference about new racist words like "Black," "ghetto," and "minority." But the Black activist and SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael decided that Black Americans should embrace the word "Black." He started calling for "Black Power"—meaning that Black communities should become self-sufficient. But white people and Black assimilationists thought that he wanted Black supremacy—again, they confused antiracism with anti-white racism.

Like every other major antiracist achievement in American history, the Voting Rights Act led to a powerful racist backlash. As usual, racists confused antiracist calls for equality with calls for Black supremacy. And antiracists responded in turn, like they have after every other racist backlash. Academic conferences seem like the total opposite of on-the-ground action, but actually, the Black Power movement combined these opposites into a popular movement. Unlike many previous activist movements, Black Power was explicitly antiracist, in part because it was intended for a Black audience rather than a white one.

Meanwhile, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense started calling for social change (like better jobs, housing, and education) and organizing social programs around the country. Angela Davis moved back to the U.S. and started a Black Student Union at UC-San Diego. Across the country, Black students organized for social change, and Dr. King started building a Poor People's Campaign to call for an "economic bill of rights" for all Americans. As always, the media struck back: the blockbuster *Planet of the Apes* used apes controlling Earth as a metaphor for "the dark world rising against the White conqueror." White people responded to Black Power by calling for "law and order."

The Black Panthers, Black Student Unions, and Poor People's Campaign were all antiracist groups that carried on the civil rights movement's work and fought for broader kinds of social change. But they are not as widely remembered in part because they have not been as successful. In particular, Dr. King is better remembered for his seemingly assimilationist "I Have a Dream" speech than his later socialist, antiracist activism. Like Tarzan, Planet of the Apes *used racist stereotypes—namely, the old racist idea that Black people are subhuman, closer to apes than white people—to drum up white support for racist policies. Finally, "law and order" is still a popular political slogan. It's a race-neutral way of conveying a racist idea: that Black people's political organizations and dissatisfaction with the government are illegitimate, and the government should attack them with force.*

Then, Dr. King was assassinated. In response, the Black Power movement grew exponentially. The singer James Brown told Black people to "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud." Black people embraced African clothing and natural hairstyles, and Black students protested to create Black Studies departments at colleges and universities. They built an antiracist coalition with white anti-war protestors and Latinx activists. But the Black Power movement had its faults. For instance, it was sexist. Angela Davis felt that Black Power didn't take her seriously as a woman. Instead, she joined the Communist Party and started working for its antiracist Che-Lumumba Club.

In schools and popular culture, Dr. King's story is often disconnected from the Black Power movement. King is viewed as a heroic Black leader who won important victories and whose views are no longer controversial. But the Black Power movement is seen as militant, dangerous, and anti-white—its views are absolutely still controversial. This popular culture is racist: it reduces King to his assimilationist aspects, while rejecting Black Power's antiracism. In reality, they were both fighting the same fight. Angela Davis was an important visionary because she also saw how antiracist movements have to collaborate with movements against other kinds of oppression—like sexism and class inequality. She was an early pioneer of what is now called intersectionality—or an approach to justice that focuses on how different kinds of oppression overlap and intersect.

CHAPTER 23: MURDER WAS THE CASE

Hoping to attract white racist voters, Richard Nixon ran for president on a segregationist platform, with a twist. Instead of saying "Black" and "white," he used code words like "ghetto," "urban," and "thugs." This "southern strategy" won him the election and became the standard racist vocabulary for decades.

The "southern strategy" is a clear example of how racism's tactics evolve over time. Antiracists have to do the same if they want to be successful. The "southern strategy" is the predecessor to today's "color blind" racism—in which people claim not to see race, or to be not racist, while still discriminating against certain racial groups and supporting racist policies.

Meanwhile, California governor Ronald Reagan fired Angela Davis from her teaching job at UCLA because she was a communist. This caused a national controversy. Davis got her job back, then lost it again after she defended imprisoned Black activists. Then, one of the activists' brothers attacked a courthouse, held five people hostage, and got into a shootout with the police. Who got charged with murder? *Angela Davis.* Apparently, one of Jackson's guns belonged to her. The penalty was a death sentence. She ran away, got arrested, and then represented herself at her trial—and won. She dedicated the rest of her life to helping the people she met in prison get free.

It's easy to think that the civil rights movement and the government's attacks on Black activists are long over. But Angela Davis's case shows that they're not. Even as the U.S. government celebrates leaders like Dr. King, it has continued to use the law as a tool for injustice by persecuting antiracist activists. However, this strategy also backfired, because it turned Angela Davis into an international celebrity and gave a massive platform to her prison abolition activism.

