Stamped from the Beginning

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF IBRAM X. KENDI

Dr. Ibram X. Kendi was one of two children born to Larry and Carol Rodgers, "student activists and Christians inspired by Black liberation theology." While he was a teenager, Kendi's family moved to Virginia, where he completed high school. Kendi earned his undergraduate degree in journalism at Florida A&M University and his MA and PhD in African American Studies from Temple University—the first department to offer an African American Studies doctorate in the world. After completing his PhD, Kendi held positions at SUNY, Brown, the University of Florida, and American University. In 2020 he began a role as professor of History and founding director of the Boston University Center for Antiracist Research. Kendi and his wife, Sadiqa, chose their last name and held a renaming ceremony at their wedding in Jamaica in 2013. *Kendi* means "the loved one" in Meru (while *Xolani* means "peace" in both Xhosa and Zulu). In 2018 Kendi was diagnosed with cancer, but after undergoing treatment he recovered. In addition to *Stamped from the Beginning*, Kendi is the author of *The Black Campus Movement* (2012) and *How to Be An Antiracist* (2019).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As a work of history spanning the 15th century to the present (and with references going all the way back to the Ancient world), *Stamped from the Beginning* features an enormous number of historical events. Broadly speaking, the book begins by discussing European imperialism, the colonization of Africa, and the transatlantic slave trade. It then moves on to discuss the institutionalization of chattel slavery in colonial America and how this intersected with the early political and economic development of the nation. It covers the Revolutionary era, the rise of abolitionism, and finally the Civil War, which concluded with the abolition of slavery. The book then discusses Reconstruction and its failures, the institution of Jim Crow segregation, the Harlem Renaissance, and the emergence of the Civil Rights movement. It examines the triumphs and failures of Civil Rights as well as the rise—and repression—of Black Power. Finally, the book concludes with examinations of mass incarceration, the election of President Barack Obama, and the persistence of racism in a nation that often frames itself as being "post-racial."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

As a work of intellectual history, *Stamped from the Beginning* references several other literary works. Some of the most important of these include Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave*, Phillis Wheatley's poems, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, W.E.B. Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk*, Malcolm X's *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and Angela Davis' *Women, Race, and Class*, among many others. Other contemporary nonfiction books that also examine the history of racism in America include Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me*, Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, Keegan Yahmatta-Taylor's *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, Dorothy Roberts' *Fatal Invention*, and Barbara J. and Karen E. Fields' *Racecraft*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America
- **When Written:** Unknown
- **Where Written:** Unknown
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** 21st-century African American Studies
- **Genre:** Popular History
- **Setting:** America from the colonial period to the present; Europe and Africa during the era of colonization
- **Climax:** While the book does not have a traditional climax, the most pivotal moment it covers is the end of the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation in 1865, which marks the threshold between the two most obviously distinct eras of African American history.
- **Antagonist:**
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Priorities. Kendi describes himself as a "hardcore antiracist and softcore vegan."

All Ages. Kendi also published a version of *Stamped from the Beginning* for young people entitled *STAMPED: Racism, Antiracism, and You.*

PLOT SUMMARY

In *Stamped from the Beginning*, Africana Studies scholar Ibram X. Kendi proposes that there are three kinds of ideas when it comes to race: segregationist ideas, which assert that there is something inherently and permanently wrong with Black people; assimilationist ideas, which suggest that Blackness is inferior to whiteness but that this can be improved through

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assimilation into whiteness; and antiracist ideas, which assert that there is nothing wrong with Black people. Kendi centers his history of racist ideas around five central figures: the colonial preacher Cotton Mather, the slaveholding president and author of the **Declaration of Independence** Thomas Jefferson, the white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, the scholar W. E. B. Du Bois, and the scholar and Black Power activist Angela Davis. These five figures are "arguably the most prominent or provocative racial theorists of their respective lifetimes."

In the 17th century, Cotton Mather's grandfather John Cotton writes the first constitution of New England, which legalizes the purchase of enslaved people. Colonial settlers justify the enslavement of Africans using ideas about race developed via imperialism back in Europe. During the 1500s, colonial travel writers suggested that African people were inferior due to the hot conditions back in Africa, which supposedly had a corrupting impact on humanity; this is known as the "climate theory" of Black inferiority. However, a rival theory suggests that Black people are actually inferior because they are the descendants of the "evil, tyrannical, and hypersexual" biblical figure Ham; this is known as the "curse theory."

At 11, Cotton Mather becomes the youngest student to enroll at Harvard College. During the Salem Witch Trials, he becomes fascinated with witches and how the white women accused of witchcraft often blame the "Black Devil man" for corrupting them. Mather develops an obsession with protecting the purity of white society against (African) devilishness and immortality. He argues that slavery is a divine opportunity to save African heathens' souls. As such, he is "America's first great assimilationist."

The European Enlightenment—which takes place from the end of the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th—sees a proliferation of theorizing about race. Some scholars advance the theory of **polygenesis**, which refers to the idea that the white and Black races were created separately. In the 18th century, the abolitionist movement gains momentum among Quakers and other Christian denominations.

When Thomas Jefferson's father, Peter dies, 14-year-old Thomas becomes the official head of his household, which includes a plantation where 66 people are enslaved. Influenced by Enlightenment ideas, Jefferson serves as the legal defendant of a self-emancipation biracial man, Samuel Howell, and argues that "under the law of nature, all men are born free." He loses the case.

Phillis Wheatley, an enslaved African woman, becomes the first published Black poet in American history. She is cruelly "exhibited" around England in order to prove the white abolitionists' point that Black people's intellectual merits mean they shouldn't be enslaved. In the Revolutionary era, Jefferson is one of many American leaders who rhetorically compare being subjected to British colonial rule to being enslaved. Drafting what will become the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson asserts that "all Men are created equal"—even though he's an enslaver. During the Revolutionary War, Jefferson composes *Notes of the State of Virginia*, once again straddling both anti-slavery and anti-abolitionist positions. He ultimately advocates that Black people should gradually be freed, educated, and sent back to Africa.

Kendi writes that in 1787, Jefferson begins raping his daughter Polly's enslaved maid, 14-year-old Sally Hemings. The pair have many children together, though Jefferson publicly denounces interracial reproduction. At the turn of the 19th century, enslaved Haitians stage a rebellion and establish the first free Black state in the world. Jefferson and other enslavers worry about this revolutionary movement spreading to the U.S. But rebellions do take place, just as they have ever since the first enslaved Africans were brought to American shores. Jefferson dies on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, surrounded by the Black people enslaved in his household.

When William Lloyd Garrison begins his career as an abolitionist, many Northerners fatalistically feel that slavery is a permanent evil. Garrison initially advocates for the gradual abolition of slavery but soon calls for immediate abolition. Four years after meeting the formerly enslaved writer and orator Frederick Douglass at an abolitionist meeting, Garrison writes the preface to Douglass' *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* but fills it with racist ideas about how Black people have been destroyed by slavery.

As tensions over slavery escalate, Southern Democrats leave the Democratic Party in the first step toward secession. Abraham Lincoln is elected president in 1860, but Douglass refuses to vote for him due to his poor record of protecting Black people's rights as a congressman in Illinois. When the Civil War begins in 1861, a large number of enslaved people in the South self-emancipate, and many go on to fight for the Union Army. When Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, he is hailed as the Great Emancipator, but Garrison critiques it as a halfway measure. In January 1865, the House of Representatives abolishes slavery by passing the Thirteenth Amendment. In April, the Civil War is officially declared over; almost immediately after, Lincoln is assassinated.

During the ensuing Reconstruction period, Black people are accorded a number of rights, including (for Black men) the right to vote with the Fifteenth Amendment, which Garrison celebrates as a "miracle." However, Southern violence, economic exploitation, and a lack of political will to implement these rights means that Black people remain severely oppressed, with some in conditions that do not differ from slavery. Yet when Reconstruction is eventually declared a failure, many blame Black people themselves.

W. E. B. Du Bois fantasizes about going to Harvard but cannot

due to the fact that he is Black. Instead, he enrolls in the country's most esteemed Black institution, Fisk University. Here, he internalizes assimilationist ideas about Black inferiority. He then goes on to become the first Black person to receive a PhD from Harvard. In 1890, he attends the first Pan-African Conference in London and discusses decolonization with other Black leaders, although at this point he recommends this be a "gradual" process. In 1903, he publishes his most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, which combines powerful antiracist analysis of Black people's "double consciousness" with assimilationist ideas about their "simple faith." He also develops the idea of the "**Talented Tenth**," the elite minority of high-achieving Black people who will elevate the status of the race overall through an assimilationist strategy known as uplift suasion.

After the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, Du Bois becomes the founding editor of the organization's journal, *The Crisis*. Although aimed toward advancing the rights and conditions of Black people, the organization is plagued by classism and colorism, as well as assimilationist tendencies. As the "Red Scare" over communism takes hold of the U.S., Du Bois immerses himself in Marxist thought and publishes his most vehemently antiracist book thus far, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920).

In the 1920s, Du Bois becomes deeply involved with the Harlem Renaissance, a Black cultural movement that contains many splits over issues of colorism, elitism, gender, sexuality, assimilation, and antiracism. When the Great Depression grips the U.S. in the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt makes a compromise with the segregationists in order to pass his New Deal legislation. Following the end of World War II, antiracist efforts gain greater momentum as Americans reel from news of the Holocaust and feel self-conscious of the racism that continues to exist within the country that proclaims to be the "leader of the free world." As segregation begins to be legally challenged, white Southerners mount a violent campaign of "massive resistance." Du Bois, meanwhile, travels to a newly decolonized Ghana and celebrates his 94th birthday with Ghanaian revolutionary President Kwame Nkrumah. Du Bois dies in Ghana the day before Martin Luther King, Jr. delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech.

Angela Davis's parents raised her with strong socialist and antiracist values in Birmingham, Alabama. As a college student, Davis witnesses the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. After Black revolutionary leader Malcolm X is assassinated, Davis gets involved with the emergent Black Power movement, which demands *economic* justice (in addition to social and political justice) for Black people. In 1969, Davis takes her first academic job at UCLA, but California Governor Ronald Reagan orders that she be removed from her post because she is a member of the Communist Party. After being implicated in the escape attempt of the Soledad Brothers in 1970, Davis is sent to prison, where she develops a "Black feminist consciousness." Upon her release, she dedicates her life to police and prison abolition.

When Richard Nixon runs for president, he promises to restore "law and order" to the country. Meanwhile, political leaders of both parties continue to ramp up funding for police and prisons while cutting welfare spending, particularly after Reagan's "War on Drugs" in 1982. After Republicans Reagan and George H. W. Bush lay the groundwork, Democrat Bill Clinton solidifies the implementation of the mass incarceration of Black people.

In the 2000s, American culture is increasingly dominated by "color-blind" and "postracial" discourse, even as the evidence of ongoing racism is extremely apparent. In 2008, Barack Obama becomes the first Black president of the U.S., and many choose to view this as evidence that racism has ended. But following the murder of Black teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012, a new wave of protest against police brutality and the racist criminal justice system emerges: the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Kendi reflects that rather than trying to persuade or educate racism away, people should focus on eliminating racist policies, because racist ideas are produced to justify these policies.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ibram X. Kendi – Ibram X. Kendi is the author of *Stamped from the Beginning*. At the time Kendi is writing, he is working as a professor of Africana Studies, having earned his PhD from Temple University's historic Black Studies department. Despite being a professor whose life and work is dedicated to understanding race and racism, Kendi admits that, while writing the book, he realized that he had absorbed racist (specifically assimilationist) ideas. He notes that if this is true of him, then it is likely true of his readers, too. Through writing *Stamped from the Beginning*, Kendi was able to dismantle many of his assimilationist beliefs and embrace a more coherently antiracist worldview.

Cotton Mather – One of the five central figures that Kendi bases the book around, Cotton Mather was a Puritan minister who was born in New England in 1663. Mather was a descendant of the illustrious Cotton and Mather families (his parents gave Mather his mother's maiden name as a first name), which were both powerful in shaping the intellectual and political climate of colonial America. At 11, he became the youngest person in history to attend Harvard; after graduating, he became a preacher and encouraged slaveowners to convert their slaves to Christianity. Mather was passionately committed to the belief that, underneath their skin, Black people had "white" souls, which he took to mean that they could be redeemed and saved by God so long as they became

Christians. In this sense, he had a decisive impact on the history of racism in America by embedding into the popular imagination the idea that Christianity would redeem enslaved people and make them naturally docile and submissive.

Thomas Jefferson – Another of the five central figures featured in the book, Jefferson was born in Virginia to a wealthy slaveholding father named Peter. Jefferson inherited the plantation as a teenager when Peter died and went on to attend the College of William & Mary, where he trained as a lawyer. He was a relatively minor Virginia legislator during the Revolutionary Era but shot to prominence after being the primary author of the **Declaration of Independence** in 1776. Jefferson spent his life neglecting to resolve his extremely self-contradictory political and philosophical positions, as his thought straddled both segregationist and assimilationist beliefs. He was an enslaver who wrote passionately about the importance of freedom and equality for all, and he promised abolitionists that he shared their desire to end slavery, but he ultimately delayed the question of abolition and thus facilitated the continuation and massive escalation of slavery. Kendi writes that after the death of Jefferson's wife, Martha, Jefferson began raping an enslaved teenager in his captivity, 14-year-old Sally Hemings, with whom he had several children. Yet in public, he strongly denounced "amalgamation" and expressed highly derogatory (and nonsensical) opinions about Black people, such as their greater capacity for love and lack of sensitivity to pain. Jefferson was in favor of colonization (sending freed Black people to an African colony) because, despite his wavering support for abolition, he could not abide the idea of living among Black people as equals. He died on the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, July 4th, 1826.

William Lloyd Garrison – Another of the five figures featured in the book, Garrison was a white anti-slavery activist and editor of the influential abolitionist paper *The Liberator*. Born in 1805, Garrison worked for a newspaper editor as an indentured servant during his teenage years. His interest in the temperance movement soon developed into a passion for abolition. He initially supported the gradual abolition of slavery (as was common at the time) but soon after revised his position and fought for immediate and full abolition. Garrison dedicated his entire life to the anti-slavery project but still harbored racist ideas. After meeting Frederick Douglass at an abolitionist meeting on Nantucket Island, Garrison worked alongside Douglass and wrote the preface to Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Kendi explains that this preface is overflowing with racist ideas, namely revolving around the notion that slavery had severely ruined and corrupted Black people. During the Civil War era, Garrison was skeptical of Abraham Lincoln, whom he perceived as being insufficiently committed to the abolitionist cause. However, Garrison later became more impressed with Lincoln's actions surrounding the end of slavery. Garrison continued to harbor naïve hopes of racial progress even as it became clear that the Reconstruction era was being replaced by brutal retaliation and the institution of segregation. He died in 1879.

W. E. B. Du Bois – Du Bois is the fourth figure that Kendi focuses on in the book, with arguably the most rich and complicated career. Born in Great Barrington, a small town in Massachusetts in 1868, Du Bois was an exceptionally talented student who attended Fisk University, which was at the time the premiere Black institution in the country. At Fisk, he internalized assimilationist ideas; following his graduation he became the first Black person to earn a PhD from Harvard. After a number of years working as a professor, Du Bois became editor of the NAACP's journal, *The Crisis*. This part of his career was characterized by an investment in education suasion, uplift suasion, and the idea that the **Talented Tenth** would elevate the conditions of Black people as a whole. He was involved with the Harlem Renaissance and developed an interest in Marxist thought. His most influential works are *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (1920), and *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), the latter of which was his personal favorite of his books. Over time, Du Bois began to question assimilationist ideas and embrace socialism and Pan-Africanism. He came to reject his earlier thinking and admit that education and uplift suasion do not work. The U.S. deemed him a security threat when he was 82 and briefly revoked his passport. After it was reinstated, Du Bois traveled to Ghana, where he developed a friendship with Kwame Nkrumah. He died in Ghana at the age of 94.

Angela Davis – Angela Davis is the last of the five figures Kendi focuses on and the only one to have embraced antiracism from the beginning of her life. A talented student from Birmingham, Alabama, Davis attended Brandeis University, where she studied with Herbert Marcuse. Her parents raised her with antiracist and socialist values, and she became involved in activism as a teenager. The Black Power movement began while Davis was completing doctoral work in Frankfurt, Germany, and she traveled back to California to complete her PhD there in order to take part in the movement. Davis was a member of the Communist Party and twice ran for vice president on the Communist Party ticket, although she eventually left the party due to frustrations over its racism and elitism. When Davis earned her first academic job at UCLA, California Governor Ronald Reagan attempted to have her fired. Shortly after, she was charged with involvement in the Soledad Brothers' escape attempt and a warrant was issued for her arrest. Although she initially fled, she was eventually captured and incarcerated. While in prison, Davis developed an emergent "black feminist consciousness" and commitment to police and prison abolition. After being released in 1972, she continued her teaching and activism. In 1981, she published her most famous work, *Women, Race, and Class*, followed by *Are Prisons Obsolete?* in

2003. Now retired from academia, Davis continues to work in abolitionist activism.

Abraham Lincoln – Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States, remembered by many as the "Great Emancipator" due to his issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and Fourteenth Amendment, which banned slavery in the U.S. Originally a lawyer, Lincoln served as a Congressman before being elected president in 1861, serving for the duration of the Civil War. Lincoln was a moderate Republican and abolitionist who favored colonization (sending freed Black people to an African colony). Despised by enslavers, Lincoln also attracted the anger and frustration of abolitionists who claimed that he did not really care about Black people and initially thought he was not serious about ending slavery. Shortly after the Civil War ended and while he was still in office, he was killed by the Confederate assassin John Wilkes Booth.

Phillis Wheatley – A Wolof girl who was captured and enslaved as a young child, Phillis Wheatley was adopted by a Boston couple who came to treat her like their own daughter. Unlike most enslaved people, she received a formal education and became the first Black poet to be published in the United States. Due to the racism of the world in which she lived, Wheatley was treated as an extraordinary exhibit and even brought on tour to England.

Frederick Douglass – Frederick Douglass was an abolitionist and writer who was enslaved from birth but self-emancipated and went on to write the highly influential *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. Garrison and Douglass worked together for a time and Garrison wrote the preface to Douglass's *Narrative*; however, Douglass grew sick of the paternalism of Garrison and the white abolitionist movement in general and ended up distancing himself from him. Douglass refused to vote for Abraham Lincoln for president due to Lincoln's poor record in supporting Black people while he was an Illinois congressman.

Zora Neale Hurston – Zora Neale Hurston was a Black author and anthropologist who was also an anti-assimitationalist. Consistently and defiantly antiracist, Hurston criticized other Black leaders—such as Du Bois—for their elitist tendencies and tendency to think badly of poor, Southern Black people. Hurston's talent and political outlook were ahead of their time and she did not receive sufficient recognition or money during her life. After her death, however, her work became widely read and celebrated. Many consider her book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) to be one of the best American novels of all time.

Malcolm X – Malcom X was a Black radical leader who became famous during the Civil Rights movement. Malcolm was a Muslim after joining the Nation of Islam while incarcerated. He initially embraced ideas about white people being "devils," but after going on hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) he revised his views and advocated for a multiracial coalition to defeat racists (of all races). While he was often criticized as an extremist in the mainstream press, Malcolm grew increasingly popular, particularly as the Black Power movement began to take shape. He was assassinated in 1965. His *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, coauthored with Alex Haley, was released posthumously and became one of the most influential antiracist texts of all time.

Martin Luther King, Jr. – Martin Luther King, Jr. was a Black Baptist preacher who came to be viewed as the leader of the Civil Rights movement. Early in his activist career King emphasized nonviolence and Christian principles of passivity and love. However, as time went on he grew frustrated with the "white moderate" and the possibility of instituting racial justice in the U.S. without revolutionary economic change. As he was growing more radical, his career was cut short when he was assassinated in 1968.

Ronald Reagan – Ronald Reagan was an actor-turned-politician who served as Governor of California from 1967 to 1975, during which time he desperately tried to have Angela Davis removed from her post as an assistant professor at UCLA. As president of the U.S. from 1981 to 1989, Reagan drastically cuts welfare while fueling racist stereotypes about Black "welfare mothers" who drain the state of resources. He also introduces the War on Drugs, ramping up mass incarceration and devastating Black communities. In doing so, he embodies the racist retaliation to the radical social movements of the 1960s (especially Black Power). Reagan's economic and social policies are continued in some form by every president who follows him in office.

Bartholomé de Las Casas – Bartholomé de Las Casas was the son of a Spanish merchant and the first priest to be ordained in the Americas. He traveled to Hispaniola in 1502 along with the first enslaved Africans to be transported to the continent. In Las Casas' *Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, he advocated for easing the suffering of the indigenous people of the Americas by importing more enslaved Africans, a recommendation he eventually came to regret.

Al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi/Leo Africanus – Al-Hasann Ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi was a highly educated Moroccan who was captured, enslaved, and presented as a gift to Pope Leo X, who freed him and christened him Johannes Leo, although he came to be known as Leo Africanus. He wrote the first "scholarly survey" of Africa, *Description of Africa* (1526), which is filled with racist ideas about Black inferiority.

Sally Hemings – Sally Hemings was one of the dozens of enslaved people held in captivity on Thomas Jefferson's plantation, Monticello. When Hemings was 14, Jefferson began raping her; she had several children by him. At 16, she attempted to secure her freedom in Paris and avoid returning

to America. However, after striking a deal with Jefferson wherein he promised to free all their children, she agreed to go back to Virginia.

Harriet Beecher Stowe – Harriet Beecher Stowe was a white author from Maine who was involved in both the early women's rights movement and the abolitionist movement. Her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) was widely read and praised by many fellow white abolitionists. However, some Black readers (such as Martin R. Delany) criticized Stowe's portrait of the submissive, loyal Uncle Tom.