Over the next few years, public conversations about race and racism exploded. Assimilationist professors said that integration failed because white men were jealous of Black men's sexual prowess. Black women and LGBTQ people found their rightful place in the conversation through art and literature, like Audre Lorde's poetry, Ntozake Shange's play *For Colored Girls*, and Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*.

Both racist and antiracist work flourished during the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, most of the classic antiracist books taught in schools and universities today—and especially the antiracist feminist ones—are from this time period. These works set the terms for today's conversations about race, gender, and justice.

Meanwhile, white men found another role model in Rocky, Sylvester Stallone's working-class Italian American boxer. Rocky faced Black fighter Apollo Creed, who represented Muhammad Ali. Finally, Alex Haley published *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, an incredibly popular antiracist story about slavery and its legacy. The TV version became the most-watched show of all time.

Like Tarzan, Rocky *represents white men winning back their dominant role in American life. Even though* Rocky *isn't explicitly white supremacist, like* Tarzan, *it's still based on the assumption that white people naturally deserve better than nonwhite people—or that the United States rightly belongs to them, rather than all the other groups who also immigrated there (or the native peoples who originally lived there). At the same time, shows like* Roots *show the power that media can play in spreading antiracist ideas as well.*

CHAPTER 24: WHAT WAR ON DRUGS?

Like Nixon, Ronald Reagan won the presidency with the "southern strategy." Then, he launched the War on Drugs. Crime was actually going down, and few Americans were worried about it, but Reagan knew he could use drugs as an excuse to target Black people. He increased sentences for marijuana and started punishing crack cocaine users (mostly poor people and Black people) much more harshly than powder cocaine users (mostly rich, white people). White and Black people sold and used drugs at the same rate, but the police mostly targeted Black men. This created mass incarceration. When Black men returned from prison, they couldn't vote or get jobs, so they often committed crimes.

The War on Drugs is another example of how racist policies support powerful white people's self-interest, then get justified through racist ideas. By disproportionately arresting and incarcerating Black Americans, Reagan's administration decreased their political power. It also justified redirecting resources away from social programs that helped Black people and instead dedicating them toward sources that primarily help middle-class and wealthy white people, like the police, prisons, and tax cuts. Like new versions of the "southern strategy," the War on Drugs is still around in the 21st century. It continues to affect Black people (and other people of color) in the United States today. This is a clear example of how the history discussed in Stamped *is really a history of how the present situation came to be.*

But Reagan and the media blamed stereotypes—and the welfare system—for this crime wave. Even Bill Cosby's *Cosby Show*, which was supposed to improve Black people's image by depicting an ideal "family of **extraordinary Negroes**," actually made the problem worse by making most Black families look defective. Meanwhile, the columnist Charles Krauthammer started writing about drug-addicted "crack babies" and arguing that Black children were genetically defective. He had no scientific proof, but he successfully painted a whole generation of Black people as criminals.

Stereotypes about Black criminality and the "extraordinary" Huxtable family from The Cosby Show *are two different kinds of racist ideas that served the same purpose: they justified the racist policy of the War on Drugs. The stereotypes suggested that it was Black people's fault, not racism's fault, that Black people get disproportionately arrested and incarcerated in the U.S. The Huxtable family suggests that Black people* could *choose to form respectable upper-middle class families if they wanted to—but they've somehow chosen poverty and crime instead. So the stereotypes are segregationist ideas, while* The Cosby Show *pushed assimilationist ideas. But the reality is that the government imposed poverty and crime on Black communities, in part by targeting them during the War on Drugs. This is an example of how students can use the history and terms they learn in* Stamped *to analyze the racism they see around them today.*

CHAPTER 25: THE SOUNDTRACK OF SORROW AND SUBVERSION

Hip-hop became a force for political change in the late 1980s, through popular songs like Public Enemy's "Fight the Power." Women like Sister Souljah had an important voice in rap, unlike in other kinds of art, like film. By 1991, Black directors like Mario Van Peebles and Spike Lee were making influential movies—but the year's "most influential racial film" was the video of the police beating a Black man named Rodney King.

The media and popular culture continued to give Black people a powerful venue for portraying their experiences and spreading antiracist ideas. Meanwhile, the Rodney King film shows how new technology—like the camcorder on which it was shot—has made new kinds of antiracist activism possible.

In an empty gesture to Black Americans, President George H.W. Bush appointed the Black assimilationist Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. When Anita Hill accused Thomas of sexual harassment, Congress persecuted her. Angela Davis was furious. She had just become a professor at UC-Santa Cruz and finally quit the Communist Party because of its racism and sexism.

Reynolds and Kendi see Clarence Thomas's appointment as showing why assimilationism doesn't work. Integrating institutions by putting a few Black people in positions of power doesn't do much to help the majority *of Black people. This is doubly true when those powerful Black people are assimilationists who blame Black people for racial inequities and don't believe in policy change. Angela Davis, meanwhile, continued to put principles before self-interest.*

Meanwhile, Democratic candidate Bill Clinton started using the Republicans' racist law and order strategy to attract white voters. The police who beat up Rodney King were acquitted at their trial, and Los Angeles rose up in response. Clinton and his Black allies started blaming rappers like Sister Souljah for making Black people violent and greedy.

Many liberal Americans might be surprised to see that Kendi and Reynolds criticize Clinton just as much as Republican presidents like Nixon and Reagan. But they see themselves as being antiracist rather than politically partisan. And Clinton's policies, in their eyes, were still based on racism. The Rodney King trial and uprisings are a reminder that #BlackLivesMatter's demands for police reform are not new: they're rooted in a long history of racist policing and antiracist activism in the U.S.

At the same time, scholars like Angela Davis were meeting at an M.I.T. conference on Black women's issues. In her speech, Davis boldly proposed abolishing the prison system. Instead, Clinton was imposing new, harsher laws that expanded the prison population faster than ever before—mostly by locking up Black men for nonviolent drug-related offenses.

Angela Davis continued to speak out in favor of antiracist policies and ideas, while the U.S. government continued to impose racist policies and ideas on the nation. Davis's work is still highly relevant to the present day, as mass incarceration and the War on Drugs are still two of the most significant anti-Black racist policies in the U.S.

CHAPTER 26: A MILLION STRONG

In the 1990s, academics realized that intelligence is impossible to measure. But for generations, white people have used the concept of intelligence to argue that they're inherently superior to non-white people, and men have used the concept of intelligence to argue that they're inherently superior to women. In response to the new findings about intelligence, two Harvard scientists wrote the book *The Bell Curve*, which argues that standardized testing is fair and Black people are simply less intelligent than white people. In 1994, these scientists started campaigning for Republican politicians who argued that Black people should take "personal responsibility" for inequality, rather than blaming racism or the government. Hoping to one-up the Republicans, Democrats tried and failed to get Angela Davis fired again.

Yet again, scientific evidence comes out on the side of antiracism. It's not scientifically valid to rank people by overall intelligence. Instead, the idea that some people are smarter than others is simply a social prejudice. Like racism, its purpose is to give some people (and some ways of thinking) power over others. But The Bell Curve *shows how racists try to save these kinds of prejudices from legitimate science. In fact, Kendi and Reynolds suggest that because their racism was so blatant, the authors of* The Bell Curve *show how racist ideas justify racist policies by explaining away their effects.* The Bell Curve *said that Black people's inherent inferiority causes racial inequality, which means that this inequality is justified—and if Black people want to change it, they shouldn't expect the government's help. Meanwhile, the Democratic effort to fire Angela Davis shows that, even in polarized American politics, there's a consensus around racism: at best, Kendi and Reynolds suggest, voters get to choose between assimilationism and segregationism.*

1995 was a particularly racist year. The O.J. Simpson trial divided the U.S. on racial lines, and academics started talking about Black teenage "super predators." Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan launched the largest political march in Black history, and protests stopped the execution of the Black prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Meanwhile, Clinton was telling white religious voters to, basically, "*pray God fixes Black people.*" And California was passing influential anti-affirmative action legislation. When Clinton promised to lead a public conversation about race, a million Black women assembled in Philadelphia to speak about their experiences, but the white-dominated media ignored them and proposed "color blindness" as the solution instead. They paid lip service to equality but did nothing to achieve it.

In 1995, like during the early 2020s, both racists and antiracists vocally pushed their ideas in the public sphere. They used the media, certain "extraordinary" cases, and protest movements to gain attention and support. This again shows how racists and antiracists tend to evolve together, in response to each other's tactics. In turn, this reminds readers that the common idea of constant racial progress towards equality is actually a myth. The new dominant racist idea in American culture is "color blindness," which essentially amounts to denial. Racism continues in the U.S.—the numerous racial disparities in wealth, health, and safety clearly prove that. But by saying that racism is over, racists can continue discriminating and supporting racist policies—without facing the consequences of doing so.

CHAPTER 27: A BILL TOO MANY

In 2000, scientists proved that humans are 99.9 percent genetically identical and race has no scientific reality. Still, many racist scientists think that race *must* account for the other 0.1 percent. In 2000, a U.N. report showed that racial discrimination is common all over the U.S., but in the 2000 presidential election, both George W. Bush and Al Gore ignored it. In fact, racism helped decide the election: a Florida voting law prevented tens of thousands of Black voters from casting their ballots, and then Bush won the presidency when he won Florida by only a few hundred votes.