Ulysses S. Grant – Grant was a Republican and Civil War hero who was elected president in 1868. Grant introduced rights legislation for Black people during the Reconstruction era, notably the Fifteenth Amendment which granted Black men the right to vote. After widespread retaliation that ruins his political career, Grant admitted that he regretted ratifying Black enfranchisement.

Barack Obama – Barack Obama was the 44th president—and first Black president—of the United States. Obama's election in 2008 was seen as a victory over racism by individuals across the political spectrum. However, Kendi points out that his campaign and presidency was characterized by racist reactions from commentators as well as castigation of Black people from Obama himself.

John F. Kennedy The 35th U.S. President, from 1961 until his assassination in 1963. In his bid for the presidency he generally tries to avoid the topic of civil rights as he fears that it might hurt his chances of election. He even goes so far as to add the anti-civil-rights politician Lyndon Johnson to his ticket as Vice President. As President, he comes to see the unrest in the U.S. over civil rights as damaging the country's reputation, and he begins to move to pass civil rights legislation. However, he is assassinated before the legislation can pass.

Lyndon Johnson The 36th U.S. President. Johnson was originally an anti-civil-rights politician, who was made John F. Kennedy's Vice Presidential candidate precisely for that reason: Kennedy felt that having such a running mate would protect him from charges of being too "soft" on civil rights. Johnson became president after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, and vowed to pass Kennedy's proposed civil rights legislation in Kennedy's honor.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jefferson Davis – Jefferson Davis was a 19th-century Mississippi senator who went on to become president of the Confederacy. In a 1860 speech he claimed that the "inequality of white and black races" in America was "stamped from the beginning."

Kimberlé Crenshaw – Crenshaw was a legal scholar who developed the concept of intersectionality.

Richard Mather – Richard Mather was a Puritan minister and colonial settler who arrived on American shores in 1635. He was one of the founders of Harvard College and Cotton Mather's grandfather.

John Cotton – John Cotton was another Puritan minister and Cotton Mather's other grandfather. He wrote the first constitution of New England, which legalized the purchase of enslaved people during war.

Ibn Battuta – Ibn Battuta was a 14th-century Moroccan scholar and traveler who traveled to the area now known as Mali and wrote about his experiences.

Ibn Khaldun – Ibn Khaldun was another 14th-century Arab scholar who believed in the climate theory of Black inferiority.

Ham – In the Old Testament, Ham is the cursed son of Noah. Throughout history, certain scholars chose to argue that Black people were the descendants of Ham. This is known as the curse theory of Black inferiority.

Prince Henry – Prince Henry was a 15th-century Portuguese royal who oversaw colonization and slave trading missions in West Africa.

Gomes Earnes de Zurara – Gomes Earnes de Zurara was a Portuguese writer who documented Prince Henry's life and work in *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, which is arguably the first surviving written record of anti-Black racist ideas.

Queen Isabel of Spain – Queen Isabel was Prince Henry's great-niece and the sponsor of Christopher Columbus' journey to Asia, which resulted in him accidentally landing in the Americas.

Christopher Columbus – Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer and colonizer whose (accidental) encounter with the Americas launched the European colonization of the North and South American continents.

Pope Leo X – Pope Leo X freed and christened Leo Africanus after being presented him as a gift.

George Best – George Best was an English travel writer who questioned the climate theory of Black inferiority.

William Perkins – William Perkins was a Cambridge theologian who, in his 1590 essay *Ordering a Familie*, characterizes the relationship between masters and slaves as a "loving family relationship."

William Shakespeare – William Shakespeare was an early modern playwright, arguably the most famous writer in the world, who explored themes of race and colonization in his plays (notably *Othello* and *The Tempest*).

Ben Jonson – Ben Jonson was an English playwright who wrote *The Masque of Blackness*.

Queen Anne – Queen Anne was an English queen who performed in blackface at the premiere of Ben Jonson's *The*

Masque of Blackness.

King James – King James was an English king who expanded the British colonial territories in North America.

Pocahontas – Pocahontas was an indigenous woman who was captured by British colonists and taken to England, where she was toured as an example of a "civilized savage."

John Pory – John Pory was an English colonist who lived in Jamestown and was the English translator of Leo Africanus' *Geographical Histories of Africa*.

Elizabeth Key – Elizabeth Key was an enslaved biracial woman who sued for her freedom after it was not granted as promised by her white legislator father in 1655.

Richard Ligon – Richard Ligon was the English author of *A True and Exact Historie of the Island of Barbadoes* (1657). In it, he argued that Black people are naturally "docile" and that the enslaved should be allowed to convert to Christianity.

Robert Boyle – Robert Boyle was an English scientist who developed the idea that black skin is a corruption of the normal default of white skin.

Increase Mather – Increase Mather was Cotton Mather's father.

Maria Cotton – Maria Cotton was Cotton Mather's mother.

Richard Baxter – Richard Baxter was a British minister who argued that slavery could be positive and benevolent as long as the enslaved were permitted to convert to Christianity.

John Locke – John Locke was a famous English philosopher and physician who was an advocate of polygenesis, arguing that West Africans are descended from both humans and apes.

Metacomet/King Philip – Metacomet—known as King Philip in English—was sachem, or leader, of the Wampanoag people.

Aphra Behn – Aphra Behn was an English author and playwright who wrote *Oronooko: or, the Royal Slave* (1688), the first novel that repeatedly characterizes its characters as white or Black.

James Blair – James Blair was an enslaver, commissary of Virginia, and the founder of the College of William & Mary.

John Saffin – John Saffin was a New England businessman and judge who in 1700 refused to free a Black indentured servant, Adam.

Adam – Adam was an servant indentured to John Saffin.

Samuel Sewall – Samuel Sewall was a Boston judged who denounced John Saffin's refusal to free his black indentured servant Adam and slavery in general, although he advocated for Black people to be removed from New England and taken back to Africa.

Onesimus – Onesimus was an enslaved man whom Cotton Mather held in captivity after being given him as a "gift."

Zabadiel Boylston – Boylston was a Boston doctor who successfully inoculated his young son against smallpox alongside two enslaved people based on African medicinal techniques.

Peter Jefferson – Peter Jefferson was Thomas Jefferson's father and the owner of a large tobacco plantation in Virginia, Shadwell.

Voltaire – Voltaire was a French Enlightenment philosopher who condemned slavery yet advocated for polygenesis and a natural hierarchy of races.

John Woolman – John Woolman was a New Jersey Quaker who wrote the famous abolitionist tract *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* (1746). Woolman's largely antiracist argument, Kendi notes, was ahead of its time.

Samuel Howell – Samuel Howell was a self-emancipated biracial man whose legal case Jefferson took soon after graduating law school.

Francis William – Francis William was a free Black Jamaican man who was sent to the University of Cambridge in order to prove Black people's capacity for "civilization." After returning to Jamaica, he opened a school and enthusiastically disseminated assimilationist ideas.

David Hume – David Hume was a renowned Scottish philosopher who Kendi points out was both a staunch racist and an abolitionist.

Benjamin Franklin – Benjamin Franklin was one of the Founding Fathers.

Selina Hastings – Selina Hastings was an Englishwoman (whose title was the Countess of Huntingdon) who sponsored the production of Olaudah Equiano's autobiography.

Olaudah Equiano – Born in what is currently southern Nigeria, Equiano was captured and enslaved as a child before purchasing his freedom and writing *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1789).

Edward Long – Edward Long was an enslaver living in Jamaica who in *The History of Jamaica* supports the polygenesis theory.

Immanuel Kant – Immanuel Kant was a German philosopher and one of the most influential thinkers in Western history. He disputed polygenesis, but not European supremacy.

Samuel Johnson – Samuel Johnson was an English writer who mocked the American Revolutionary elite for their hypocrisy in championing freedom while at the same time enslaving people.

Adam Smith – Adam Smith was a highly influential Scottish economist who wrote *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

George Washington – George Washington was one of the Founding Fathers, a celebrated general in the Revolutionary War, and the first U.S. president. He delayed addressing the question of abolition because he argued it is not the right time, falsely claiming that anti-Black "prejudice" was waning on its own.

Martha Jefferson – Martha Jefferson was Thomas Jefferson's wife. She died in 1782.

Samuel Stanhope Smith – Samuel Stanhope Smith was a Presbyterian minister who advocated for the climate theory of Black inferiority.

James Wilson – James Wilson was a Supreme Court Justice who, before being nominated to the Court, proposed that enslaved people should legally count as three-fifths of a person.

Elbridge Gerry – Elbridge Gerry was an American politician and abolitionist.

Polly Jefferson – Polly Jefferson was Thomas and Martha Jefferson's daughter.

Benjamin Banneker – Banneker was a free Black men who wrote a letter to Jefferson in 1791 encouraging him to lend support to Black people against the tide of anti-Black racism.

Benjamin Rush – Benjamin Rush was a Philadelphia physician who falsely informed Black people that they were immune from yellow fever, which led to thousands of avoidable deaths.

Eli Whitney – Eli Whitney was the inventor of the cotton gin.

John Adams – John Adams was another Founding Father and the second president of the United States.

Henry Moss – Henry Moss was a Black man with a skin condition called vitiligo, wherein skin loses its pigment. Benjamin Rush believed that Moss represented a miraculous hope for Black people's ability to physically assimilate into whiteness.

Henri Gregoire – Henri Gregoire was a French abolitionist scientist and author of *An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties, and Literature of Negroes*.

Sarah Baartman – Sarah Baartman was a Khoi woman who was captured and cruelly exhibited in France.

Gabriel Prosser – Gabriel Prosser was an enslaved rebel who organized a rebellion in Virginia in 1800 with Nancy Prosser.

Nancy Prosser – Nancy Prosser was the co-organizer, with Gabriel Prosser, of the 1800 rebellion.

Denmark Vesey – Denmark Vesey was an enslaved person who attempted to stage a Haitian Revolution-style coup due to take place on July 14,1822. He recruited a large number of rebels for his "army" before being betrayed by fellow slave Peter Prioleau.

Peter Prioleau – Peter Prioleau was an enslaved man who betrayed Vesey and gained freedom as a reward. He went on to become an enslaver himself.

Samuel Cornish – Samuel Cornish was a Black preacher and coeditor of the nation's first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*.

John Russwurm – John Russwurm was the third Black person to graduate from an American college and coeditor of *Freedom's Journal*.

Robert E. Lee – Robert E. Lee was Commander of the Confederate army during the Civil War.

Benjamin Lundy – Benjamin Lundy was the editor of the abolitionist journal *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

David Walker – David Walker was a Black abolitionist and author of the visionary antiracist, antislavery pamphlet, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*.

Maria Stewart – Maria Stewart was an early Black feminist and abolitionist.

P. T. Barnum – P. T. Barnum was a famous 19th-century showman.

Nat Turner – Nat Turner was an enslaved man who staged a rebellion after receiving instructions via a vision from God. Turner successfully killed at least 57 people during the rebellion, starting with his master's family.

Thomas Roderick Dew – Dew was a pro-slavery professor at the College of William & Mary who advocated against colonization.

John C. Calhoun – Calhoun was a fervently pro-slavery South Carolina senator who twice served as vice president of the United States.

Edward Jarvis – Jarvis was a Harvard-educated psychiatrist who developed racist research that argued that slavery was psychologically beneficial to Black people.

Josiah C. Nott – Nott was a Southern scientist and enslaver who argued that biracial women were less fertile than those of "purely" African or European descent.

George R. Gliddon – Gliddon was a pro-slavery Egyptologist.

Samuel A. Cartwright – Cartwright was a doctor and former student of Benjamin Rush who claimed that enslaved people suffer from a disease called "dysesthesia," cured only by submitting to the authority of white people.

J. Marion Sims – Sims was an Alabama doctor who conducted brutal medical experiments on dozens of enslaved women without providing them with anesthesia.

James K. Polk – Polk was the 11th president of the United States.

Sojourner Truth – Sojourner Truth was an early Black feminist and formerly enslaved woman who gave the famous speech "Ain't I a Woman?" in Ohio in 1851.

Martin R. Delany – Delany was a Black writer and doctor often said to be the first Black nationalist.

Franklin Pierce – Pierce was a Northern Democrat and Mexican-American War general who was opposed to abolition. He served as the 14th president of the United States.

Herman Melville – Melville was a famous American writer who satirized racist pseudoscience (and particularly polygenesis) in

his short story "The 'Gees.'"

James Buchanan – Buchanan was a Democrat and the 15th president of the United States.

Dred Scott – Dred Scott was an enslaved Black man who unsuccessfully sued for his freedom in a case that was taken to the Supreme Court. The 1857 ruling, *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, barred Black people from citizenship.

Roger B. Taney – Taney was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court during the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* case. He was an enslaver who freed his own captives but continued to champion the property rights of enslavers.

Stephen Douglas – Stephen Douglas was a Democratic senator and prominent critic of Abraham Lincoln.

Hilton Rowan Helper – Helper was a North Carolina critic who wrote *The Impending Crisis of the South*, a racist argument against slavery that advocates for abolition on the basis of white labor rights.

John Brown – Brown was a radical white abolitionist who argued in favor of armed insurrection against slavery. He was hanged in 1859.

Charles Darwin – Darwin was an English biologist who wrote *The Origin of Species*, pioneering the theory of evolution.

Francis Galton – Galton was another English scientist who developed the principle of "nature v. nurture." He was Darwin's cousin.

Henry Villard – Villard was a German-American journalist and friend of Garrison's son.

Wendell Phillips – Phillips was an abolitionist and critic of Lincoln.

Garrison Frazier – Frazier was the formerly enslaved editor of *The Liberator*.

John Wilkes Booth – John Wilkes Booth was the proslavery Confederate assassin who murdered Abraham Lincoln at the theater.

Andrew Johnson – Andrew Johnson was the 17th president of the United States. He took over after Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. A Democrat, he immediately introduced conciliatory measures with the former Confederacy after assuming the presidency.

Thaddeus Stevens – Stevens was a "Radical Republican" member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania.

Horace Greeley – Greeley was the pro-segregation Democratic candidate for president in the 1872 election.

Rutherford B. Hayes – Rutherford B. Hayes was the Republican winner of the tightly contested 1876 presidential election. With such a slim margin of victory, Hayes chose to make concessions to Democrats that amounted to the end of Reconstruction.

Mary Silvina Burghardt – Mary Silvina Burghardt was W. E. B. Du Bois's mother.

George Washington Williams – Williams was a Black historian and writer of *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880*.

Otto von Bismarck – Otto von Bismarck was an aristocratic German leader who oversaw the unification of Germany in the late 19th century before serving as the first German chancellor.

Walter Vaughan – Vaughan was a Nebraska Democrat who proposed giving a pension to the formerly enslaved.

Callie House – House was a formerly enslaved woman and founder of the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association. House's work can be seen as originating the reparations movement. She criticized the Black elite's lack of solidarity with poor Black people.

Henry Cabot Lodge – Henry Cabot Lodge was a Massachusetts congressman who proposed legislation to discourage racist voter intimidation that did not pass.

Ida B. Wells – Ida B. Wells was a Black journalist and anti-lynching activist who was singular in her commitment to antiracist thinking.

Franklin D. Roosevelt – The 32nd president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt was a Democrat who oversaw the New Deal.

Booker T. Washington – Booker T. Washington was a formerly enslaved educator, orator, and head of the Tuskegee Institute who made the famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech of 1895. He was the author of the memoir *Up From Slavery* (1901).

Havelock Ellis – Havelock Ellis was a British sexologist who was the first person to use the term "homosexual."

Frederick Hoffman – Frederick Hoffman was an insurance statistician and author of *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, which argued that Black people were heading toward "gradual extinction."

William Archibald Dunning – Dunning was a Columbia University professor and the developer of the Dunning School of Reconstruction, a group of historians that blamed Reconstruction's failure on Black people.

Thomas Dixon Jr. – Thomas Dixon Jr. was the most influential member of the Dunning School.

William Hannibal Thomas – William Hannibal Thomas was a Black writer and legislator who wrote *The American Negro: What He Was, What He Is, and What He May Become*, a book so filled with racist ideas that it led Black people to label him "Judas."

Theodore Roosevelt – Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th president of the United States.

Franz Boas – Boas was a German Jewish scholar known as the

father of anthropology.

Jack Johnson – Jack Johnson was a Black boxer who made history by being the first Black person to make it to the heavyweight championships final. However, the match was ultimately cancelled after Johnson was arrested on fabricated charges and fled the country.

Jim Jeffries – Jim Jeffries was an American boxer who was the World Heavyweight Champion.

Edgar Rice Burroughs – Edgar Rice Burroughs was the American author of *Tarzan* (1912).

Oswald Garrison Villard – Villard was an American journalist and William Lloyd Garrison's grandson; considered the "darling of White liberal America."

Mary White Ovington – Ovington was a white woman journalist, suffragist, and cofounder of the NAACP who expressed assimilationist ideas.

Nannie H. Burroughs – Burroughs was a Black educator and writer who contributed to Du Bois' special issue of *The Crisis* on the question of women's suffrage.

Woodrow Wilson – Wilson was a segregationist Democrat elected president in 1912.

Marcus Garvey – Garvey was a Jamaican Black nationalist who clashed with Du Bois in the early 20th century. Garvey was critical of what he saw as the elitism, colorism, and assimilationism of the NAACP and started his own Universal Negro Improvement Association as an alternative.

Adolf Hitler – Hitler was the leader of the Nazi party and Chancellor of Germany from 1934-1945.

Lewis Terman – Terman was a Stanford psychologist and eugenicist who invented the IQ test.

Karl Marx – Marx was a German theorist who developed the political philosophy of communism in the 19th century.

Warren G. Harding – Harding was the 29th president of the United States.

Alaine Locke – Locke was a writer and Howard University professor famous for his book *The New Negro*.

Wallace Thurman – Thurman was a Black novelist and an anti-assimilationist Harlem Renaissance artists.

Langston Hughes – Langston Hughes was a Harlem Renaissance poet and an anti-assimilationist Harlem Renaissance artists.

Carl Van Vechten – Carl Van Vechten was a white patron of the Harlem Renaissance and author of the highly controversial novel *N____ Heaven*.

Ruth Benedict – An anthropologist who had been a student of Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict invented the term "racism."

E. Franklin Frazier – Frazier was a Black sociologist and author of *The Negro Family in the United States*, which pathologized Black families and argued for an assimilationist solution.

Mammy – Mammy was a stereotypical Black character from the racist 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*.

Richard Wright – Wright was the author of the hugely influential books *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945).

Bigger Thomas – Bigger Thomas was the tormented main character in Richard Wright's book *Native Son*.

James Baldwin – James Baldwin was an enormously influential Black writer of the 20th century. He critiqued both Harriet Beecher Stowe and Richard Wright in his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel."

Kwame Nkrumah – Kwame Nkrumah was a Ghanaian anticolonial revolutionary and the first Prime Minister and President of independent Ghana.

Jomo Kenyatta – Jomo Kenyatta was a Kenyan anticolonial activist and the first indigenous head of government of Kenya, serving as President and then Prime Minister from 1963-1978.

Ashley Montagu – Ashley Montagu was a student of Franz Boas and the author of *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (1942).

Harry Truman – Truman was the 33rd president of the United States. He introduced the Truman Doctrine, which emphasized the U.S.' role in protecting the freedoms of people around the world.

William Patterson – Patterson was a Black communist leader who in 1951 delivered a petition (signed by Du Bois and other leaders) to the U.N. entitled *We Charge Genocide*.

Dwight D. Eisenhower – Truman's successor as president, Eisenhower was in power during the early civil rights movement. Facing shame from the international community, Eisenhower enforced desegregation using the U.S. military.

Emmet Till – Emmet Till was a 14-year-old Black boy brutally murdered by a lynch mob in Mississippi during the era of "massive resistance" to desegregation.

Elijah Muhammad – Elijah Muhammad was the leader of the Nation of Islam, a Black separatist Muslim group of which Malcolm X was a member.

George Wallace – George Wallace was a vocally segregationist Alabama Governor.

Herbert Marcuse – Herbert Marcuse was a German Marxist philosopher who taught Angela Davis.

Barry Goldwater – Barry Goldwater was an ultra-conservative Arizona senator who ran for president on the Republican ticket in 1964.

Alex Haley – Alex Haley was a Black author who wrote the 1976 book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* cowrote Malcolm X's *Autobiography*.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan – Moynihan was a white politician

who authored the infamous Moynihan Report, which pathologized the matriarchal structure of Black families in the U.S.

Stokely Carmichael – Carmichael was a Trinidadian American activist who graduated from Howard University, served as chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and is thought to be the first person to use (or at least popularize) the phrase Black Power. He later changed his name to Kwame Ture.

Huey P. Newton – Newton was a young activist who cofounded the Black Panther Party for Self Defense with Bobby Seale. He was murdered in 1989.

Bobby Seale – Seale was the cofounder of the Black Panther Party with Huey Newton.

Charles Hamilton – Hamilton was the coauthor of the book *Black Power* with Stokely Carmichael.

Eldridge Cleaver – Cleaver was a Black Power activist, husband of Kathleen Cleaver, and author of the memoir *Soul on Ice*.

Kathleen Cleaver – Kathleen Cleaver was a Black Power activist and the first woman to serve in the Black Panther's Central Committee.

Richard Nixon – Nixon was the 37th president of the United States. Nixon introduces the "law and order" style of political leadership, ramping up policing and mass incarceration only for his own presidency to end in the Watergate Scandal, a crime for which he is never incarcerated.

James Brown – James Brown as a funk musician whose song "Say It Loud—I'm Black and I'm Proud" helped popularize Black Power.

Frances Beal – Beal was cofounder of the Black Women's Liberation Committee, a subcommittee within the SNCC. She advocates for Angela Davis while Davis is on the run and incarcerated.

Charlene Mitchell – Mitchell was the first Black woman to run for president of the United States, on the Communist Party ticket in 1968.

Jonathan Jackson – Jonathan Jackson was an American revolutionary who was killed at 17 while storming the Marin County Courthouse in an attempt to free the Soledad Brothers, including his brother George Jackson.

Toni Morrison – Toni Morrison was a Black novelist considered by some to be the greatest writer in American history.

Maya Angelou – Maya Angelou was a poet, writer, and activist.

George Jackson – George Jackson was a Black author and revolutionary who was one of the Soledad Brothers. He was killed during an attempted escape from prison.

Audre Lorde – Audre Lorde was a Black lesbian feminist poet and activist.

Ntozake Shange – Shange was a Black feminist poet and playwright.

Alice Walker – Alice Walker was a Black feminist writer.

Michelle Wallace – Wallace was a Black feminist writer, critic, and professor. She's most famous for her 1979 work *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman*.

Bo Derek – Bo Derek was a white actress who became famous for sporting cornrows, which were nicknamed "Bo Braids."

Kunta Kinte – Kunta Kinte is the main character in Alex Haley's book *Roots*, the story of a man (Kinte) who's kidnapped and enslaved in Gambia and brought to America.

Jimmy Carter – Jimmy Carter was the 39th president of the United States.

William Julius Wilson – Wilson was a Black sociologist and the author of *The Declining Significance of Race*.

Harry Blackmun – Blackmun was a white Supreme Court Justice who warned against the perils of "race-blind" approach to policy.

Gus Hall – Gus Hall was the Communist Party's presidential candidate in 1980.

George H. W. Bush – George H. W. Bush was the 41st president of the United States.

Michael Dukakis – Michael Dukakis was George H. W. Bush's opponent during the 1989 presidential race. His defeat was in part credited to the fact that he was perceived to be too "soft" on crime.

Molefi Kete Asante – Asante was the founder of Afrocentrism and chair of Temple University's Black Studies Department.

Rodney King – Rodney King was a Black taxi driver in Los Angeles who was brutally beaten by the LAPD in 1991.

Clarence Thomas – Clarence Thomas is a Black conservative Supreme Court Justice known for his sexual harassment of Anita Hill and his political emphasis on self-reliance.

Anita Hill – Anita Hill is a Black lawyer and academic who accused Clarence Thomas, her former supervisor, of sexual harassment after he was nominated to the Supreme Court.

Bill Clinton – Bill Clinton was the 42nd president of the United States. Clinton's presidency, much like Reagan's, was characterized by cuts to welfare and an escalation of mass incarceration. This earned him the title of "New Democrat." Unlike Reagan, however, Clinton's rhetoric tended to emphasize racial progress and "reconciliation."

Maxine Waters – Maxine Waters is a Black California Congresswoman.

C. Delores Tucker – C. Delores Tucker was a Civil Rights activist critical of what she termed "Gangsta rap."

Evelynn Hammonds – Evelynn Hammonds is a Black feminist professor, formerly based at M.I.T. and now Harvard. In 1994, she organized the conference "Black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name."

Richard Herrnnstein – Herrnnstein was a Harvard psychologist and coauthor of the racist defense of general intelligence *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*.

Charles Murray – Murray was a Harvard political scientist and coauthor of *The Bell Curve*.

Dinesh D'Souza – D'Souza was a former aide to Ronald Reagan. In his book, *The End of Racism*, D'Souza claimed that racism had ended while simultaneously defending the notion that Black people are less intelligent than other racial groups.

John J. Dilulio – Dilulio was a Princeton professor and inventor of the racist term "super-predator."

Mumia Abu-Jamal – Mumia Abu-Jamal is a Black journalist and political prisoner.

John McWhorter – John McWhorter is a Black conservative linguist who developed the idea that Black people were self-sabotaging, preventing their own progress.

Dorothy Roberts – Dorothy Roberts is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania who works at the intersection of race, gender, law, and science.

George W. Bush – George W. Bush was the 43rd president of the United States. He was widely criticized for his neglectful handling of the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005. He is George H. W. Bush's son.

Bill Cosby – Bill Cosby was a Black actor who starred in the assimilationist TV series *The Cosby Show*. He later went on what was nicknamed a "blame-the-poor-tour" in which he blamed working-class Black people for their own struggles.

Kanye West – Kanye West is a Black American rapper who caused a scandal in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster by pronouncing live on television, "George Bush doesn't care about black people."

Crystal Mangum – Crystal Mangum is a Black woman who falsely accused a group of white lacrosse players from Duke University of rape.

Joe Biden – Joe Biden was vice president of the United States alongside President Barack Obama. Kendi notes that when Obama initially announced his run for president in 2007, Biden made notably racist remarks about the candidate, which he later retracted.

Michelle Obama – Michelle Obama is Barack Obama's wife.

Glenn Beck – Glenn Beck is a conservative commentator who labelled Obama as racist against white people.

Michelle Alexander – Michelle Alexander is a legal scholar and author of *The New Jim Crow* (2010).

George Zimmerman – George Zimmerman was a Latino man who killed Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012.

Trayvon Martin – Trayvon Martin was an unarmed Black teenager whom George Zimmerman shot and killed in 2012.

Shereese Francis – Shereese Francis was a Black woman who was suffocated and murdered by the NYPD in 2012.

Rekia Boyd – Rekia Boyd was a Black woman who was shot and killed by an off-duty Chicago police officer in 2012.

Shantel Davis – Shantel Davis was a Black woman who was shot and killed by an NYPD officer in 2012.

Patrisse Cullors – Patrisse Cullors is an activist and cofounder of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Opal Tometti – Opal Tometti is an activist and cofounder of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Alicia Garza – Alicia Garza is an activist and cofounder of the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

Georges Cuvier An early 19th century segregationist anatomist who is considered "Europe's most distinguished intellectual," Georges Cuvier dissects Sarah Baartman's body after she dies in 1815, and concludes that Baartman's Khoi people are closer relations of monkeys than white humans.

TERMS

Assimilationist – **Kendi** explains that assimilationist ideas are racist, but often do not initially appear to be. The assimilationist position is that black people are inferior (although perhaps not inherently so) to white people, and that this inferiority can be reversed through assimilation into whiteness. Assimilationists believe that both discrimination *and* black people themselves are to blame for racial disparities. While segregationist ideas are more blatantly racist, assimilationist ideas tend to be implicit and covert and are often held by people who think of themselves as antiracist.

Monogenesis – Monogenesis is the scientifically accepted theory that all of humanity, including all races, originate from the same group.

Polygenesis – Polygenesis is the inaccurate theory that the races were created separately and are biologically distinct. In *Stamped from the Beginning*, the theory of polygenesis represents both the illogic of racism as well as the idea that racism is not produced by a *lack* of knowledge, but rather by *false* knowledge. Throughout much of American history, debate raged over whether people of different races all descended from the same original ancestor (monogenesis) or whether each distinct race was created separately (polygenesis). Importantly, polygenesis had no basis in scientific reality and was entirely produced by racist thinking. The reason why

polygenesis never had any real scientific credibility is that it began with a fundamental misunderstanding of race itself. While variations in skin tone and other physical features have always been part of human existence, as **Kendi** describes in the book, the concept of race was only developed around the 15th century. It is a social invention primarily developed in order to advance colonialism and slavery—not a feature of biological reality. As a result, it is not true that the races were created distinctly, with different origin stories. Despite this, scholars across many centuries advanced the theory of polygenesis, attempting to substantiate it with complex arguments based in racism rather than scientific evidence. Many of these scholars were well respected, with prestigious university roles and widely read books to their name. In this sense, polygenesis reflects how racist thinking has warped human intellectual development, leading people to develop an entirely false set of ideas about the world. Moreover, polygenesis demonstrates how racist practices lead to racist thinking, not the other way around. Those who chose to believe in polygenesis tended to do so in order to justify colonialism, slavery, segregation, and other racist practices. Because of this, the theory survived for many centuries despite having no basis in reality.

Segregationist – Segregationist is the term **Kendi** uses to describe the most blatant form of racism, which involves believing that black people are inherently, permanently inferior to white people, and that black people are themselves to blame for racial disparities. Segregationist thinking tends to be explicit and overt than assimilationist thinking.

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.

DISCRIMINATION, RACIST IDEAS, AND IGNORANCE

In *Stamped from the Beginning*, Ibram X. Kendi disputes the common misconception that racism stems from ignorance. Racism doesn't derive from a *lack* of knowledge or ideas, Kendi argues, but instead is made up of its own set of ideas—the relative simplicity of which has enabled them to endure against the more complex ideas of antiracism. In his book, Kendi examines the origins of racist ideas, how they are spread, and why they are wrong. In doing so, he helps readers understand why racism has persisted and what must be done to stop it. At the same time, Kendi also rejects the notion that it is possible to stop racism simply by educating people out of their racist ideas. While a proper understanding of race and racism is vital, history proves that the most effective way to eliminate racism is by directly changing the policies and practices that perpetuate it. When this happens, racist ideas begin to lose their power.

Kendi highlights how racism and discrimination have historically been the root cause of ignorance—not the other way around. Many people believe that racism originates in "ignorance/hate," which then produces racist ideas, which then leads to racial discrimination, when in fact "this causal relationship is largely ahistorical. It has actually been the inverse relationship—racial discrimination led to racist ideas which led to ignorance and hate." The book is filled with examples of how this actual "causal relationship" works, perhaps the most important of which is slavery. Kendi points out that the system of slavery was based on racial discrimination: Black people were kidnapped from Africa, transported to the U.S., and enslaved in order to profit white settlers in the American colonies. Slavery then fostered a whole set of ideas that were in turn used to justify the system's persistence and expansion. For instance, enslavers often argued that Black people were inherently immoral or that they were physically stronger than people of other races, both of which became ways to justify Black people's enslavement.

Kendi emphasizes that because racist ideas are *ideas* (rather than identities or even full-blown ideologies) anyone can hold them, including Black people. This helps show why racism has been so powerful and enduring for so long. In order to substantiate his argument that any person can hold racist ideas, Kendi highlights five historical figures: Cotton Mather, Thomas Jefferson, William Lloyd Garrison, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Angela Davis. He breaks down the racist and/or antiracist ideas that each of these figures held, and how each reflected patterns of thought about race during their respective eras. Kendi selects each of these figures because they "were arguably the most consistently prominent or provocative racial theorists of their respective lifetimes." By featuring these five thinkers within their historical contexts, Kendi manages to cover an enormously diverse array of ideas about race.

Importantly, Kendi is able to highlight the diversity of thinking about race through five figures because each of these individuals held a number of different—and often contradictory—ideas about race. Indeed, most of the thinkers he examines held *both* racist and antiracist views (even if they came to be more closely associated with one or the other overall). This, in turn, conveys another important facet of how racist ideas persist. Because someone can hold both racist *and* antiracist ideas, racist ideas do not disappear easily. (A prime example of this is the influential Black scholar and antiracist W. E. B. Du Bois.) Racist ideas are not necessarily eliminated by anti-racist ideas but end up coexisting with them. It is partly for this reason that racist ideas are so powerful and insidious.

The other significant way in which Kendi demonstrates why

racist ideas have endured is because they are adaptable, shifting along with changes in historical context. This makes sense in the context of Kendi's argument that racial discrimination *produces* racist ideas rather than the other way around. Just as Kendi shows that slavery produced a certain set of racist ideas, he also argues that emancipation—rather than eliminating racist thinking—simply produced a different set of racist ideas. "With emancipation, racist ideas progressed to suit this new world," Kendi says. For instance, slaveholders often characterized Black people as sturdy and strong in order to justify putting them to work in unbearable conditions. After abolition, this switched to characterizing Black people as too "weak" to be able to handle freedom. This became an excuse for paternalistic control and systemic oppression of free African Americans. The ongoing persistence of racial discrimination in the Reconstruction (post-Civil War) Era meant that racist ideas continued being produced.

Similarly, the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—an event that is widely celebrated as one of the most important antiracist milestones in American history—ended up triggering a new wave of racist ideas. For example, many people believed (and still believe) that Black people no longer face discrimination and thus should be blamed for the problems they face. Even with the Civil Rights Act in place, racial discrimination continued in a new form, and a new set of racist ideas emerged as a result.

Kendi's focus on racist ideas might make it seem like the solution is to educate people into accepting antiracist ideas rather than racist ones. However, because racist ideas are produced by racial discrimination and not the other way around, Kendi explains that they cannot be eliminated by "educational persuasion." W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, was highly accomplished academically, yet he realized that this was not enough to combat racism. "No matter what Du Bois did, he could not persuade away racist ideas," Kendi explains. Yet by understanding how racist ideas are produced by discrimination, it is possible to stop them—as long as people understand that *discrimination*, not ideas, should be most urgently tackled.

SEGREGATIONISTS AND ASSIMILATIONISTS VS. ANTIRACISTS

Instead of dividing ideas about race into a binary between racism and antiracism, Kendi splits the category of racism into two further subsections. The first is segregationist ideas, which assert that Black people are inherently and permanently inferior to white people. The second is assimilationist ideas, which assert that Black people can achieve equality by becoming more like white people. In making this distinction, Kendi highlights how anti-racist theorists and activists have faced the challenge of fighting these two contradictory arguments at the same time. Moreover, Kendi indicates that although segregationist ideas are often assumed to be more concerning because of their severity, assimilationist ideas are actually more dangerous because they are insidious and superficially "acceptable." While it might seem that assimilationist ideas are a reasonable compromise between two extremes, in fact they are arguably the most harmful form of racist thinking and thus should be as vehemently opposed as segregationist thought.

For Kendi, ideas about race exist on a binary: they can only be racist or antiracist, without any kind of "compromise" in between. Yet by distinguishing between two types of racist ideas—assimilationist and segregationist—Kendi highlights the extent to which racist thinking has endured because people mistake assimilationist ideas as a reasonable compromise between racist and anti-racist views.

Kendi provides several examples to show that while assimilationist ideas can seem like a more reasonable compromise than segregationist ideas, ultimately both are forms of racist thought. Kendi gives the example of 18th-century Europeans who would forcefully train and compel Black people to act like white people in order to prove that Black people could be "improved" by molding themselves after white people. Kendi explains: "Throughout the eighteenth century's race for Enlightenment, assimilationists galloped around seeking out human experiments—'barbarians' to civilize into the 'superior' ways of Europeans—to prove segregationists wrong, and sometimes to prove slaveholders wrong." This attempt to "prove segregationists wrong" could be mistaken for an anti-racist move, when in fact it was simply a dispute between two different strains of racist thought.

One of the most dangerous aspects of assimilationist thinking is that it often falsely suggests that segregationists and anti-racists are equivalent to each other, meaning that it is "just as bad" to be antiracist as it is to be racist. Despite how illogical this sounds to many, this idea has been espoused throughout American history—and, as Kendi points out, it's still frequently voiced in the present.

Time and again, Kendi shows that just because there were disputes between segregationists and assimilations—disputes that were often won by assimilationists—didn't mean that racism was decreasing. Indeed, the book makes the important point that although there is a lot of internal contradiction within racist thought, this doesn't make it any less racist overall. Thomas Jefferson, for example, is a major figure whose life and beliefs were deeply contradictory. Jefferson "did not pick sides between polygenesists and monogenesists, between segregationists and assimilationists, between slavery and freedom," Kendi explains. "But he did pick the side of racism." This last sentence is extremely important: just because there might be contradictions between assimilationist and segregationist ideas doesn't mean that people should lose sight of the fact that *both* are racist.

Another reason why assimilationist ideas can be seen as a

greater threat to anti-racism that segregationist ones is because people who take assimilationist positions are often generally committed to the cause of antiracism. Assimilationist ideas thus threaten the progress of antiracism by jeopardizing it from within. Kendi points out that it is common to frame abolitionists as champions of antiracism because they were fighting against a severely racist institution (slavery). However, the unfortunate truth is that most abolitionists still had racist ideas, some of which were segregationist but the majority of which were assimilationist. For example, William Lloyd Garrison—a white abolitionist who is one of the five main figures in the book—wrote the preface to the formerly enslaved abolitionist Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in what was supposed to be a gesture of solidarity. However in reality, the preface "was a compellingly racist counterweight to Douglass's *Narrative*." Garrison committed his life to abolition but still ended up producing and expressing racist thought. "Though starting at different places and taking different conceptual routes, Garrison kept arriving in the same racist place as his enslaving enemies—subhuman Black inferiority," Kendi writes.

However, it is not just white historical figures who've held assimilationist views. Part of what makes assimilationist thinking so sinister is that many of the most important Black antiracist figures in history—including Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King, Jr.—have held and espoused assimilationist ideas. (Indeed, Kendi admits that he has had to come to terms with the reality that he himself—despite being a professor of Africana studies focused on the history of racist ideas—has held assimilationist views.) As a result, racist thinking has acquired and sustained legitimacy via assimilation, and it is therefore vital that people realize that both assimilation and segregation harm the cause of anti-racism.

Overall, Kendi shows that it is possible—and in fact common—for a single person to harbor segregationist, assimilationist, *and* antiracist ideas. However, through his depiction of the final two central figures in the book—W. E. B. Du Bois and Angela Davis—Kendi also proves that not everyone is condemned to harbor racist ideas. While Du Bois initially held assimilationist (and even some segregationist) views, over the course of his life he eventually shed these and became steadfast and consistent in his antiracist mentality. Meanwhile, Angela Davis is the only one of the five main figures featured in the book to have rejected all racist ideas (including assimilationist ones) from very early on in life. This is because her parents raised her to have antiracist and anti-capitalist ideas from the beginning, a fact that indicates that racist ideas—while extremely widespread—are not totally inescapable.

MEDIA, INSTITUTIONS, AND THE TRANSMISSION OF KNOWLEDGE

As a book concerned with racist ideas, *Stamped from the Beginning* plays close attention to how ideas are transmitted via media, educational institutions, political rhetoric, and scientific thought. Kendi concludes that many of these structures and institutions—from travel writing, to universities, to cinema—have had a sinister impact in spreading and popularizing racist ideas. Indeed, throughout modern history, the production of knowledge itself has usually meant the production of racism. At the same time, though, Kendi indicates that by understanding how racist ideas travel through media and institutions, it is possible to begin eliminating racist thought and replace it with antiracist knowledge.

One of the simplest ways in which racist ideas are distributed is through universities, including (and perhaps especially) those thought to be the preeminent intellectual institutions in the world. Kendi shows how polygenesis, eugenics, the supposed "benevolence" of slavery, and many other racist ideas were developed and advanced by scholars based at universities such as Cambridge, Harvard, Stanford, and similarly esteemed institutions. Universities' role as producers of racist ideas makes sense given how exclusionary universities have historically been. This fact is illustrated by the poet Phillis Wheatley, who in "To the University of Cambridge" expressed a longing to attend Harvard, which at the time was only open to white men. The fact that the immensely talented Wheatley was automatically denied admission to Harvard highlights how the university—ostensibly a place to develop and produce knowledge—ended up reproducing racist ideas by nature of its exclusionary admissions policy.

However, it was not just white universities like Harvard that contributed to racist ideas. As an immensely talented Black student entering college in the late 19th century, W. E. B. Du Bois—like Wheatley—could not initially live out his dream of going to Harvard. (Although he would later complete his doctorate there, becoming the first African American to do so.) Instead, he attended Fisk University, which at the time was the leading institution in the country for Black students. While one might assume that such a space would not contribute to the production of racist ideas, Kendi points out that Fisk was in fact a major driver of assimilationist views. Kendi writes: "Controlled by White philanthropists and instructors, Fisk was one of the nation's preeminent factories of uplift suasion and assimilationist ideas. Du Bois consumed these ideas like his peers and started reproducing them when he became the editor of Fisk's student newspaper, *The Herald*." In other words, part of what Du Bois learned at Fisk was to think of himself and other Black people as inferior and only capable of redeeming themselves through becoming closer to whiteness.

If universities were a space in which many racist ideas were

produced, the arts and media—including forms such as sermons, pamphlets, plays, travel writing, poetry, newspapers, and films—were how they reached a mass audience. Throughout history, travel has usually only been accessible to a small minority of any given society. As a result, early modern ideas about race—the precursors to the racist ideas that have existed throughout American history—were spread through literature. As Kendi explains, "Explorers wrote about their adventures, and their tales fascinated Europeans. This new travel literature gave Europeans sitting by their firesides a window into faraway lands where different-looking people resided in cultures that seemed exotic and strange." These travel writers presented a false and exoticized impression of "different-looking people," which was further distorted when ideas from travel writing were translated into more creative forms. Far from being mere entertainment, novels were an important method through which racist ideas were created and disseminated. As Kendi notes, the female novelist Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave* "was the first English novel to repeatedly use terms like 'White Men,' 'White People,' and 'Negro.'" In doing so, the novel had an enormous impact on the development of racist ideas.

However, low literacy rates among certain populations (such as poor Europeans in the 15th century and enslaved Africans in America) as well as lack of access to books meant that theater and cinema became crucial in disseminating racist ideas to mass audiences. Kendi observes that "With the English literacy rate low, many more British imaginations were churned by playwrights than by travel writers." In the 20th century, the rise of cinema continued this trend. Due to its accessibility and popularity, film became a hugely influential vehicle for transmitting racist ideas. "In the same way that *Tarzan* became the primary medium through which Americans learned about Africa, *Gone with the Wind* became the primary medium through which they learned about slavery," Kendi explains. Both *Tarzan* and *Gone with the Wind* were filled with harmful and inaccurate racist ideas, such as depicting Africans as "ape-like" and enslaved people as happily submissive to their subjugation.