Just as they did with intelligence, scientists have definitively disproven the racist idea that there's some genetic basis for race. In short, race is not a real biological category—it's simply an idea. But the idea that races are distinct biological groups is hard to let go of because it gives an easy justification for the intuition that people with different skin color and physical features must be inherently different. This idea goes back to the earliest racists, who claimed that different races are different species descended from different ancestors. Just as "color blind" racism became the new cultural consensus in the U.S., racial inequities in voting turned the tide of the 2000 election. This proves that antiracists' work is far from over.

Antiracists kept fighting—the U.N. even held a worldwide antiracist conference in Durban, South Africa in September 2001. A few days later, the U.S. government responded to the 9/11 attacks with a new kind of racism against Arab and Islamic "evil-doers." When Bush cut school funding for lagging schools that largely served Black students, Black assimilationists like Bill Cosby were delighted. They blamed poor Black parents for their children's difficulties in school. And then, Barack Obama gave his famous speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, and "a star was born."

Although this book focuses on anti-Black racism, Reynolds reminds the reader that other racial groups also face serious discrimination and inequity in the U.S., including the way that Arab Americans were targeted with segregationist ideas after 9/11. These different kinds of racism work together to sustain white power and privilege—which means that antiracists should work together against all forms of racism.

CHAPTER 28: A MIRACLE AND STILL A MAYBE

In 2004, Senator Barack Obama became what Reynolds describes as the U.S.'s latest "**extraordinary Negro**," since he represented the dream of a post-racism society. Then, Hurricane Katrina struck. The government responded too slowly, letting Black neighborhoods flood and Black people drown. All the while, the media told sensational, racist stories about looting and violence.

Like other "extraordinary" Black celebrities throughout history, Barack Obama became a symbol of Black assimilation to many racists. In this view, the post-racial dream is like a new version of the "southern strategy"—by refusing to acknowledge race, powerful people get to pretend that racism is gone (but also continue to benefit from it). But Hurricane Katrina shows how powerful people continue to choose racist policies for political gain.

In 2007, while Obama was pulling ahead in the primary elections, the media was busy criticizing Michelle Obama's body and scrutinizing Obama's relationship with antiracist pastor Jeremiah Wright. In his eloquent "A More Perfect Union" speech, Obama responded to these criticisms with a mix of assimilationism and antiracism—and then he won the presidency. It was Angela Davis's first vote for one of the two major parties. Black Americans were overjoyed by the "antiracist potential of a Black president." When Obama was elected, he symbolized hope and progress. But ultimately, under the pressure of governing, he became an assimilationist. During his presidency, segregationists attacked him relentlessly.

As always, with Obama, the media used racist ideas to try and discredit Black leaders. While Kendi and Reynolds recognize Obama's symbolic importance to antiracists, they don't want to sugarcoat his legacy. He made the same mistake as so many other Black leaders: he used assimilationism to try and change white people's perceptions of Black people and thereby win them over. This strategy has practically never worked: racism comes from white people's self-interest, *not their racist perceptions of Black people. (Those come later.) Therefore, Kendi and Reynolds argue, Obama ended up ceding ground to racists out of goodwill—and being surprised when the racists didn't do the same to him.*

But antiracists will always keep fighting. In response to police violence, the antiracist Black women Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi started the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Their slogan shows that true antiracism is based on love—which also means that antiracists also have to oppose all other kinds of bias and injustice. With the help of social media, #BlackLivesMatter protests spread around the U.S. Like Angela Davis, who is one of their greatest influences, these antiracist feminists show how people can turn potential into power through activism.

The basic pattern from history continues to hold true: racists and antiracists both constantly evolve. They develop new ideas, policies, and movements that respond to the particular issues in each historical moment. #BlackLivesMatter is the latest in a long legacy of powerful antiracist movements, going back to the Germantown Quaker petition in 1688, that have fought for racial equity based on the moral conviction that no group is superior or inferior to any other. The best antiracists know how to learn from history, just like #BlackLivesMatter has learned from Angela Davis.

AFTERWORD

Jason Reynolds asks the reader how they feel. This book has showed how the idea of race helps certain groups of people win power, profit, and privilege. They create policies that treat Black people like animals, then teach white people to see Black people as animals through the media. But everyone can choose whether to be a segregationist, an assimilationist, or an antiracist.

Stamped *ends with a call to action. In finishing the book, the reader has completed a journey through the history of American racism and antiracism, which is supposed to equip them to deal with racism and antiracism in the present day. The reader now knows that both sides have always fought—racists want to exploit others and hoard more power and resources for themselves, while antiracists want a more equal society. Becoming an antiracist takes work and dedication, but, Reynolds and Kendi assert, readers can do it if they really want to.*

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