While Kendi's argument about how universities and media were crucial in spreading racist ideas is powerful, he also notes that they *can* be transformed into institutions that develop and distribute antiracist thought. Both Du Bois and Angela Davis worked as university professors, using their positions to develop innovative, complex anti-racist theory. Moreover, Davis was one of the leaders of the Black Power movement, in which students and activists demanded that anti-racist thought be legitimized in universities. This drastically transformed educational institutions in the U.S. and led to the founding of the first Africana studies departments, such as the one in which Kendi himself teaches.

THE INVENTION OF BLACKNESS AND WHITENESS

In *Stamped from the Beginning*, Kendi argues that the very concepts of Blackness and whiteness, not just notions of Black inferiority, should be seen as racist. Because the ideas of a Black race and a white race are so deeply ingrained into society, it might seem like they have existed forever. However, as Kendi shows, these ideas have a specific history. Crucially, the concepts of Blackness and whiteness were invented to justify and intensify colonization, slavery, and white supremacy—racial categories are inextricable from this history. As a result, Blackness and whiteness are not neutral concepts that only become harmful when they are put to hateful or ignorant uses. Rather, the invention of race was *itself* inherently racist. However, this doesn't mean that people should pretend that race and racism don't exist. Instead, Kendi argues, it is crucial that people understand how and why the ideas of Blackness and whiteness were invented in order to properly commit themselves to antiracism.

Kendi notes that throughout history, people have held prejudiced views about those of differing ethnicity, religious faith, or tribal affiliation. However, it was only in the early modern period (when the book begins) that the overarching ideas of a white race and a Black race were invented. It was during this time that Europeans were colonizing other parts of the globe, thieving land and resources and forcing indigenous peoples into indentured servitude and slavery. In order to justify these actions, Europeans began developing racist ideas about the indigenous people they were hurting and exploiting. Crucially, this involved collapsing many different ethnicities, tribes, religions, and languages into a single category (such as "savage" or "Negro"). Although this happened all over the world, it was most intensely enacted in Africa.

Kendi shows that from the beginning, the concept of "race" was dehumanizing: "The word *race* first appeared in Frenchman Jacques de Brézé's 1481 poem 'The Hunt,' where it referred to hunting dogs. As the term expanded to include humans over the next century, it was used primarily to identify and differentiate and animalize African people." Dehumanizing African people by viewing them as akin to animals made European colonizers and enslavers feel as if they no longer had a moral duty toward them. Indeed, viewing African people as animal-like specifically justified selling them into slavery, as enslaved people were given a status equivalent to farm animals. In essence, slaves were treated as commodities, valued solely for their ability to perform agricultural labor that profited their "owners."

It was during the slavery era that the ideas of Blackness and whiteness became more solid. They were concepts that were produced by slavery but could also exist outside it—which meant that once slavery ended, these harmful concepts remained. In order for slavery to work, there needed to be a

clear and absolute distinction drawn between enslaved and non-enslaved people. This was a particular concern for wealthy enslavers who feared that poor white laborers would come to perceive themselves as having more in common with enslaved Black people than wealthy white people. As a result, "Planters responded to labor demands and laborers' unity by purchasing more African people and luring Whiteness away from Blackness." This "luring" involved, for example, instituting extremely harsh punishments on white people who collaborated or fraternized with Black people.

In order to justify and solidify Black people's status as natural slaves, white Americans developed stereotypes that connected the idea of Blackness to dehumanization and enslavement. For example, white people characterized Black people as naturally strong and sturdy and thus able to withstand the unbearable forced labor to which they were subjected. Similarly, white people came to characterize Black women as hypersexual and sexually aggressive. This was a way of justifying white men's frequent (and legally sanctioned) rape of Black women by shifting blame onto these women themselves. As a result, Blackness came to be associated with a long list of negative and dehumanized traits. This association was so strong that it outlasted slavery, and it continues to affect the way people view Blackness in the present.

Kendi shows that the invention of Blackness and whiteness wasn't just about developing negative, dehumanized ideas about Black people; it was also about developing an idea of whiteness as good, pure, and naturally supreme. Associating whiteness with goodness also began in Europe. Kendi notes, "Normalizing negative behavior in faraway African people allowed writers to de-normalize negative behavior in White people, to de-normalize what they witnessed during intense appraisals of self and nation." Writers began rhetorically associating whiteness with goodness, so that even when English writers described Black people in supposedly positive terms, they would describe their "white" souls or the "whites" of the eyes.

Kendi notes that the phrase "white trash"—even though it superficially appears to convey a negative stereotype about white people—is actually another way of upholding the idea that white supremacy is normal and correct. The phrase inadvertently maintains ideas of white superiority by suggesting that whiteness usually connotes elite status, dignity, and wealth. This obscures the reality that most white people in the U.S. are not especially wealthy and are also oppressed by the elite minority of affluent, powerful individuals.

Kendi shows that the racist invention of Blackness and whiteness far outlasted colonization and slavery, maintaining a grip on people's psychology to this day. However, he also illustrates many ways in which anti-racists have fought against the psychological hold of these concepts. At the 1965 Race and Colour Conference in Copenhagen, for example, "Scholars pointed out everyday phrases like 'black sheep,' 'blackballing,' 'blackmail,' and 'blacklisting,' among others, that had long associated Blackness and negativity." Drawing awareness to the ways in which Blackness has historically been given negative connotations helps people understand how they might have internalized these ideas and work toward reorienting their minds away from racist concepts.

THE ILLOGIC OF RACISM

Throughout *Stamped from the Beginning*, Kendi highlights the fact that racist ideas are often deceptive, disingenuous, and even entirely illogical. There are several reasons for this. For one, racism contradicts the principles that people claim to live by (such as treating others as one wishes to be treated), which means that people often do not like to openly admit to them. Furthermore, racism itself doesn't make logical sense, because it is a set of ideas rooted in a false belief about humanity (that one racial group is superior to another). As a result of all these factors, racist ideas are rarely expressed in a straightforward, logical manner—and this means that they can sometimes be difficult to detect or understand. By paying close attention to the covert (hidden or disguised), paradoxical, and illogical forms that racist ideas take, Kendi provides the clarity necessary to understand racism and work toward an antiracist mindset.

Perhaps the main reason why racism so often takes covert forms is because it contradicts the principles most people claim to live by—both throughout history and in the present. Perversely, the result has often been that people claim that their racist ideas are actually an *expression* of these principles. Throughout the book, Kendi points to people who disguise their racist ideas because these notions conflict with prevailing moral principles. These include the Christian principle of treating others as one wishes to be treated, the Enlightenment emphasis on the importance of freedom and equality for all, or the utilitarian idea that society should be organized in a way that benefits as many people as possible.

Of the five key figures whom Kendi bases the book around, almost all struggle with this issue of contradiction and hypocrisy—but none more so than Thomas Jefferson. In the section of the book on Jefferson, Kendi emphasizes that the president's entire life and career was plagued by paradox: "As a holder of nearly two hundred people with no known plans to free them, Thomas Jefferson authored the heralded American philosophy of freedom. What did it mean for Jefferson to call 'liberty' an 'inalienable right' when he enslaved people?" Kendi provides no answer to this question, because the truth is that there never was one. People like Jefferson were not able to find a resolution to the enormous contradictions between the principles of freedom and equality that they claimed to live by and their racist ideas and actions.

Yet while some figures failed to acknowledge the contradiction

between their racist position and their moral commitments, others attempted to smooth over this contradiction by claiming that racism was actually a *manifestation* of their moral commitments. Kendi points out that, both historically and in the present, very few people would explicitly acknowledge their own ideas as "racist." Instead they use euphemisms: "God's word, nature's design, science's plan, or plain old common sense." Crucially, each of these euphemisms implies that racism is an expression of a certain set of principles—whether that be Christianity, science, or reason. Similarly, when racist ideas are put into practice, people have often justified this by saying it is a manifestation of moral principles, even when this patently untrue. Perhaps the best example is segregation, which operated according to the principle of "separate but equal." As Kendi emphasizes, in reality segregation was very obviously "separate and *un*equal."

Kendi suggests that one of the most troubling groups of people whose racist ideas conflicted with their stated moral principles were white abolitionists. These individuals—including William Lloyd Garrison, another of the central five figures whom Kendi bases the book around—often committed their entire lives to abolition, making significant sacrifices in the process. Yet while the abolitionist movement challenged some racist ideas, it also produced new ones of its own (including "Africans being naturally religious and forgiving people, who always responded to whippings with loving compassion"). Abolitionists did not acknowledge that there was a contradiction between the principles of freedom and equality they were upholding and the inaccurate stereotypes about Black people they were disseminating. Indeed, they claimed that disseminating these stereotypes was in the interest of racial equality—a clearly paradoxical argument.

Another reason why racist ideas usually take paradoxical and illogical forms is because racism is an inherently illogical way of thinking, not an accurate way of describing reality. Perhaps the most extreme examples of the paradoxical function of racist ideas occurred during slavery. As Kendi points out, it is difficult to imagine how it came to be that planters would sit and look out over the fields at enslavers forced to toil in extreme heat and call these enslaved people "lazy." Yet bizarre as it may seem, the idea of Black people's inherent laziness was one of the most commonly voiced racist ideas when slavery was legal in the U.S.

Furthermore, while the most exaggerated examples of the paradox of racism are rooted in slavery, Kendi emphasizes that racist ideas still operate according to this same illogic today. He notes that during Barack Obama's presidency, Republicans and right-wing commentators frequently claimed that Obama was racist against white people. But Kendi points out that the president made negative statements about Black people far more often than he did about white people. Through analyzing examples like this, it becomes clear that paradox and illogic are part of how racist ideas work because people often don't hold racist ideas because they think they are *true*—rather, they hold them because they want to hold them.

By understanding that racist ideas often take covert, paradoxical, and illogical forms, readers will be better able to identify racist ideas (including in their own thinking). This process can be difficult and painful, as almost no one would willingly admit to holding racist views. Yet because the way racism operates is so sneaky, it is even more vital that people learn to understand the veiled, indirect qualities of racist sentiments. It is only in this way that racist thinking can be properly confronted with antiracism.

SYMBOLS

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

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

The American Declaration of Independence, drafted by Thomas Jefferson and published on July 4, 1776, represents the contradiction that lies at the heart of American society: the Declaration espouses egalitarian principles, but, Kendi argues, the United States was defined by racist ideas from the very beginning.

The Declaration also represents the illogic of racism. In the Revolutionary era, the Declaration allowed white American men to declare themselves free from the metaphorical slavery of British colonial rule, all while continuing to *actually* enslave African people. In *Stamped from the Beginning*, the Declaration is featured most heavily in the section on Jefferson, who was the Declaration's primary author. In this section, Kendi emphasizes that Jefferson's worldview was always defined by paradox; he straddled both assimilationist and segregationist as well as pro-slavery and anti-slavery positions. These unresolved contradictions are represented in the Declaration itself: it asserts that all men are born free and equal, but it was written by an enslaver in a country where slavery was both legal and booming.

From one perspective, this hypocrisy might suggest that the Declaration is a worthless document—and an insult to the enslaved Black people whom it implied do not count as human. But at the same time, Kendi notes that across American history, Black people utilized the Declaration in order to fight against racism and demand equal treatment. For example, when Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale wrote the Black Panther Party's 10-Point Platform in 1966, they quoted from the Declaration. In this sense, Kendi argues that while the Declaration may be denounced as a document so illogical and hypocritical that it is practically meaningless, it is also possible to see antiracist potential within it. Indeed, viewing the Declaration in the

complex historical context in which it was written allows for the best understanding of the document's limits and failures as well as its potential for liberation.

TALENTED TENTH

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois developed the elitist, assimilationist idea of the Talented Tenth, which refers to the minority of Black people whose skill, intelligence, and refinement will supposedly help improve the status and conditions of Black people as a whole. This idea is part of the broader assimilationist concept of uplift suasion, the notion that nonblack people could be persuaded out of racist ideas by encountering examples of talented, refined, and high-achieving Black people. Kendi shows how Du Bois's commitment to the idea of the Talented Tenth was rooted in his own personal life. From the first moment he experienced racist social exclusion at the age of 10, Du Bois was determined to prove himself equal to white people by achieving extraordinary feats. This included being the first Black person to earn a PhD from Harvard, studying abroad at the world-famous University of Berlin, and establishing himself as a leader of the Black community through his role as editor of the NAACP's journal *The Crisis*.

But Du Bois's own life also highlights why the Talented Tenth was always doomed to fail as an antiracist strategy. The fact that Du Bois earned a PhD from Harvard, for example, did not persuade people that Black people were the intellectual equals of white people. At best, it encouraged them to treat him as a tokenized "extraordinary" Black man, and at worst it led them to denounce the whole situation on the basis that a Black man with a Harvard PhD was a joke or an outrage. Ultimately, the failure of the Talented Tenth strategy confirms Kendi's message that racism cannot be persuaded or educated away. This is a principle that Du Bois himself came to accept later in life, when he rejected the Talented Tenth, uplift suasion, and other aspects of his earlier, assimilationist thinking. At the same time, the fact that the principle of the Talented Tenth still has an impact on society today (although the phrase "Talented Tenth" is seldom used) shows how racist ideas—even when they are illogical and wrong—tend to have a remarkably enduring power.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bold Type Books edition of *Stamped from the Beginning* published in 2017.

Prologue Quotes

I was taught the popular folktale of racism, 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 many of America's most influentially racist ideas, it became quite obvious that this folktale, though sensible, was not based on a firm footing of historical evidence. Ignorance/hate→[JEK1]racist ideas→discrimination: this causal relationship is largely ahistorical. It has actually been the inverse relationship—racial discrimination led to racist ideas which led to ignorance and hate. Racial discrimination→racist ideas→ignorance/hate: this is the causal relationship driving America's history of race relations.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has given an overview of how *Stamped from the Beginning* is structured, explaining that he will narrate the history of racist ideas in America by focusing on five influential figures from different periods in American history. He has noted that the book will not provide a simple account of racial progress or of racism going from overt to covert. The truth is more complicated, and this is because—contrary to popular belief—racist ideas aren't born out of ignorance and hate but rather designed to justify discriminatory policies. In this passage, Kendi explains how this understanding of how racist ideas work is popular but wrong.

Kendi shows that there is logical appeal to the idea that racist ideas are formed out of ignorance and hate. He acknowledges that it is tempting to believe this is true, particularly given that it allows certain people—"ignorant and hateful people"—to be scapegoated and blamed. In reality, however, racist *policies* produce racist ideas. This distinction might not seem important but is actually hugely consequential, as it means that people bear more responsibility for racist ideas than they might want to believe. If only a few ignorant and hateful people are responsible for propagating racist ideas, then this lets the majority of people feel blameless. Yet if racial discrimination is the problem, this means that everyone who benefits from anti-Black discrimination—that is, everyone who is not Black—shares responsibility for racist thinking.

Chapter 1: Human Hierarchy Quotes

❝❝ All in all, ethnic and religious and color prejudice existed in the ancient world. Constructions of races—White Europe, Black Africa, for instance—did not, and therefore racist ideas did not. But crucially, the foundations of race and racist ideas were laid. And so were the foundations for egalitarianism, antiracism, and antislavery laid in Greco-Roman antiquity.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has explained how, in colonial New England, Puritans were influenced by their study of Ancient Greek philosophy in developing the idea of a hierarchy among different groups of people. The philosopher Aristotle, for example, claimed that Africans were "ugly" and naturally suited to enslavement; once Christianity was founded, Christians began asserting that human hierarchies and slavery were the will of God. In this passage, Kendi explains how the foundations of racism were laid even before the concept of race was actually invented.

In the ancient world, people did hold prejudices against others based on factors like ethnicity, religion, and skin color. Yet the idea of "race" that's familiar to us in the modern day hadn't actually been invented yet. (As Kendi will explain later in the book, this invention took place in the early modern period of history). In one sense, "racism" speaks to a general tendency among humanity to harbor prejudice and enact discrimination based on group difference. Yet "racism" also has a specific history, and it is important to understand this history in order to grasp how racism came to shape the modern world—as well as how it can be defeated.

Chapter 3: Coming to America Quotes

❝❝ Normalizing negative behavior in faraway African people allowed writers to de-normalize negative behavior in White people, to de-normalize what they witnessed during intense appraisals of self and nation.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has explained how, in the 16th century, Europeans became avid readers of travel writing. Travel narratives composed by European explorers portrayed Africa, and African people, as strange and exotic. More importantly, these narratives also played a major role in creating and disseminating racist views that justified colonization and slavery. Yet as Kendi points out in this passage, "normalizing negative behavior in faraway African people" had a further purpose in addition to making it seem normal and right to enslave Africans. Developing the idea that Blackness was inferior also served to make whiteness seem superior. In this sense, when white European travel writers were writing about Africans, they were also writing about themselves.

As Kendi indicates in this passage, the concept of whiteness was developed in implicit terms. Rather than directly claiming that white people were more intelligent, noble, and morally pure, travel writers subtly conveyed that this was the case via the *implicit* comparison with supposedly inferior and immoral Africans. In this sense, the concepts of Blackness and whiteness were co-developed alongside each other—neither one would be able to exist without the other.

❝❝ Planters responded to labor demands and laborers' unity by purchasing more African people and luring Whiteness away from Blackness. In the first official recognition of slavery in Virginia, legislators stipulated, in 1660 (and in stricter terms in 1661), that any White servant running away "in company with any negroes" shall serve for the time of the "said negroes absence"—even if it meant life.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the early British settlements in North America, including Jamestown in Virginia. These settlements had a social hierarchy that placed wealthy white planters, ministers, and merchants at the top and enslaved Africans at the bottom. The great demand for labor in these settlements meant that the planter elites were concerned about workers having too much power. In order to stop this, they instituted harsh punishments for collaboration and solidarity between white and Black laborers, as described in this chapter. The overall effect of this was to solidify the distinction between indentured

servant and slave, and to further underline the association between Blackness and enslavement.

In order to grasp the full significance of the shift described in this quotation, it is important to understand that life for white indentured servants in Virginia was extremely harsh. The workers were poor, their freedom was restricted, and the labor they performed was difficult. In every material sense, indentured servants had far more in common with enslaved Black people than they did with wealthy planters. For this reason, planters needed to massively disincentivize indentured servants from collaborating with enslaved Africans. In doing so, they accelerated the creation of whiteness and Blackness, concepts that were still in development during this time.

Chapter 7: Enlightenment Quotes

[...] whenever ethnic racism did set the natural allies on American plantations apart, in the manner that racism set the natural allies in American poverty apart, enslavers hardly minded. They were usually willing to deploy any tool—intellectual or otherwise—to suppress slave resistance and ensure returns on their investments.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has explained how, during the Age of the Enlightenment, racist ideas became more secular, widespread, and complex. He notes that European scholars developed rankings of different African ethnicities, which affected the price at which enslaved people were sold. In this passage, Kendi discusses how this form of "ethnic racism" served to divide enslaved people who might otherwise have seen one another as "natural allies." Although this wasn't the primary *intention* of creating ethnic hierarchies, it certainly benefited enslavers by preventing solidarity and resistance among the enslaved.

Indeed, Kendi draws a parallel between the way ethnic racism prevented the enslaved forming bonds and the way racism in general prevented poor white people from joining forces with the enslaved. Like the relation between enslaved people of different ethnicities, the connection between impoverished white workers and enslaved Black people should have been a "natural" alliance. These two groups were both oppressed by a common enemy (albeit in different ways and to different degrees). Yet this common enemy—wealthy white landowners—were able to stop the two groups from collaborating by implementing a hierarchy of racial difference. (In practice this meant granting poor white people privileges, rights, and resources while depriving enslaved Black people of these same things.)

Actually, most of the leading Enlightenment intellectuals were producers of racist ideas *and* abolitionist thought.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has discussed the French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire's belief in racial hierarchies and explained that in the 18th century, enslavers embraced the belief of ethnic hierarchies among Africans, which affected the price placed on the enslaved. Yet while there may have been similarities between Voltaire's views on race and ethnicity and that of enslavers, Voltaire himself—like most Enlightenment philosophers—was opposed to slavery. In this short quotation, Kendi conveys this contradiction and emphasizes that it does not have an easy resolution.

It might at first seem strange or even paradoxical that a group of thinkers committed to arguing against slavery would also produce racist ideas. However, as Kendi has indicated in the book thus far, it was hardly the case that every abolitionist was also an anti-racist. Indeed, there were even some people who made a *racist* case for abolition, such as those who opposed slavery not because it was a brutally dehumanizing institution, but because they did not want to live among Africans. Meanwhile, even those who took a less obviously racist view often made arguments against slavery that nonetheless perpetuated the idea that Black people were inferior.

Chapter 8: Black Exhibits Quotes

❝❞ All the vices attributed to Black people, from idleness to treachery to theft, were the "offspring of slavery," Rush wrote. In fact, those unsubstantiated vices attributed to Black people were the offspring of the illogically racist mind. Were captives really lazier, more deceitful, and more crooked than their enslavers? It was the latter who forced others to work for them, treacherously whipping them when they did not, and stealing the proceeds of their labor when they did. In any case, Rush was the first activist to commercialize the persuasive, though racist, abolitionist theory that slavery made Black people inferior. Whether benevolent or not, any idea that suggests that Black people as a group are inferior, that something is wrong with Black people, is a racist idea.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Benjamin Rush

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

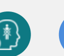
Kendi has described the "Black exhibits" that were commonly paraded in the 18th century in support of the abolitionist cause. These were supposedly "exceptional" Black people who had been educated and trained in white institutions and—according to the assimilationist perspective—had been improved by becoming like white people. University of Pennsylvania professor Benjamin Rush was an assimilationist who anonymously published a pamphlet in which he argued that the negative traits Black people supposedly had were caused by slavery, not Black people's innate nature. While this argument was in service of abolition, as Kendi explains in this paragraph, it was still racist.

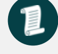
Rush's point might seem initially justified and harmless, as he aims to displace blame from the enslaved toward those who enslave them. Yet as Kendi points out, beneath the surface Rush's statement is both racist and completely illogical. It is clearly the *enslavers* who are lazy, deceitful, and cruel—not the enslaved. These ideas don't have any grounding in reality but are projections designed to reassure enslavers and justify their cruelty. Kendi argues that Black people—whether enslaved or not—do not have any traits *as a group*, whether deceitfulness or physical strength. No racial group does. Asserting that a racial group *does* have collective traits is racist misinformation—even when it is done in service of abolition or another worthy goal.

Chapter 9: Created Equal Quotes

❝❞ As a holder of nearly two hundred people with no known plans to free them, Thomas Jefferson authored the heralded American philosophy of freedom. What did it mean for Jefferson to call "liberty" an "inalienable right" when he enslaved people? It is hard to figure out what Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and indentured White servants meant when they demanded liberty in 1776. But what about Jefferson and other slaveholders like him, whose wealth and power were dependent upon their land and their slaves?

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Thomas Jefferson

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the escalating tensions between American and Britain in the leadup to the Revolutionary War. While American leaders decried the English restrictions on their freedom, the English responded by pointing to the hypocrisy of enslavers protesting curbs placed on *their* own liberty. These tensions culminated in the American Declaration of Independence, drafted by Thomas Jefferson in 1776. In this passage, Kendi reflects on the mysterious contradictions embodied by this document, which was written by an enslaver yet asserts that "all men are created equal" with a right to "life, liberty, & the pursuit of happiness."

One of the most important aspects of this passage is its illumination of the paradoxical and counterintuitive nature of racist thought. As Kendi emphasizes, it was very clear what Black people and other oppressed groups wanted when they demanded liberty during this era. Yet due to the illogical and contradictory nature of racist thinking, Jefferson's argument that all "men" in America had the right to freedom is difficult—even impossible—to understand. Indeed, what is perhaps most baffling about the contradictions within the Declaration of Independence is that there is no reference to them within the document. It is as if Jefferson and the other members of America's slaveholding political elite were not even *aware* of the hypocrisy of demanding freedom while they kept Black people in bondage. To some scholars, this is taken as proof of just how dehumanizing slavery and anti-Blackness were, as it didn't even occur to enslavers to think of the enslaved

as people.

The ambitious politician, maybe fearful of alienating potential friends, maybe torn between Enlightenment antislavery and American proslavery, maybe honestly unsure, did not pick sides between polygenesists and monogenesists, between segregationists and assimilationists, between slavery and freedom. But he did pick the side of racism.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Thomas Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the range of confused and contradictory yet authoritatively stated claims about race that Thomas Jefferson makes in his influential book *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Jefferson positions himself as an egalitarian and believer in individual freedom above everything, yet his demeaning views about Black people clearly undermine this. In this passage, Kendi points out that Jefferson never resolved the contradictions that existed within his position on race and slavery. This could be due to any of the reasons Kendi lists here—or a combination of all of them. As Kendi illustrates in this quotation, Jefferson had various incentives to maintain his contradictory views.

This passage—and the section of the book on Jefferson in general—challenges the idea that racist ideas are straightforward and coherent. As Kendi emphasizes, Jefferson was both for and against slavery; he argued for and against assimilation; and he believed in both polygenesis (the theory that races are biologically distinct) and monogenesis (the theory that all races originate from the same group). Some might be assume that racist people are always fully and consciously convinced of their views, when in reality—as the story of Jefferson shows—this is often far from the case. However, as Kendi emphasizes at the end of the passage, the confused and contradictory nature of racist thought doesn't make it any less racist.

Chapter 12: Colonization Quotes

On July 2, 1826, Jefferson seemed to be fighting to stay alive. The eighty-three-year-old awoke before dawn on July 4 and beckoned his enslaved house servants. The Black faces gathered around his bed. They were probably his final sight, and he gave them his final words. He had come full circle. In his earliest childhood memory and in his final lucid moment, Jefferson rested in the comfort of slavery.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the final years of Jefferson's life, during which time Jefferson refused to free any of the people he enslaved aside from Sally Hemings and the children Jefferson fathered with her. Struck down by ill health in 1825, Jefferson became bedridden; his final visitor was the half-brother of (later) Confederate general Robert E. Lee. In this passage, Kendi describes Jefferson's death, which took place at his home in Monticello surrounded by his Black slaves. This passage is striking and disturbing for the way it emphasizes the "comfort of slavery."

It can be easy to forget that for many enslavers, slavery was a source of happiness, assurance, and care. For those who grew up having slaves, as Jefferson did, slavery likely played a role in the happy, comforting memories of childhood. Many enslavers claimed that they loved those they held in bondage and were loved by them in return. They ignored the obvious reality that subjecting a person to the brutality, degradation, and cruelty of slavery is as far from a loving act as it is possible to get. Moreover, they ignored the fact that enslaved people *had* to act as though they loved their enslavers, when in reality love is arguably not even possible within such a cruel and coercive relationship. This quotation thus provides a disturbing suggestion about why Jefferson, despite his egalitarian ideas, never properly opposed slavery: on a personal level, it brought him comfort and happiness.

Chapter 13: Gradual Equality Quotes

❝ If Blacks did not violently resist, then they were cast as naturally servile. And yet, whenever they did fight, reactionary commentators, in both North and South, classified them as barbaric animals who needed to be caged in slavery. Those enslavers who sought comfort in myths of natural Black docility hunted for those whom they considered the real agitators: abolitionists like Garrison. Georgia went as far as offering a reward of $5,000 (roughly $109,000 today) for anyone who brought Garrison to the state for trial.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), William Lloyd Garrison

Related Themes:

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the rebellion of Nat Turner, an enslaved man who was guided by a vision from God to kill his master and over 50 other enslavers. Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison disapproved of Turner's Rebellion, horrified by its violent methods and concerned that it would dissuade people from supporting abolition. In this passage, Kendi explains how two oppositional racist ideas sought to undermine enslaved people's resistance in the antebellum period. People would argue that Black people were both "naturally servile" *and* naturally "barbaric," regardless of the fact that these are two completely oppositional ideas. When the reality of resistance among enslaved people could not be denied, enslavers blamed "outside agitators"—white Northerners like Garrison.

This passage demonstrates of the illogic of racism, showing how racist thought is necessarily illogical because it is based in denial of reality. Kendi's words also illuminate how racist ideas are created in order to justify discrimination. Enslavers wanted to continue to hold Black people in bondage and would thus turn to whatever argument was most convenient in order to justify this. It is also worth noting that, even though this part of the book describes the early 19th century, the term "outside agitators" is still used today. When Black communities protest and riot in response to police brutality, some media outlets and politicians blame outside agitators (such as white anarchists), rather than acknowledging that Black people themselves are resisting.

Chapter 14: Imbruted or Civilized Quotes

❝ Presenting slaveholders as evil, the literature challenged some racist ideas, such as the Black incapacity for freedom, yet at the same time produced other racist ideas, such as Africans being naturally religious and forgiving people, who always responded to whippings with loving compassion. The movement's ubiquitous logo pictured a chained African, kneeling, raising his weak arms up to an unseen heavenly God or hovering White savior. Enslaved Africans were to wait for enslavers to sustain them, colonizationists to evacuate them, and abolitionists to free them.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has noted that a staggering one million pieces of abolitionist literature were published in the year 1835 alone. This was part of a reinvigorated abolitionist movement that had a new and distinct character when compared to the previous movement of the Revolutionary Period. In this passage, Kendi describes how this literature both challenged *and* perpetuated racist ideas. He argues that the abolitionist movement is a prime example of the argument he makes throughout the book: that throughout American history, antiracist ideas have often intermingled with racist ones. On first glance, the abolitionist movement might seem like a solidly antiracist enterprise—however, as Kendi shows in this passage, abolitionists were actually guilty of creating and disseminating racist thought.

The image Kendi describes in this passage of a feeble, enslaved African person kneeling and begging for help is one of the most famous images associated with the abolitionist movement and the antebellum period more broadly. And, as Kendi notes here, it is far from an innocuous one. It helps perpetuate the idea that Black people are helpless and submissive—almost like children—and that they rely on white people for authority and guidance. Indeed, as Kendi indicates at the end of this passage, enslavers, colonizers, and abolitionists arguably occupied a similar position: all of these groups positioned themselves as having authority over Black people and the right to decide their fate.

Chapter 17: History's Emancipator Quotes

❝ The *New York Times* reported at the end of 1861 that enslaved Africans were "earnestly desirous of liberty." The growing number of runaways proved that Confederate reports of contented captives was mere propaganda. This form of Black resistance—not persuasion—finally started to eradicate the racist idea of the docile Black person in northern minds.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216-217

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the beginning of the American Civil War, a battle over slavery that threatened to destroy the entire nation. He has explained how the federal government ruled that Union forces were allowed to seize Confederate property—including enslaved people—as "contraband," and how thousands of enslaved refugees ended up being placed in horrific contraband camps where a quarter of them died. Nonetheless, enslaved people kept fleeing. In this passage, Kendi explains how these mass acts of self-emancipation finally began to challenge the racist idea that Black people were naturally submissive and "docile." It became undeniably clear that Black people were vigorously opposed to slavery and would risk everything—including their lives—to secure their freedom.

This idea forms a crucial part of Kendi's argument about how racist ideas work. Throughout the book, he has shown that attempts to persuade people out of racist ideas through debate or persuasion have almost never worked. It is only when historical conditions change—for example, when the possibility of emancipation emerges after centuries of slavery—that racist ideas are forced to change too.

Chapter 19: Reconstructing Slavery Quotes

❝ Southern Blacks defended themselves in the war of re-enslavement, lifted up demands for rights and land, and issued brilliant antiracist retorts to the prevailing racist ideas. If any group should be characterized as "lazy," it was the planters, who had lived in idleness on stolen labor," resolved a Petersburg, Virginia, mass meeting. It had always been amazing to enslaved people how someone could lounge back, drink lemonade, and look out over the field, and call the bent-over pickers lazy. To the racist forecast that Blacks would not be able to take care of themselves, one emancipated person replied, "We used to support ourselves and our masters too when we were slaves and I reckon we can take care of ourselves now."

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 235-236

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the end of the American Civil War: even before President Lincoln's assassination, the question of what rights and freedoms the formerly enslaved should have had been the subject of intense conflict. Ultimately, the U.S government passed oppressive laws that effectively recreated slavery by another name. In this passage, Kendi describes how the formerly enslaved rejected the false racist ideas used to justify the racial oppression that continued in the post-Emancipation period. As their words indicate, freed people were quite aware of how ironic and insulting it was for them to be called lazy or incapable of independence by those who they'd been forced to serve.

Indeed, this passage speaks to how racist ideas are wrongly considered to protect those they discriminate against. Earlier in the book, Kendi described how, in the early modern period, theorists developed the concept of the Black race (with all its negative associations) in part to portray whiteness as pure, moral, and superior. And as this passage indicates, when white enslavers accused enslaved Black people of being lazy or incapable, it was a way of displacing characteristics that white people *themselves* had. This is so absurd that it is difficult to believe it ever worked. Indeed, this passage arguably suggests that the absurdity and illogic of racism is part of why it *does* work. When people choose to hold beliefs that are obviously false, they demonstrate a political commitment that's far more powerful than belief in true facts.

And if poor Whites were "White trash," then what were elite Whites? Black consumers of racist ideas had come to associate Whiteness with wealth and power, and education and slaveholding. Only through the "White trash" construction could ideas of superior Whiteness be maintained, as it made invisible the majority of White people, the millions in poverty, by saying they were not ordinary Whites: they were "White trash." Similarly, the upwardly mobile Blacks were not really Black: they were extraordinary. At some point, racist and classist White elites started embracing the appellation to demean low-income Whites. "White trash" conveyed that White elites were the ordinary representatives of Whiteness.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 235-236

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has explained that President Andrew Johnson was resistant to giving Black people voting rights in the Reconstruction Era. This is because Johnson feared that Black people had come to resent poor white people and would thus vote against them, even if this meant aligning themselves with wealthy planters. While Johnson likely also had racist motivations for not wanting to introduce Black suffrage, Kendi explains that his concerns were well-founded. The formerly enslaved *had* come to resent poor white people for the way they participated in slavery, "doing the master's dirty work." At the same time, as he explains in this passage, the resentment freedmen felt toward poor white people also suggests they had internalized racist ideas associating whiteness with wealth, power, and natural authority.

This passage is significant for the way it shows that Black people were participants in constructing the concepts of the white and Black race. Black people internalized racist ideas not only about Blackness, but about whiteness too. While calling poor white people "white trash" was obviously disparaging, paradoxically, this phrase actually helped solidify the association between whiteness and elite status. The phrase "white trash" is constructed like an oxymoron: poor white people are thought to be the exceptions that drag down the usually refined and elite category of whiteness. Of course, in reality—as Kendi explains here—the majority of white people in the South were not wealthy or powerful. Rather, most were poor workers who had more in common economically with Black people than they did with wealthy planters.

Chapter 20: Reconstructing Blame Quotes

Hate fueled the lynching era. But behind this hatred lay racist ideas that had evolved to question Black freedoms at every stage. And behind these racist ideas were powerful White men, striving by word and deed to regain absolute political, economic, and cultural control of the South.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described the failure of Reconstruction, explaining that this failure was essentially caused by racist opposition to Black emancipation yet was blamed on Black people themselves. Even while the legal rights and protections introduced during Reconstruction were still in place, Black people faced such brutal violence and intimidation from white Southerners that daily life could be miserable—and accessing their ostensible rights (such as the right to vote) was often impossible. This continued in the "lynching era," as these rights were eroded anyway. In this passage, Kendi explains how life in the post-Reconstruction South might seem like an example of how racism is fueled by ignorance and hate. Yet he suggests the truth is actually a little different.

Importantly, Kendi connects lynching—which was carried out by vigilantes, even if these people also held positions of power—to the policies being made by those in government. Elected officials may have balked at the brutality of lynching and strongly condemned it, but the truth is that the discriminatory policies they put in place were part of what made lynching possible. (Indeed, Kendi suggests that these discriminatory policies are, in some sense, the *main* cause of lynching, although others might dispute this.) Discriminatory policies contributed to a general climate of anti-Blackness—what Kendi describes as a total assault on "Black freedoms"—that, in turn, made lynching happen.

Chapter 21: Renewing the South Quotes

Controlled by White philanthropists and instructors, Fisk was one of the nation's preeminent factories of uplift suasion and assimilationist ideas. Du Bois consumed these ideas like his peers and started reproducing them when he became the editor of Fisk's student newspaper, *The Herald*.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), W. E. B. Du

Bois

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

W.E.B. Du Bois grew up in Great Barrington, a small town in Massachusetts. Having been made aware at age 10 that white people thought less of him due to his race, Du Bois became determined to prove them wrong. He fantasized about going to Harvard—but instead, local white philanthropists in his town gathered funds for him to go to Fisk, which was the U.S.'s top Black university at the time. In this passage, Kendi explains that Fisk was run by white people and that it specialized in "uplift suasion" (the idea that Black people's high achievement is what will dissuade others from discriminating against them). This means that even though Fisk was a Black university, it generated anti-Black ideas. This corresponds to what Kendi has already mentioned about the esteemed 19th-century Black institutions, which tended to be controlled white people. These institutions also tended to be assimilationist and organized by the same racist hierarchy that defined wider U.S. society.

This, in turn, highlights the limits of using education as a way of advancing Black people's status in society. Although being able to receive a high-quality education at Fisk was, in some ways, a transformative opportunity for Du Bois and his peers, it also came with major setbacks. No one is born with racist ideas—including assimilationist ideas—but Du Bois learned and internalized them while studying at university. Fisk essentially taught Du Bois to see himself and other Black people as inferior. This is certainly a steep cost to pay for education, and it arguably undermines the rest of what Du Bois learned during his studies.

Chapter 23: Black Judases Quotes

Blacks in the early twentieth century would joke that the first English word immigrants learned was "nigger."

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has explained that in the early 1900s, there was a surge of immigrants arriving in the U.S. from Europe, Asia, and Latin America. These immigrants often faced racist, ethnic, and religious discrimination. Some chose to stand in solidarity with Black people, but most didn't, instead internalizing racist ideas. In this quotation, Kendi relates that Black people at this time were aware of how quickly immigrants learned to repeat American anti-Black ideas, including through use of the n-word (an anti-Black racial slur).

Black people in the early 20th century would also have been aware of the that non-Black people of color and other marginalized immigrants benefitted from adopting anti-Black ideas. They may have still faced a host of other challenges, but by joining the chorus of American anti-Black racism, they could signal that they were the "right" kind of immigrant with the capacity to successfully assimilate into American culture. This idea is significant due to the way it shatters myths of the U.S. as a harmonious "melting pot" where racial and ethnic differences were accepted and celebrated. Indeed, while this could sometimes be true, Kendi argues that it was always grounded on a foundation of pervasive anti-Blackness.

Arguably the only thing that Kendi's description of immigrants' racism fails to mention is the fact that anti-Blackness is not only a U.S. phenomenon, but also something that most immigrants would have brought with them from their home countries. While racism in the U.S. has a particular character (one symbolized by the n-word), anti-Blackness is far from a uniquely American phenomenon.

Uplift suasion had been deployed for more than a century, and its effect in 1903? American racism may have never been worse. But neither its undergirding racist ideas, nor its historical failure, nor the extraordinary Negro construction ensuring its continued failure had lessened the faith of reformers. Uplift suasion had been and remained one of the many great White hopes of racist America.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

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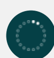
Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 294

Explanation and Analysis

In 1903, Du Bois published what would become his most

famous book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. This book combined assimilationist and antiracist ideas; one of its most influential arguments was that the "Talented Tenth" should uplift the rest of the Black race. Scholars, leaders, and reformers alike embraced this racist and classist idea. Yet as Kendi explains in this quotation, it should have been very obvious by 1903 that "uplift suasion" (the idea that Black people's achievements would dissuade others from discriminating against them) did not work.

There had never been a shortage of Black people who have displayed extraordinary talent and skill in spite of discrimination against them. Yet the existence of these people never managed to eliminate the general public's racist beliefs. This historical reality demonstrates an important fact about the illogical way that racism works. As Kendi describes, leaders and reformers who proclaimed that they were committed to ending racism did not abandon the tactic of uplift suasion, even though it was very clear that it didn't work. There are likely many reasons for this: some may have been naïve or unaware of how long uplift suasion had been failing. Yet for others, continuing to use a failing tactic may have indicated that they were not actually committed to ending racism in the first place.

Chapter 24: Great White Hopes Quotes

"North American negroes… in culture and language," Boas said, were "essentially European." Boas was "absolutely opposed to all kind of attempts to foster racial solidarity," including among his own Jewish people. He, like other assimilationists, saw the United States as a melting pot in which all the cultural colors became absorbed together (into White Americanness). Ironically, assimilationists like Boas hated racial solidarity, but kept producing racist ideas based on racial solidarity.

Related Characters: Franz Boas, Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

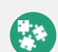
The American intellectual landscape of the early 1900s was defined by ongoing discussions of biological essentialism, Social Darwinism, and eugenics. Franz Boas, the famous German-Jewish scholar credited with founding the field of anthropology, had stunned Du Bois and others in the audience during his commencement address at the University of Atlanta by asserting that Black people were not inferior and describing the majesty of precolonial West African kingdoms. At the same time, as Kendi describes here, Boas was still very much an assimilationist and thus a racist. His version of egalitarianism was not based in "racial solidarity" but rather in racial *sameness*.

The argument Kendi makes in this passage might seem confusing or even contradictory. Boas is an assimilationist (and thus a racist) who fashions himself as an antiracist. He is "absolutely opposed" to racial solidarity yet produces racist ideas that are informed by racial solidarity. All of these apparent paradoxes illuminate the complex and illogical way that racism works. As Kendi has shown throughout the book, figures like Boas, who may commit themselves to eradicating racism, can be just as adept at producing racist ideas as segregationists are. Moreover, to say that Boas' racism is based on "racial solidarity" highlights that Boas did recognize points of connection and possible alliance between different racial groups. However, he then helped erase this possibility of solidarity by articulating a vision of the future where racial difference no longer exists and all races have collapsed into "White Americanness."

Chapter 26: Media Suasion Quotes

The Talented Tenth's attempt at media suasion was a lost cause from the start. While "negative" portrayals of Black people often reinforced racist ideas, "positive" portrayals did not necessarily weaken racist ideas. The "positive portrayals could be dismissed as extraordinary Negroes, and the "negative" portrayals could be generalized as typical. Even if the racial reformers managed to one day replace all "negative" portrayals with "positive portrayals in the mainstream media, then, like addicts, racists would then turn to other suppliers.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 302

Explanation and Analysis

In the midst of the Harlem Renaissance, a split emerged among the Black cultural elite. The assimilationist Talented Tenth (the high-achieving Black elite) fretted about the media's depiction of poor Black people as sensual, hypersexual, and debauched. The antiracist elite, on the other hand, chose not to concern themselves with this issue. As Kendi explains in this passage, the Talented Tenth's fretting was pointless—using the media to fix racism was

never going to work, anyway. While Kendi doesn't deny that racist media portrayals of Black people had a harmful effect, the problem could not be solved by replacing these portrayals with positive ones. The issue is that there was an appetite for racist ideas, and thus, no amount of positive depiction could help.

Kendi's use of quotation marks in this passage also invites the reader to question whether the portrayals that the Talented Tenth were so worried about were actually negative—and whether their own desire for assimilationist representation was necessarily any better. The Talented Tenth were horrified by media representation that depicted Black people as sensual, sexual, hedonistic, and non-normative. Yet it's a matter of subjective interpretation as to whether these traits are good or bad—it was arguably only racism and other restrictive social ideology that made the Talented Tenth think of these traits in a negative way. In this sense, it was better to not worry about supposedly "negative" portrayals.

Chapter 27: Old Deal Quotes

Beginning around 1940, Columbia anthropologist Ruth benedict, a student of Franz Boas, dropped the term "racism" into the national vocabulary. "Racism is an unproved assumption of the biological and perpetual superiority of one human group over another," she wrote in *Race: Science and Politics* (1940). She excused her class of assimilationists from her definition, though […] As assimilationists took the helm of racial thought, their racist ideas became God's law, nature's law, scientific law, just like segregationist ideas over the past century. Assimilationists degraded and dismissed the behaviors of African people and somehow projected the idea that they were not racist, since they did not root those behaviors in biology, did not deem perpetual, spoke of historical and environmental causes, and argued that Blacks were capable of being civilized and developed.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict

Related Themes:

Page Number: 342

Explanation and Analysis

Kendi has described how, during the 1930s, white American intellectuals watched the rise of Nazism and began to grow uncomfortable about the persistence of Jim Crow segregation in the U.S. In 1938, the American Anthropological Association unanimously voted to denounce biological racism. However, the term racism wasn't even *introduced* into mainstream English until two years later (up until this point, people used terms like "color prejudice"). In this quotation, Kendi alludes to the importance—and drawbacks—of defining a concept like racism. Before racism was actually named, there were hard limits to how well it could be understood (and opposed). Black people, of course, understood racism because they were forced to experience it—but without shared vocabulary, it was difficult to discuss the issue.

At the same time, however, defining racism is no easy feat—and, as Kendi indicates, the definition Benedict came up with was far from adequate. Crucially, Benedict's definition focused on segregationism, when at the time, assimilationist thought was the main form of racism being practiced. The fact that Benedict herself was an assimilationist explains how this happened: Benedict did not want to think of herself as a racist and may have been unaware that she was one. Yet by excluding assimilationist thinking from the definition of racism, Benedict constructed a significant setback for antiracism—one that endures in the present day.

Chapter 30: The Act of Civil Rights Quotes

And so, as much as the Civil Rights Act served to erect a dam against Jim Crow policies, it also opened the floodgates for new racist ideas to pour in, including the most racist idea to date: it was an idea that ignored the White head start, presumed that discrimination had been eliminated, presumed that equal opportunity had taken over, and figured that since Blacks were still losing the race, the racial disparities and their continued losses must be their fault. Black people must be inferior, and equalizing policies—like eliminating or reducing White seniority, or instituting affirmative action policies—would be unjust and ineffective. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 managed to bring on racial progress and the progression of racism at the same time.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 385-386

Explanation and Analysis

Following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidency and passed the 1964 Civil Rights Act in Kennedy's memory. This Act ended Jim Crow segregation but—as Kendi explains in this quotation—it also ushered in a whole new

era of racist discrimination. After eliminating some of the legal barriers that most obviously restricted Black people's freedom and equality, a large number of Americans declared that racism was over, and that any lingering inequality was therefore evidence of Black people's inferiority. Of course this was a false and disingenuous argument.

The forms of explicit racist discrimination banned by the Civil Rights Act barely scratch the surface of all the ways in which Black people were socially and politically disadvantaged. Meanwhile, it did nothing to diminish the centuries of privileges, power, and wealth that white people had accrued at Black people's expense. Indeed, a pessimistic perspective might argue that passing the Act was actually a long-term strategy for containing Black resistance and extending racism by simply repackaging it in a new way. Americans had been told that only segregationists—not assimilationists—were racist. Thus, when segregation was ended, many believed racism had ended, too. Assimilationist racism was left to thrive thanks to the false assertion that it did not count as racism. This left those subjected to it especially vulnerable, as the injustice and harm they faced was not even acknowledged for what it was.

Chapter 33: Reagan's Drugs Quotes

In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently. We cannot—we dare not—let the Fourteenth Amendment perpetuate racial supremacy.

Related Characters: Harry Blackmun (speaker), Ibram X. Kendi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 428

Explanation and Analysis

The 1970s saw a rise in opposition to measures such as affirmative action, including in the *Regents v. Bakke* case of 1978, in which a white man successfully challenged the affirmative action policy at the University of California. In this quote from Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun's dissenting opinion, Blackmun warns that racism cannot be solved with a "race-blind" approach. In order to adequately fight racism, the reality of racism must be addressed. True equality is not about pretending that the playing field is even, Blackmun argues, but about acknowledging the discrimination and inequity that exists and adjusting for it. This is what he means when he declares "in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently."

The way Blackmun writes in this dissenting opinion may seem paradoxical or counterintuitive. However, the reason for this is that racism itself operates in a sly, covert, and paradoxical way—particularly in the years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed, when explicit racism gave way to subtler forms. Blackmun urges Americans to remain vigilant against racists who use the tools of antiracism—including the Fourteenth Amendment—to further their own agenda. Unfortunately, his warning was, by and large, not heeded. As Kendi shows in the remainder of the book, racists in the 1970s to the present have enacted their ideas by appropriating antiracist tools.

Chapter 35: New Republicans Quotes

The campaign for California's Proposition 209 ballot initiative displayed the progression of racist ideas in their full effect: its proponents branded antiracist affirmative action as discriminatory, named the campaign and ballot measure the "civil rights initiative," evoked the "dream" of Martin Luther King Jr. in an advertisement, and put a Black face on the campaign.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Martin Luther King, Jr.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 465-466

Explanation and Analysis

The 1990s was a time of escalating racial discrimination, yet many people during this time claimed that racism no longer existed. In 1996, California voters elected to eliminate affirmative action in the Proposition 209 ballot. As Kendi explains here, the campaign in favor of Proposition 209 was a preeminent example of how antiracist language, ideas, and imagery can be used in service of racist policies. By using antiracism in this way, proponents of racist policies can win over segregationists who want to pretend that they are antiracist; assimilationists who often falsely believe that they *are* antiracist; and genuine antiracists who might be lured in by disingenuous antiracist messaging.

This appropriation of antiracist tactics is why racism in the late 20th and 21st centuries is so difficult to pin down. In a way, the situation was at least simpler—though certainly no less brutal and unjust—prior to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, when segregationists were at least more likely to openly admit their racist ideas. In the contemporary

period, almost no one openly admits to being racist, and in fact, racist policies are often framed as being actively *antiracist* (as with Proposition 209). In situations like this, a lot of time tends to be wasted in trying to prove that a racist proposal is actually racist—which results in genuinely antiracist efforts being hindered.

Epilogue Quotes

❝❞ Months into Obama's presidency, the postracialists slammed down their new ground rules for race relations: Criticize millions of Black people whenever you want, as often as you want. That's not racialism or racism or hate. You're not even talking about race. But whenever you criticize a single White discriminator, that's race-speak, that's hate-speak, that's being racist. If the purpose of racist ideas had always been to silence the antiracist resisters to racial discrimination, then the postracial line of attack may have been the most sophisticated silencer to date.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker), Barack Obama

Related Themes:

Page Number: 499

Explanation and Analysis

After Barack Obama was elected the first Black U.S. president in 2008, many commentators declared that the U.S. was officially "post-racial." By this, they meant that the country was essentially no longer racist, and that race was not a significant factor in shaping society. But Kendi argues that this was not based in reality but rather in ideology—and specifically on racist people's desire to downplay racism's ongoing presence. As Kendi explains in this quotation, postracialism was not even a coherent ideology. Those making postracial arguments were extremely sensitive to mentions of whiteness or racism and tended to tear down anyone who did so as the "real" racist. Yet when Black people were criticized *as a group*—as Obama did frequently throughout his presidency—it was not perceived as racist.

As Kendi has made clear thus far, racism tends to operate in an illogical, insidious, and deceptive manner. This is clearly demonstrated in the supposedly "post-racial" climate of the Obama years. Of course, some may have been invested in the post-racial myth because they genuinely wanted to believe that racism was over—they wanted to believe that humanity was better than it had been and no longer so full of senseless hate. Yet, as this quotation indicates, the main function of the post-racial myth has always been to silence antiracists—and, in doing so, to keep Black people oppressed.

❝❞ The history of racist ideas tells us what strategies antiracists should stop using. *Stamped from the Beginning* chronicles not just the development of racist ideas, but the ongoing failure of the three oldest and most popular strategies Americans have used to root out these ideas: self-sacrifice, uplift suasion, and educational persuasion.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 503

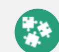
Explanation and Analysis

Having concluded his historical overview of racist ideas, Kendi shifts to reflect on the implications of this history. Kendi suggests that part of why it's important to study racist ideas is to learn which strategies do not work in opposing racism. Throughout American history, it's been shown that "self-sacrifice, uplift suasion, and educational persuasion" do not actually help eradicate racism. As Kendi has shown, this has not stopped people from investing in these strategies and thereby making the same mistakes over and over again.

Through properly understanding how racist ideas work, Kendi argues, this cycle of historical repetition can finally be broken. As he has shown, this means understanding that racist ideas are not fueled by ignorance but instead created to justify racist policies. Once people grasp this fact, it becomes obvious that racist ideas cannot be explained away or disproven. Many people do not hold racist ideas because these ideas reflect an *accurate* understanding of the world—instead, they commit to them because doing so helps justify the *existing* order of the world.

❝❞ I am certainly not stating that generations of consumers of racist ideas have not been educated or persuaded to discard those racist ideas. But as Americans have discarded old racist ideas, new racist ideas have been constantly produced for their renewed consumption. That's why the effort to educate and persuade away racist ideas has been a never-ending affair in America. That's why educational persuasion will never bring into being an antiracist America.

Related Characters: Ibram X. Kendi (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 503

Explanation and Analysis

In this part of his conclusion, Kendi anticipates an objection to his argument and introduces an important caveat. Readers thus far may be skeptical of Kendi's insistence that racist ideas cannot be educated or persuaded away. After all, the truth is not so simple—many Americans are taught false or misleading information about Black people at home, in school, in church, by the media, or by their friends. They may believe these racist ideas to be true but then find different information that disproves them. This phenomenon, while it may not be universal, is certainly very common. People's ideas are not permanent; in fact, they are always changing and adjusting to new information.

Kendi acknowledges this: he is not claiming that racist ideas can never be educated or persuaded away. However, this isn't really why he condemns persuasion strategies. As he points out in this passage, even if every single racist idea was explained away to every single person (which is impossible), new racist ideas would simply fill their places. As long as racial discrimination exists, the tide of antiracist persuasion could never keep up with the speed of racist ideas being produced to justify discrimination. While not everyone will entirely agree with this argument, this caveat helps clarify what Kendi is actually claiming—and what he isn't.

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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.

PROLOGUE

Ibram X. Kendi reflects on the historical moment in which he is writing *Stamped from the Beginning*—a moment in which both the murders of unarmed Black people and the #BlackLivesMatter resistance movement have gained particular prominence. At the time Kendi is writing, young Black men are 21 times more likely to be killed by the police than young white men. African Americans make up 13% of the U.S. population, but 40% of those are in prison and own only a 2.7% share of national wealth. In 2016, the U.S. is 240 years old and still gripped by racial conflict.

Kendi opens the book by making it starkly clear that racism is still very much alive in the U.S. Even though the book's focus is on racist ideas, the evidence he cites is not opinion. Rather, it is the material conditions of Black people—the economic, social, physical, and infrastructural facts of Black people's lived reality.

Throughout American history, there have been three main camps of thought about these racial disparities between Black and white people. Segregationists argue that the disparities are due to Black people's supposed inferiority to white people. Antiracists argue that the problem is racial discrimination, not Black people themselves. And lastly, assimilationists take a middle position, arguing that it is both the fault of discrimination *and* Black people themselves that inequalities exist. The existence of these three types of thinking means that anti-racist arguments face not one but two opponents.

The idea that racist thinking is split into two camps—segregationist and assimilationist—is the most important idea in "Stamped from the Beginning." As this passage suggests, assimilationists are much more common than segregationists, especially in today's America. However, this does not mean that assimilationist thinking is less dangerous.

Jefferson Davis, a Mississippi senator who went on to become president of the Confederacy, used the phrase "stamped from the beginning" in a speech he gave on April 12, 1860. In the speech, he praised white supremacy, arguing that in America, "the inequality of white and black races [...] [was] stamped from the beginning." This is a segregationist statement, which means it is more obviously recognizable as racist than an assimilationist statement would be. However, it is important to be aware of the fact that—although they have frequently been used in the fight for racial justice—assimilationist arguments are still racist, because they also characterize Blackness as a "stamp" of inferiority (albeit one that can be washed away).

While segregationist and assimilationist ways of thinking can appear very different on the outside, Kendi seeks to show that there is a fundamental similarity between these two positions. Although assimilationist arguments are often used in service of antiracism, they are actually racist, because like segregationist claims, they posit that there is something inferior about Blackness.

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Assimilationists believe that Black people should try to become more like white people and that this will solve the problem of racial inequality. The history of racist ideas is complex and unpredictable, yet the ideas themselves appear to many people as simple "common sense." The conflict between racist and antiracist thought is far from a comfortingly straightforward divide between good and evil. This is partly because it is a "three-sided battle" with racist ideas split into two separate categories.

Throughout the book, Kendi reminds the reader that seemingly simple ideas are often actually complex and vice versa. Antiracist thought might seem complicated because it challenges many of the norms and principles that people internalize from an early age. Yet antiracist thought is grounded in a very simple idea: that Black people and white people are equal and that there is nothing inferior about Blackness. Similarly, racist thought poses as "common sense" but is often sly and deceptive.

People rarely admit to being racist; instead, both segregationist and assimilationist ideas are disguised as being morally good, while for much of American history racist acts and policies have been legal. This has created confusion regarding what is a racist idea and what isn't. To Kendi, an idea is racist if it implies that there is something wrong with a particular racial group—or, in other words, that this group is inferior in some way. Like all races, Black people are an extremely diverse group of people consisting of different ethnicities, nationalities, classes, and many other variances.

Here, Kendi highlights that although almost no one admits *to being racist, almost everyone* is *racist, at least in the sense that they harbor racist ideas.*

Moreover, Black people's experience of racism is differentiated according to factors such as class, gender, and sexuality, a phenomenon the scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw terms "intersectionality." Existing histories of racist ideas tend to neglect the way in which intersectionality shapes racism. *Stamped from the Beginning* examines the "entire history" of racist ideas from their origins in early modern Europe. The book revolves around five main figures, who serve as "tour guides" through the history of thinking about race. The first is colonial preacher and writer Cotton Mather (1663-1728), the son of two powerful New England Puritan families. Mather preached about Black inferiority in order to excuse slavery as a practice of "saving" Africans by converting them to Christianity.

Some might assume that racist ideas are simple, in the sense that they are based in a basic premise of white superiority and Black inferiority. However, As Kendi shows through tracing the intellectual history of racist ideas, racism has changed significantly over time. As the example of Cotton Mather shows, at times racism has had a distinctly religious bent. Yet it is of course also possible for there to be racism in a totally secular context.

The second figure is President Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), a slaveholder who managed to be both "antislavery" *and* "anti-abolitionist." Third is William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879), who spread assimilationist ideas about Black inferiority via his work as an abolitionist. Garrison argued that slavery had made Black people savage and brutal, which is a racist sentiment. The next figure is W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963), an influential Black scholar whose views shifted from assimilationist to anti-racist over the course of his lifetime. Lastly is Angela Davis, a Black scholar who rose to prominence during the Black Power movement and has dedicated her life to fighting both racist myths and the myth that racism has ended.

The five main figures Kendi examines in the book—as with most people in general—hold a number of different and even contradictory ideas about race. For instance, an abolitionist like William Lloyd Garrison might dedicate his life to alleviating Black suffering while still harboring racist ideas about how Black people have been corrupted by slavery. It is important to examine the entirety of a person's worldview and not discount all these complexities and contradictions.

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Kendi selected these five figures because they "were arguably the most consistently prominent or provocative racial theorists of their respective lifetimes." *Stamped from the Beginning* contests simple ideas of racial progress or racism suddenly becoming covert. While there certainly has been progress, racist ideas have also evolved, adapting to the new conditions created by anti-racist struggle. This makes sense when one realizes that racist ideas aren't produced by ignorance and hate but instead usually develop in support of racist *policies*. They justify and excuse racist policies by blaming Black people themselves for the unjust and unequal conditions they face. The true causal relationship is that discrimination leads to the development of racist ideas, which then generate "ignorance and hate."

This passage contains one of the most important ideas in the whole book. Kendi argues that racist ideas are produced by racist policies, which means that in order to eliminate racist ideas, eliminating racist policies should be the first priority. Moreover, it is also significant that Kendi does not consider racist ideas to be a form of ignorance. While racist ideas are always false and can stem from a misunderstanding about how the world works, they do not constitute a lack of knowledge, *but a form of incorrect knowledge.*

Throughout American history, intelligent, educated, and powerful people have actively spread racist ideas for their own benefit. It can often seem strange that racism was not met with more resistance in the past, but part of the explanation for this is the power of racist ideas. In this sense, racist ideas are highly effective—including on Black people themselves. Kendi may be a professor of Africana studies, but he has still absorbed racist thinking. Shedding racist ideology means realizing that while individual Black people might have negative traits, there is nothing wrong with Black people "*as a group*."

Readers might have heard it said that Black people cannot be racist and feel confused over Kendi's argument about Black people harboring racist thoughts themselves. Some might claim that there is a distinction between being *a racist and internalizing racist ideas. Kendi implies that while Black people can internalize racist ideas, they cannot be racists like white people can.*

Through his research, Kendi was able to eliminate much racist thinking from his own mind, although he doesn't believe that this switch in thinking is possible for those who are the main producers of racist ideas. He does, however, hope that the book will "liberat[e]" other people's minds.

In this passage, Kendi makes clear who the book is for. He does not seek to persuade those who are deeply entrenched in racist thought; instead, he wants to help those who already want to move toward antiracism.

CHAPTER 1: HUMAN HIERARCHY

The Great Hurricane of 1635 wreaks havoc on the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Puritan minister Richard Mather is aboard the *James*, a ship that seems destined to be destroyed by the storm. However, the ship miraculously swerves around a dangerous rock, and the passengers arrive in Boston safely, which Richard credits as an act of God. Richard faced persecution in England; in America, he reunites with John Cotton, a fellow Puritan minister. Together, the men lay out a plan for life in New England. Mather is involved with the establishment of Harvard, the first college in colonial America, which is modelled after the University of Cambridge.

John Cotton and Richard Mather are two important figures in colonial history, who greatly influenced the development of the emerging nation. In particular, through helping to establish Harvard College, Richard Mather plays a decisive role in America's intellectual *history, influencing which ideas are spread among the colonial population.*

Influenced by the study of Ancient Greek philosophy, the New England Puritans developed a hierarchical view of different people groups, claiming that Native Americans, Africans, and Anglicans are all inferior to them. Aristotle theorized that Africans were "ugly" and natural slaves because the hot climate in Africa had a corrupting effect on them; ideas like this were used to justify slavery in the ancient world. Once Christianity emerged, early believers claimed that slavery was ordained by God, even as St. Paul asserted that all souls were equal in Jesus. The ancient world was filled with ethnic and faith-based prejudice, but racism did not exist because the concept of race (chiefly whiteness and Blackness) had not yet been invented.

*Kendi's assertion that whiteness and Blackness did not exist in the ancient world might seem confusing. Because whiteness and Blackness are such deeply entrenched ideas in the contemporary world, it can be hard to believe that they did not always exist. Later in the chapter, Kendi will go on to explain how these concepts were developed, but for now readers should note the distinction between Aristotle's specifically anti-*African *prejudice and the anti-Black prejudice that can only exist once the concept of a Black race is invented.*

Back in the 17th century, John Cotton writes the first constitution of New England and legalizes the purchase of enslaved people captured during war. At this point, both Africans and indigenous people are being enslaved in the Americas. Puritans are quick to justify the enslavement of "Negroes" using arguments that preexisted colonial America. These arguments originated back many centuries previously. In the 14th century, the scholar and explorer Ibn Battuta journeyed to Mali, a resource-rich, thriving intellectual hub, and was astonished by its peacefulness. Another prominent Muslim scholar, Ibn Khaldun, rebuked Battuta's report, arguing that "Negroes" were like animals and naturally suited to enslavement. This is the "climate theory" of Black inferiority.

The dispute between Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun emphasiszes that any given point in history, it was never the case that everyone believed the same thing about race and racism. While of course particular historical periods were defined by fixation on certain racist ideas, these ideas were never shared by everyone. The history of racist (and antiracist) ideas is a history of disagreement, conflict, and debate.

Ibn Khaldun believed that dark-skinned Africans could improve themselves by migrating North, which would mean that their descendants would eventually have paler skin and more European features. At this point, Muslim powers were trading both Africans and Slavic peoples as slaves, yet Khadun's assimilationist helped shift the slave trade toward Africans only. Even before this, there had already been another argument framing Black people as natural slaves. For centuries, certain religious scholars had been arguing that Black people were the cursed descendants of Noah's son Ham, a figure from the Book of Genesis. Khaldun found this idea "silly," but the "curse theory" of Black inferiority gained significant power over time.

One common racist argument is that Black people should get over the history of slavery because historically it is not only those of African descent who have been enslaved. Slavs have been enslaved, as have Jews and many other ethnic and religious groups. At the same time, as Kendi points out here, Africans were subjected to the unique dehumanization of having a theory about race produced in order to justify their enslavement (and over time to pretty much limit slavery to Africans only). This is part of why slavery is such an especially charged issue for Black people.

CHAPTER 2: ORIGINS OF RACIST IDEAS

In 1415, Prince Henry of Portugal led the capture of a Ceuta, a key Muslim trading site in northeastern Morocco. From there, Henry embarked on a colonization and slave trading mission across West Africa. In 1453, Gomes Earnes de Zurara published a book about Henry's life and work, *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, which began "the recorded history of anti-Black racist ideas." Portuguese forces were the first Europeans to ship enslaved Africans to Europe. The Portuguese were also selling Slavic people in large numbers; this is why the word "slave" is actually taken from "Slav." Yet by the mid 1400s, trading of Slavic people gave way to that of Africans, and "Western Europeans began to see the natural Slav(e) not as White, but Black."

Across history, a large number of different groups have enslaved one another, and this practice was often justified through ethnic prejudice. But Kendi makes an important distinction here regarding how Western Europeans gradually came to regard Africans as "natural" slaves. The concept of Blackness was developed in conjunction with the colonization of Africa and the establishment of transatlantic slavery. As a result, the concept of Blackness had an association with enslavement built in from the beginning.

Zurara's *Chronicle* describes a slave auction that Prince Henry oversaw in 1444. The enslaved people were ethnically diverse—with some light-skinned and some dark-skinned—but Zurara collectively characterized them as "one inferior people." Zurara described Africans as uncivilized, immoral, and in need of "salvation." This created the impression that Henry's enslaving mission was an act of moral rescue, rather than an enterprise motivated by profit. As the Portuguese slave trade grew, Zurara's ideas about Africans became widespread. In 1492, Prince Henry's great-niece Queen Isabel of Spain sponsored a journey headed by an explorer from Genoa, Christopher Columbus. Setting off for Asia, Columbus's fleet accidentally encountered other lands: the islands now known as the Bahamas and Cuba.

Here Kendi describes how the idea of Blackness started solidifying as the ethnic, linguistic, religious, and other differences between enslaved people were collapsed into one. By characterizing the enslaved as belonging to one group and at the same time casting this group as inferior, these early colonizers helped construct the idea of race and *a racial hierarchy. This is an extremely important point within critical race theory: the idea of race always exists as part of a racial hierarchy.*

Spanish colonizers called the indigenous people they encountered in the Americas "*negros da terra*" (Blacks from the land) and immediately subjected them to an enormous campaign of enslavement and genocide. In 1502, the first ship carrying enslaved Africans to the Americas arrived in Hispaniola. Aboard this ship was Bartolomé de Las Casas, an 18-year-old son of a Spanish merchant who soon became the first priest to be ordained in the Americas. Influenced by a group of abolitionist Dominican Friars, Las Casas dedicated himself to easing indigenous people's suffering, but he did so by importing enslaved Africans to perform labor in the colonies. He argued that whereas indigenous Americans were weak, Africans were strong and naturally suited to hard labor—racist ideas that would endure for many years to come.

The relationship between Black and indigenous people during the colonization of the Americas is a highly fraught one. Both were subjected to unimaginable brutality, dehumanization, and genocide. Yet at times—as the example of Las Casas shows—the two groups were also pitted against each other, such that the survival and relief from suffering of one meant the intensification of the suffering of the other.

Las Casas' ideas gradually gained popularity, and he recorded them in *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1542). However, he later published another book, *History of the Indies* (1561), in which he expressed regret over recommending the import of enslaved Africans, a practice he eventually came to view as un-Christian. At this point, though, it was too late. After his death, Las Casas was denounced as an extremist radical due to his anti-slavery views.

One of the most important lessons of the book is that racist ideas take on a life of their own once a person (or group of people) invents them, and this is part of what makes racist ideas so dangerous. Las Casas came to regret his recommendation of enslaving Africans, but by that point the idea was so powerful that it had already changed the world forever.

In 1510, a highly educated Moroccan named Al-Hasan Ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Fasi was captured and enslaved during a diplomatic mission. He was brought to Pope Leo X, who freed him, converted him to Christianity, and gave him the name Johannes Leo, although he came to be known as Leo Africanus (Leo the African). In 1526, he published the first "scholarly survey" of Africa available in Europe—*Della descrittione dell'Africa* (*Description of Africa*). Leo Africanus described Africans as savage, immoral, and sexually devious. In doing so, he became one of the first people to demonstrate that anyone—no matter their race or ethnicity—can produce and consume racist ideas.

Throughout the book, Kendi provides examples of Black people conscripted into producing racist ideas. While Kendi does not fully exonerate these figures, it is important to understand how their actions were (often forcefully) produced by their circumstances. As an enslaved person, Leo Africanus had almost no autonomy over his own life. He was cut off from his homeland, family, culture, and forced to act in service of a brutal regime. Kendi suggests that while Leo Africanus may have believed in racist ideas, but in some sense he had little choice.

By the mid 1550s, the British had grown determined to outpace Portugal's participation in slave trading. In the ensuing decades, the genre of English-language travel writing began solidifying new ideas about race.

Here Kendi reemphasizes that ideas about race came into being specifically in order to justify slavery.

CHAPTER 3: COMING TO AMERICA

The majority of 16th century Europeans could not travel and were thus fascinated by stories of "exotic" distant lands and their inhabitants. Yet travel writers' main motivation was usually to justify colonization and enslavement. In the late 1500s, the English travel writer George Best questioned the climate theory of Black inferiority after encountering dark-skinned Inuit in the far north of the globe. In its place, he proposed the curse theory, which cast Black people as the descendants of the "evil, tyrannical, and hypersexual Ham." The conflict between these two positions was the first significant clash of racist theories in the English-speaking world.

It might seem pointless and even absurd for there to be a conflict between the curse theory and climate theory of Black inferiority—after all, if both sides agree that Black people were inferior, what did it really matter how this inferiority came to be? Yet as Kendi will show, the difference between the two theories is important, as this has huge implications on whether it is considered possible for Black people to be redeemed or if they are cursed with inferiority forever. This distinction in turn shapes racist policies.

By assigning negative traits to African people, Europeans also created the impression that they—white people—were morally pure and noble. Over time, travel writing began to explicitly call for Africans to be converted to Christianity. Slavery came to be characterized as a "civilizing" endeavor based on love. In his influential 1590 text *Ordering a Familie*, the Cambridge theologian William Perkins compared the relationship between masters and slaves to a "loving family relationship."

During the age of colonization and the establishment of the slave trade, white Europeans were committing moral evils on an unprecedented scale. Kendi thus suggests that it is not a coincidence—but is, of course, highly ironic—that Europeans simultaneously invented the concept of the evil, cursed Black race and the pure, good white race.

It is into this assimilationist climate that Richard Mather is born in 1596. In 1600, Leo Africanus' *Geographical Histories of Africa* is published in English translation for the first time, giving further credence to the curse theory, a segregationist view of Black inferiority. During this era, playwrights spread ideas about Blackness further than travel writing could, as literacy rates among the general public remain low. Plays like Shakespeare's *Othello* and Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* are written to satisfy an audience newly fascinated by the "exotic" and "sensational" idea of Africa. When *The Masque of Blackness* premieres, Queen Anne plays one of the characters, an African princess, in blackface.

Kendi suggests that one of the most disturbing facts about the invention of race is that it was often developed via entertainment despite being such a deeply violent and dehumanizing concept. Elizabethan audiences found it fun to go to the theater and witness the spectacle of blackface, exoticization, and other forms of race-play, but Kendi stresses that the ideas about Blackness that were being developed had serious and brutal real-world consequences.

Around this time, King James leads a vigorous mission to expand the British colonization of North America. In Virginia and New England, British settlers are already starting to "conceive of distinct races." The first use of the word "race" in 1481 was to describe breeds of hunting dogs; during the ensuing century it was extended to humans, most often Africans. Over time, it became a way to collapse the ethnic diversity of Africans and Native Americans, making them seem like two internally homogenous (and animalistic) groups.

Here, Kendi highlights that the fact that "race" was originally applied to animals is very telling. The concept of race has always been dehumanizing, a way to denigrate nonwhite (and especially Black) people by animalizing them. Crucially, the fact that "race" was used specifically for hunting dogs is also significant, as these dogs were not wild animals but the profit-generating possessions of their owners.

In the early colonial period, English opinion can be somewhat sympathetic to Native people—such as the "civilized savage" Pocahontas—but travel writing from the American colonies creates the impression that Africans are lazy and evil. In reality, these anti-Black ideas are not based in actual observation so much as a recycling of views represented in earlier travel narratives, plays, and texts by Spanish and Portuguese enslavers.

Kendi suggests that recycled ideas about race affected how English people perceived Africans. English people were predisposed to see Africans as lazy and evil, so this is what they saw even though it conflicted with the reality of how Africans actually were.

By the time Richard Mather comes of age and starts preaching in England, the British slave trade is small but steadily growing. The first known slave ship to arrive in colonial America docks in Jamestown in 1619. That same year, John Pory—the English translator of Leo Africanus' *Geographical Histories of Africa*—leads a meeting of Jamestown's first group of elected officials. During this period, it becomes clear that a large amount of laborers are needed to grow tobacco, the colony's main cash crop. While there are white indentured servants in the colony, they are considered to be in a distinct category from enslaved Africans. In 1630, a white man found having sex with a Black woman is sentenced to a whipping for "defiling his body" and dishonoring God.

As Kendi indicates in this passage, early ideas about Blackness and slavery in colonial America are produced primarily by economic factors. A large number of enslaved Africans are imported because their labor is needed to cultivate the land and enrich the colonizers. Furthermore, enslaved Africans and white indentured servants are kept separate in order to preserve an economic hierarchy with planters on the top, servants further down, and the enslaved at the very bottom.

Following the death of King James in 1625, the persecution of Puritans in England rapidly escalates, with the country's political conflict reaching a climax in the English Civil War of 1642. In Virginia, meanwhile, society is arranged into a hierarchy that places wealthy planters, ministers, and merchants at the top and enslaved Africans at the bottom. In 1655, a biracial woman named Elizabeth Key sues the estate on which she is enslaved for not granting her the freedom that her white legislator father promised would be granted her at the age of 15. Key's case poses a problem for the Virginia planters, as her enslavement cannot be justified by either her non-Christian status (she is a convert) or her father's status (as he was a free white man).

At this point, chattel slavery isn't yet a fully established institution, but a system still being developed. Cases like that of Elizabeth Key are important for how they shape the ideas, norms, and laws of slavery going forward. At the same time, while much of the system of slavery is still undefined, it is clear that the planters are already invested in making it almost impossible for a person to rid themselves of enslaved status, as this will benefit planters in an economic and political sense.

Meanwhile, labor shortages and alliances between white servants and Black slaves are beginning to trouble the Virginia elite. They end up instituting extremely harsh punishments for white servants who run away with Black people. Furthermore, legislators stipulate that children derive enslaved status from their mothers—a break from English law that allows white men to materially benefit from raping enslaved women (and thereby producing more enslaved people). This practice is subsequently written into racist literature, which becomes filled with depictions of African women as hypersexual, aggressive, and animalistic. In doing so, white men make it seem as if African women are themselves to blame for being raped. At the same time, hysteria around Black men raping white women gains momentum.

Here, Kendi highlights how the law that children inherit the status of their mothers creates one of the most widespread and brutal systems of sexual abuse in human history. Not only are white men able to rape enslaved African women with impunity—they are actually financially incentivized to do so. This is in part why it became so widespread for enslavers to father enslaved children through rape. It is also how rape became not just a byproduct of slavery, but an institutionalized part of it.

During this period, there are some white men who openly admit to being attracted to Black women and frame this attraction using assimilationist ideas. Englishman Richard Ligon, for examples, writes about his attraction to a Black woman by emphasizing the beauty of her white teeth and eyes. In the same book, *A True and Exact Historie of the Island of Barbadoes* (1657), Ligon introduces the idea that Black people are naturally "docile" and that the enslaved should be allowed to convert to Christianity.

As Kendi points out here, one key theme within the history of racist ideas is white people finding ways to disavow the feelings of attraction and admiration they feel for Black people.

In 1660, the English scientist Robert Boyle argues that dark skin is an "ugly" corruption of the proper default of white skin, claiming that this argument is based in objective scientific observation. Boyle's argument is widely read, including by Richard Mather's son, Increase, who is an "unremarkable" Cambridge student. In 1661, the Council for Foreign Plantations begins actively recommending that planters convert enslaved Africans to Christianity. Neither planters nor the enslaved welcome this. But in the 1660s, missionaries began taking it upon themselves to save the souls of the enslaved—a movement in which Richard Mather's son will come to play a vital role.

Because Christian conversion eventually became such an important way in which slavery was justified, it can be surprising that, for a long time, enslavers were opposed to converting the enslaved. Indeed, this fact is also important because it indicates that on some level enslavers knew what they were doing was wrong. They could justify subjecting "heathens" to brutality, exploitation, and slow death, but to do so to a Christian troubled their consciences.

CHAPTER 4: SAVING SOULS, NOT BODIES

The persecution of Puritans in England escalates in 1660 with the restoration of Charles II to the throne. Across multiple generations, the Cotton and Mather families intermarry, an interlocking sealed with the "triple-knot" of Increase Mather and Maria Cotton's son, born in 1663 and named Cotton Mather. Across his lifetime, Cotton Mather will help solidify the institution of African slavery in America. He does so under the significant influence of the British minister Richard Baxter's book *A Christian Directory* (1664-1665). This book argues that slavery can be fair and "benevolent" as long as it incorporates conversion for the enslaved. Baxter even proposes that there might be some "voluntary" slaves who willingly choose to become enslaved in order to be converted.

Here, Kendi shows how the debate over whether to convert the enslaved solidifies two completely opposite (yet equally racist and delusional) positions. On one hand, enslavers troubled by their consciences want to pretend that they do not have an ethical obligation to the enslaved (because they are not Christian). On the other side, another group of enslavers want to pretend that what they are doing is benevolent and even holy. But both views, Kendi shows, are fundamentally based in self-interest and delusion.

In 1667, a law passes in Virginia stipulating that Christian conversion does not affect a person's enslaved status. That same year, John Locke moves to London and pens a number of influential works of philosophy, including *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* and *Two Treaties of Government*. While these texts superficially advocate for egalitarian humanism, they do so while vehemently denying the humanity of Africans. In *An Essay*, Locke claims that West African women had children with monkeys. This polygenesis theory soon gained widespread support—not least among enslavers in the British colonies.

One of the most striking things about Stamped from the Beginning *is its revelation that so many of the most prominent and respected thinkers in Western history developed deeply racist views. This is true of the philosopher John Locke, whose work is shaped by an investment in "egalitarian humanism" even while he advocated for a deeply racist (and absurd) understanding of how the Black race was supposedly produced through human women having sex with monkeys.*

In 1675, colonists kill 3,000 Native Americans during King Philip's War. During this period, abolitionist ideas begin circulating among religious sects such as Quakers and Mennonites. In 1688, a group of Mennonites write the Germantown Petition Against Slavery, the "inaugural antiracist tract among European settlers in colonial America." Like much of the later antiracist movement, the tract is based on the principle of the Golden Rule. Ultimately the Mennonite's petition is swiftly suppressed by Philadelphia Quakers who are themselves enslavers.

Some might assume that the white abolitionist movement is something that only develops later on in history, after slavery has been instituted for a long period of time. Yet as this passage makes clear, almost as soon as slavery begins to exist as an institution, there are white abolitionists who oppose it.

Meanwhile, in 1676, Increase Mather prays fervently for the defeat of the Native American sachem Metacomet (known in English as King Philip). When Metacomet is killed, the Puritans dismember his body and Cotton Mather, then only 14, breaks the jaw from his skull. That same year, Bacon's Rebellion successfully burns down Jamestown only to ultimately be defeated. This rebellion is a coalition of poor white workers and enslaved Black people fighting together against the white elite; concerned, legislators introduce further punishments for white people who collaborate with Africans and give all white people "absolute power to abuse any African person."

It is important to consider how a young teenager like Cotton Mather ends up absorbing the racist ideas of his time. The moment of dislodging the deceased Metacomet's jaw from his skull is brutal and dehumanizing. It seems that, to Mather, indigenous people like Metacomet are not human in the same way that white people are.

In 1674, the already fanatically pious Cotton Mather becomes the youngest Harvard student ever at the age of 11. After graduating, he cofounds the Boston Philosophical Society with his father, Increase. This is a time in which "scientific" views about race are becoming increasingly complex, with scholars asserting that white people are the primary, original human race. This idea often goes hand-in-hand with claims about Black hypersexuality and physical superiority, which have the overall effect of making Black people seem more akin to animals than humans. Following King Philip's War, conflict escalates over the extent of royal control over the American colonies. Increase is horrified by the idea of losing autonomous control of New England to the crown. In 1689, New Englanders begin a rebellion.

As this passage indicates, it is not just enslavers, travel writers, and preachers who develop racist ideas. Throughout history, racist ideas have also been produced by scientists who claim that they are making objective observations about the physical world even when this is not actually the case.

CHAPTER 5: BLACK HUNTS

In 1689, 26-year-old Cotton Mather hosts a meeting in which he and fellow New Englanders plan to arrest a group of royalists at Boston Harbor. Their aim is not revolution, but merely a restoration of local power. This plan is successfully carried out, and Cotton Mather reads from a *Declaration of Gentleman and Merchants* to the assembled crowd. This text, which Mather likely wrote himself, asserts that "The people of *New England* were all *slaves* and the only difference between them and slaves is their not being bought and sold." In reality Mather sees more affinity between Puritans and royalists than Puritans and the enslaved based on racial similarity. But he nonetheless believes that all people—including Africans—have the same "White" soul inside.

To Kendi, one of the most extraordinary things about American colonial history is the frequency with which white colonizers claim to be "enslaved" by the British—even while they are literally enslaving actual African people at the same time. This can again be seen as proof that on some level, American enslavers understand that what they are doing to the enslaved is unjust and wrong. Indeed, racist ideas are needed to justify the obvious injustice and hypocrisy.

Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave* (1688) is the first English novel in which the phrases "White People" and "Negro" repeatedly appear. The novel portrays the titular character as a "noble savage" elevated by his proximity to whiteness—a classic assimilationist gesture. In 1689, Mather publishes *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions*, propelled by his increasingly fanatical fixation with witches and devils. This fixation is part of what eventually triggers the Salem Witch Hunt, a period of public hysteria in which the Puritan New Englanders begin routinely characterizing the devil as Black. White women accused of being witches blame the "Black Devil man" for the supposed errors in their ways.

Often people do not associate the famous Salem Witch Hunt with race but—as with almost everything that takes place in colonial America—it is actually a highly racialized historical event. The anxieties surrounding morality, violence, and evil that characterized the witch frenzy are also anxieties about race and gender. Indeed, it is significant that the white women accused of being witches choose to displace blame on to a "Black Devil man" in the hopes of saving themselves.

Even after the hysteria subsides, Cotton Mather clings to his role as the defender of white Puritanism against the dangers of "black" witches and devils. 1693, he writes up rules for the newly formed, Boston-based "Religious Society of Negroes." These rules dictated that Black members submit to God via the authority of white people. Throughout the 1690s, Mather continues to assert that preserving the racial, gendered, and class-based social hierarchy is a Christian duty akin to renouncing Satan and honoring God. He insists that enslaved Black people are in a better situation than they would have been living freely in their homelands in Africa. His writing on slavery becomes enormously influential in the same period that the transatlantic slave trade booms.

Mather's life and views provide a classic example of how ideas about race don't have to make sense for them to be deeply felt. While it is impossible to understand the mind of a historical figure and know what they truly felt, it is nonetheless plausible that Mather truly does believe that enslaved people are better off in America than they would have been in Africa. At the same time, it is also plausible that he does not really believe this but instead only claims to in order to justify slavery.

For the moment, however, enslavers remain resistant to converting the enslaved to Christianity. In 1689 the Scottish minister James Blair is appointed commissary of Virginia; he uses profits from slavery to found the College of William & Mary in 1693. In 1699, he proposes ramping up the "Christian education" of Black and indigenous people. Yet enslavers by and large remain hostile to the idea of mass conversion and education.

Again, even those enslavers who believe (or pretend) that slavery is ordained by God for the "improvement" of African people have good reason to oppose allowing the enslaved to have access to education. With the tools of literacy and other forms of knowledge, enslaved people are much more likely to be able to successfully rebel.

CHAPTER 6: GREAT AWAKENING

In 1700, a public debate about slavery takes place after a New England businessman and judge John Saffin refuses to free a Black indentured servant, Adam, after Adam finishes his seven years' contracted service. On hearing about this matter, Boston judge Samuel Sewall writes a text condemning slavery and systematically attacking various proslavery arguments. At the same time, he also recommends expelling Africans from New England on the basis that they cannot live properly among white people. Sewall is a powerful individual and close friend of Cotton Mather. Furious, Saffin pens a response to Sewall justifying slavery on the grounds of Black immorality and inferiority, claiming that enslaved Africans are bettered by bondage.

In this passage, Kendi underscores that many opponents of slavery did not reject the institution on the basis on antiracism. Indeed, for some individuals, like Sewell, racism is actually the reason they want slavery to end. Slavery involves white people and Black people living alongside each other (albeit in an extremely hierarchical relationship of subjugation). For some racists, this proximity is too much to bear.

Adam ends up being freed after a long trial in 1703, but it is Saffin's position that ultimately prevails. As the population of enslaved people in America grows, new oppressive laws are introduced in order to prevent revolt. In 1705, Virginia rules that freed white servants be allocated land, a motion that noticeably increases white affluence and power. The following year, Cotton Mather publishes *The Negro Christianized*, in which he argues that God decided to send Africans into slavery in order to save their souls. He emphasizes that however supposedly unintelligent Africans may be, they are "*Men*, and not *Beasts*." That year, members of Mather's congregation give him an enslaved person, Onesimus (such "gifts" are a common practice at the time).

When Kendi emphasizes that Cotton Mather views Black people as "Men" and not "Beasts," he is not excusing Mather or arguing that he is a less severe kind of racist than others. Indeed, one of the main points Kendi makes in Stamped from the Beginning *is that there is no such thing as a less severe or "better" kind of racist. Mather may have seen enslaved Africans as people, but he was still thoroughly racist with views that produced enormous harm.*

Africans resist slavery from the very beginning of their arrival in America. As a result, they are "stamped from the beginning as criminals," their yearning for freedom coded as barbaric and brutal. But despite enslaved resistors' and abolitionists' efforts, the slave trade continues to thrive into the early 18th century. When Mather asks Onesimus if he's had smallpox, Onesimus explains that he's been inoculated against it using an early vaccination technique practiced by African physicians. At this point vaccination hasn't been invented in the West yet and Mather, fascinated, collects stories about it from various Africans in Boston. However, he observes that those who explain it to him do so "like Idiots."

The beginning of this passage might seem simple, but it makes an extremely important point. From the very moment Black people arrive in America, their desire to live normal, free lives—a basic human desire—is criminalized.

After hearing Mather's stories, a physician named Zabadiel Boylston inoculates his young son along with two enslaved Africans against smallpox. This horrifies other white men in Boston, some of whom claim the whole thing is a sinister African conspiracy. In 1723, Increase Mather dies in the arms of his doting son. Cotton begins dwelling on the question of his legacy, which largely rests in his singular impact on encouraging the conversion of the enslaved. In the early 1700s, more enslavers begin embracing the idea of Christian slaves, reasoning that converting slaves would make them more docile and submissive.

This passage introduces a new and extremely influential racist idea: the association between enslaved Black people, Christianity, and docility. Before converting enslaved people to Christianity became mainstream, enslavers wanted the enslaved to be submissive but did not frame this desire in religious terms. From this point forward, submission and docility are framed as morally and spiritually desirable attributes for enslaved people to have.

The First Great Awakening, a proslavery evangelical revival, takes place in the 1730s. Yet during this time the abolitionist movement gains momentum, too. Cotton Mather dies in 1728, a day after his 65th birthday. His lasting impact on the history of race and racism is to solidify the idea that Christianity has an ennobling and mollifying effect on the enslaved. Mather is thus "America's first great assimilationist," preaching the idea that Black people could and should strive to have "white" souls.

Again, this passage emphasizes that while Cotton Mather may not have been a segregationist like so many others of his era, his legacy is still harmful. Assimilationist thinking is different from segregationist thinking, but from Kendi's perspective, it's not necessarily any less dangerous and dehumanizing.

CHAPTER 7: ENLIGHTENMENT

In 1747, Peter Jefferson embarks on the grueling task of surveying land untouched by European settlers in order to expand colonization westwards. Upon returning home, he entertains his 4-year-old son Thomas with stories of his adventures. During the mid-1700s, a shift takes place wherein religious leaders no longer "completely dominat[e] the racial discourse in America." This is the Enlightenment, a time in which racist beliefs are both intensified and secularized. The era began with the scientific revolution of the 17th century, which births a philosophical movement in the 18th. The word "Enlightenment" on one hand refers to religious obscurity giving way to rational clarity. At the same time, this is also the period in which the concept of whiteness—and with it white supremacy—is properly consolidated and enforced.

The Enlightenment is often discussed as a time of greater freedom, egalitarianism, and objective truth. By rejecting the hierarchies of feudal society and the obscure, restrictive laws of religion, Enlightenment thinkers wanted to create a fairer and more rational world. Yet when it comes to the topic of race, the legacy of the Enlightenment has a quite different bent, as Kendi will explain in this section of the book.

During this period, the slave trade massively escalates, propelled by the booming trade in cotton cloth. The enormous economic engine of the British Empire is built on the foundation of racist ideas, which enables the slave trade to persist and expand. It is racist ideas that define the intellectual environment of the Enlightenment—antiracist ideas are practically nowhere to be found. Scholars devise a hierarchy of human groups with white Europeans at the top and Africans at the bottom. Enslavers also create internal rankings of different African ethnicities, which affect the price placed on enslaved people. This is a form of "ethnic racism" that ultimately reinforces white supremacy, as the African ethnicities deemed superior are those that are supposedly nearest to whiteness.

The creation of "scientific" knowledge about race during the Enlightenment is perhaps the clearest example of Kendi's argument that racist ideas are not a form of ignorance, but rather of mistaken knowledge. "Ignorance" can imply that there is a total absence of thought and understanding around a given topic. Yet Enlightenment scientists and philosophers devote countless pages to theorizing race—it just happens to be the case that almost all of this theory is completely unfounded and wrong.

At times, Africans internalize and reproduce ethnic racism themselves. This can create divisions among the enslaved, who should be "natural allies," which benefits enslavers as it lessens the likelihood of resistance. French Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire is another supporter of the idea of racial hierarchy, asserting that Africans are inferior to white people and animalistic, yet in this sense are also physically "hardy" and fierce. With these ideas, he adds weight to the polygenesis theory, suggesting that Africans and Europeans do not emerge from a common ancestor. This is a segregationist view and one that enslavers embrace. At the same time, Voltaire is against slavery, a typical position within the intellectual climate of the Enlightenment.

Again, Kendi underscores that many abolitionists are also racist, including the famous philosopher Voltaire. Like proponents of slavery, Voltaire believes that African people are naturally sturdy, even if he doesn't support using that belief to justify slavery. As Kendi points out, opposing slavery is common among Enlightenment thinkers—and almost all of these thinkers are also deeply racist.

Of course, if Black people and white people are truly two different species, it wouldn't make sense that they could have children together. Yet segregationists and polygenesists are not so easily swayed by this argument. The supposed wrongness and aberration of biracial people is captured in the word "mulatto," which emerges in the 18th century and is derived from the word "mule."

Like the word "race," the slur for a mixed-race person is originally used to describe animals (again, specifically animals that are commercially traded and owned like slaves).

Peter Jefferson owns a tobacco plantation, Shadwell, and 1,200 acres of land in Virginia. Cherokee and Catawba dignitaries often stop at the Jefferson household on their way to conduct diplomatic business in Williamsburg. Meanwhile, Thomas grows up surrounded by enslaved Africans, coming to associate slavery and Black people with his comfort and care. Like other white people at the time, he finds slavery completely normal and familiar, "as customary as prisons are today." His father, Peter, has the second highest number of slaves of anyone in the county. Unlike other enslavers at the time, Peter does not allow them to be converted to Christianity.

The fact that Thomas Jefferson grows up on a wealthy plantation where a large number of people are held in bondage is crucial to understanding the later trajectory of his life. While some people born into enslaving families do later grow up to be abolitionists, this is very rare.

In 1746, New Jersey Quaker John Woolman writes the influential abolitionist tract, *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*. In it, he characterizes white Christians as having a superior position, which bestows them with the duty to act benevolently toward enslaved Africans. Woolman waits until 1754 to publish the essay, choosing a moment in which Quakers appear to be becoming more sympathetic to abolition. Woolman's essay jumpstarts a powerful Quaker abolitionist movement, although many Quakers are still enslavers and remain hostile to abolition. After traveling around the country and meeting with both abolitionists and advocates of slavery, Woolman publishes an updated version of his essay in 1762. This new version emphasizes racial equality rather than a paternalistic view of white benevolence. Woolman's antiracist position is "ahead of its time."

This passage introduces another vital theme in the book: the ability (and importance) of a person's thinking about race to change over time. Woolman begins with a patronizing view of Black people similar to that held by most of his fellow white abolitionists at the time. However, he is eventually able to see that he is wrong and revises his position to a more coherently antiracist one. As Kendi will show throughout the book, revising one's own thoughts is an extremely important part of embracing antiracism.

Peter Jefferson dies at 1757, making 14-year-old Thomas the official head of the household. In reality Thomas' mother oversees the running of the plantation, where 66 people are held in bondage. In 1760, Thomas begins studying at the College of William & Mary, where he is exposed to abolitionist Enlightenment philosophy. Following this, he trains as a lawyer and then takes a role as a political leader representing Albemarle County in the House of Burgesses. However, he has only occupied the role for 10 days when the royal governor of Virginia closes the House over a dispute about colonial taxes.

Born into a powerful family, Jefferson inherits both wealth power at a young age (when his father dies) and is clearly poised for an influential role. At the same time, the America that he grows up in is still in a volatile state of formation, in part because it is still under British control.

After this, Jefferson takes the case of a Samuel Howell, a self-emancipated second-generation biracial man. Jefferson argues that Howell should be granted freedom, arguing that "under the law of nature, all men are born free." He loses the case.

Here it seems as if Jefferson is rebelling against the pro-slavery culture into which he was born thanks to the Enlightenment ideas he learned at college.

CHAPTER 8: BLACK EXHIBITS

In 1772, a group of white men from Boston approach a 19-year-old enslaved woman, Phillis Wheatley, demanding to know if she is the true author of the poetry published under her name. Wheatley's story is unusual. A Wolof girl captured and brought across the Atlantic as a small child, she is purchased at the age of seven by a Boston couple whose own seven-year-old daughter had died nine years earlier. The Wheatleys raised Phillis like their own daughter, providing her with an extensive education. She writes her first English-language poem at 11, and by 12, she can fluently read Latin, Greek, and English literature along with the Bible.

During this time, it was highly unusual (and in many cases actually illegal) for enslaved people to be taught how to read and write. While there can be no doubt that Phillis Wheatley is a remarkably gifted young person, this must be considered alongside the reality that she is one of a very small handful of Black people from whom the tools to express that talent are not withheld.

At 15, Wheatley writes a poem entitled "To the University of Cambridge," in which she expresses her dream to attend Harvard, which at this point still only admits white men. The poem conveys the assimilationist ideas Wheatley has internalized. In 1771, she assembles a volume of poetry, much of which meditates on the intensifying conflict between Britain and colonial America. It is at this point that the men from Boston come to verify if she is the true author of her works. Astonished that the answer is yes, the men give their signatures as proof of the poems' authenticity.

The fact that a group of white men feel they must authenticate that Wheatley is indeed the author of her own poems is telling. Rather than being treated like an ordinary author, Wheatley is more like an artifact or exhibit whose authenticity must be "proven" by others. Although she is the first published Black poet in American history, she is not allowed to speak for herself.

Kendi writes that Phillis Wheatley is one of many so-called "barbarians" exposed to assimilationist education and training only to be paraded around as evidence of Black people's capacity for "civilization." Francis William is born to a free Black man in Jamaica and sent to Cambridge University, where he performs well. Upon returning to Jamaica, he opens a grammar school for the children of enslavers, where he spreads assimilationist ideas and praises colonial governors. The renowned Scottish Enlightenment philosopher David Hume, meanwhile, rejects the idea that William is truly intelligent, comparing him to a parrot who has been taught to repeat "a few words plainly." Hume is an abolitionist, but nonetheless also a staunch segregationist.

Figures like Francis William are often celebrated in the contemporary period due to their pathbreaking journeys as the first Black people to enter a particular exclusionary institution or be awarded a particular form of recognition. What this celebration sometimes obscures is the deeply racist context in which William and others like him are granted access into the white world. It is not in recognition of William's own intelligence that he is admitted to Cambridge, but to prove that he can be "civilized."

In 1763, Benjamin Franklin meets a group of Black students at a school in Philadelphia and is impressed by their capabilities. He observes that it seems possible that some Black people could "adopt our Language or Customs." However, he insists that this is only a minority and that most Africans are naturally "sullen" and "malicious." Because it is easy for racists to concede that there might be a few exceptional Black people, pointing to these exceptional few is not a very effective tactic for antiracism. In 1789, the Countess of Huntingdon Selina Hastings sponsors the production of the formerly enslaved Nigerian Olaudah Equiano's autobiography. Starting in the 1770s, English law begins to shift toward abolition, although slavery remains in place in the colonies.

This passage introduces another of the key ideas in the book: the impossibility of persuading away racism by using the example of an exceptionally talented or intelligent person. As Kendi explains, few racists refuse to believe that there are exceptions to the apparent "rule" of Black inferiority. Racist ideas are, after all, ideas about Blackness overall, not ideas about any one individual person. As a result, racists allow for exceptions; indeed, these are necessary in order to preserve a racist worldview.

In 1773, a University of Pennsylvania professor named Benjamin Rush anonymously publishes a pamphlet that cites Phillis Wheatley as an example of Black "genius" and argues that all the negative traits associated with Black people are produced by slavery. The truth, of course, is that the negative traits associated with Black people are products of racist thinking alone. Nonetheless, Rush's anti-slavery pamphlet helps trigger a powerful upswing in abolitionism; in 1774, the first recorded white antislavery society, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, is founded.

The distinction Kendi makes here is a nuanced one that can initially be hard to grasp. It is of course the case that slavery has an impact on the enslaved, causing profound psychological trauma as well as other consequences. At the same time, slavery does not give Black people as a group particular traits. To suggest that it does is actually racist.

The publication of Wheatley's poems in 1773 is a massive event in London, and when she arrives in England she is treated like a "rock star." At this point she is still in enslaved; however, after the Boston Tea Party of December 1773 stokes political tensions, British people decry the hypocrisy of Wheatley's enslavement and she is granted freedom. When Voltaire reads Wheatley's work, he admits that it seems Black people *are* capable of writing poetry. None of this, however, has any effect on proslavery segregationists, because "as long as there [is] slavery, there [will] be racist ideas justifying it."

This passage underlines an important message about how racist ideas work. While Wheatley becomes famous—the object of fascination, admiration, and shock—assimilationist abolitionists hope that this will help persuade people to oppose slavery. However, this is based on a misunderstanding of why slavery exists and how it is justified.

In 1773, Thomas Jefferson is caught up in the political tumult of the escalating tensions with Britain. American enslavers at the time are wary of the force of British abolitionism and simultaneously excited by the prospect of making money from non-British markets. In 1774, Jefferson and other Virginia rebels publish a "freedom manifesto," *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, that blames England for slavery and the slave trade. However, some critics point out the hypocrisy in such a tract being written by enslavers.

By this point, while the British are denouncing the Americans for continuing to have slavery, the Americans blame the British for introducing slavery in the first place. On one level, there is actually some truth in both these accusations. Yet at the same time, they remain so hypocritical that they are effectively hollow—especially considering that neither nation has fully eliminated slavery.

At the same time, the Jamaica-based enslaver Edward Long writes a book entitled *History of Jamaica* that lends further weight to the polygenesis theory. Long claims that Black people more closely resemble monkeys than white people and argues that Francis William was a white man in "black skin," complete with fervent anti-Black beliefs. A new wave of debate about polygenesis ensues. Immanuel Kant—one of the most influential philosophers in history—argues against polygenesis, yet simultaneously claims that Europeans are the original and best human group. Benjamin Franklin, meanwhile, argues that by restricting American autonomy through colonial policy, England is turning "American whites black." The writer Samuel Johnson mocks the revolutionary American elite, pointing out that the only true discussion of freedom emerging from America comes from Black voices.

Throughout the book, Kendi exposes how much variation there is within racist thought. Indeed, this is part of why racist ideas are so widespread and insidious. Furthermore, as Kendi emphasizes throughout, racist ideas are very often in conflict with one another. A person might reject one racist idea and imagine that this makes them not racist without realizing that the opposite idea in a given debate is also racist.

CHAPTER 9: CREATED EQUAL

In 1776 the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia writes up the **Declaration of Independence**. The task of drafting it goes to Thomas Jefferson, who is 33 and a fairly unimportant figure within Congress. Writing against the claim of American inferiority (to Europeans), Jefferson asserts: "all Men are created equal." No one can say for sure whether Jefferson seeks to include the enslaved in this statement or if the word "created" hints at the still-raging debates over polygenesis. In the same document he rebukes the British for attempting to encourage the enslaved to "rise in arms among us." Regardless of Jefferson's intention, however, the assertion that all men are created equal has a powerful impact, helping lead Massachusetts and Vermont to abolish slavery.

It is quite extraordinary that in one of the most important—if not the most important—documents in American history, there remains so much ambiguity over a key sentence. From the very moment Jefferson writes that "all Men are created equal" onward, debate rages about what this actually means. Nevertheless, a statement like this in a country where slavery exists is hypocritical at best and at worst a clear indication that Black people do not count as human.

It is impossible to say what Jefferson's vision of freedom and equality means given that he is actively holding 200 people in bondage when he writes it. When Jefferson demands "freedom" from the English, what he truly seeks is arguably *power*. While Jefferson is writing, hundreds of thousands of enslaved people are simultaneously asserting *their* right to freedom, emancipating themselves by fleeing from plantations. Yet these freedom efforts—along with those of women resisting gendered oppression—are systematically dismissed and excluded from the Declaration.

The distinction between "freedom" and "power" can be seen as the single most important issue regarding America's self-image (both during Jefferson's time and in the present). When a country that defines itself by freedom yet is being built on genocide and slavery, it is reasonable to assume that "freedom" actually refers to something else (which as Kendi points out, is really power).

Crucially, revolutionary American leaders want freedom in the form of a free *market*—the ability to trade beyond the British Empire (and thus exponentially increase the profits from slavery and the slave trade). Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith supports this in his enormously influential *The Wealth of Nations*. In it, Smith calls Africa "barbarous and uncivilized" and praises the new system of government being developed in America. Following the resolution to declare independence in 1776, Jefferson's fellow delegates edit the **Declaration**. A group of Southern representatives remove a reference to slavery as a "cruel war against human nature," worrying that this will stimulate the abolitionist movement.

Part of what makes the Declaration of Independence a complex and internally contradictory document is that it is written collaboratively by a group of people attempting to represent a large number of views. From its inception, the new American state is far from a monolith, but rather a jumble of very different social, political, and religious views. Of course, at the time, Black people are largely excluded, with their own opinions left out of this form of recorded history

After the **Declaration of Independence** is issued on July 4, 1776, the Revolutionary War ensues. Jefferson and his family leave their main house, Monticello, hiding in another spot on the 10,000 acres of land that surrounds it. During this time Jefferson composes *Notes on the State of Virginia*, which he doesn't intend to publish. In it, he reflects on slavery, straddling both anti-slavery and anti-abolitionist as well as racist and anti-racist positions. General George Washington, meanwhile, is more unequivocal in his belief that the time is not right to fight for abolition. He makes the strange argument that anti-Black "prejudice" is decreasing on its own, and that it would be dangerous to launch a "frontal attack" on it via abolition.

George Washington, Jefferson, and other political leaders at the time are not entirely dismissive of the prospect of abolition; rather, they patronizingly insist that it isn't the right time, acting with none of the urgency that the issue so desperately requires.

In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson lays out a plan that he will continue to endorse for the rest of his life: Black people in America should be educated, freed, and then sent back to Africa. He emphasizes Black people's supposed deficiencies and in doing so becomes "the preeminent American authority on Black intellectual inferiority." The reality evident on his own plantation is that Black people are just as intelligent and capable as any white person, as demonstrated by the enormous and complex range of skills that enslaved Black people develop during this period. Runaway adverts, including those written by Jefferson himself, frequently mention the "ingenious" cunning and skill of fugitives, yet enslavers do not count this as evidence of Black intellectual capability.

Overall Jefferson's views on slavery are defined by vagueness and paradox, but when it comes to the question of colonization, his position becomes quite clear. Whether because he can't stand the idea of living among Black people as equals, because his conscience as an enslaver troubles him, or because he is worried about the formerly enslaved seeking revenge, Jefferson is adamant that free Black people must be sent back to Africa.

Overall, *Notes on the State of Virginia* is brimming with paradoxes about Black people: that they are more adventurous and short-sighted than white people, that they have a greater capacity for love but lower sensitivity to pain, and that, bizarrely, they like sleeping more but *need* to sleep less than their white counterparts. Jefferson also asserts that Native Americans, unlike Black people, are "in body and mind equal to the whiteman." Kendi suggests that these confused statements are typical of Jefferson's writing on race, which tends to straddle many different conflicting positions while always ultimately ending up being racist.

This is a perfect example of how racist thought is represented not by absence but by the presence of knowledge—even an abundance of knowledge—however confused and misguided that knowledge might be. Jefferson has a lot of ideas about race, but as Kendi points out, they just happen to all be incorrect and deeply racist.

In 1782, Jefferson is still recovering from the impact of the Revolutionary War when his wife, Martha, dies. Partly in order to distract himself from the pain of losing her, Jefferson travels to Paris as a diplomat in 1784. He sends word back to Monticello that tobacco production should be ramped up at the same time as he promises abolitionists that he earnestly shares their desire to see an end to slavery. Jefferson sends the still-unpublished *Notes on the State of Virginia*, and in 1786, a rogue printer publishes a French translation without first alerting him. After this happens, Jefferson signs off on an English translation, which is published in 1787. The book proves enormously popular.

While Jefferson's contradictory views on slavery make his true opinion hard to judge, what he claims to think matters far less than his actions. Even as Jefferson frequently invokes ideas of universal freedom, and even as he promises abolitionists that he wants slavery to end, Jefferson still orders that tobacco production be escalated on his plantation in order to increase his own profits. However he chooses to justify it, on some level this makes him unquestionably pro-slavery.

This same year, Samuel Stanhope Smith delivers the annual lecture of the prestigious American Philosophical Society, advocating for climate theory. He argues that "Europeans, and Americans are, the most beautiful people in the world." Yet moving to a colder climate and assimilating into white civilization can, he argues, erase Black people's inferiority. Ideas like this translate into a system in which biracial people—whether enslaved or free—tend to be treated better than those of entirely African descent. Some light-skinned Black people respond to this by discriminating against those of darker skin, while others choose to act in solidarity with all other Black people. Smith's lecture concludes that, on account of climate theory principles, slavery has actually *benefited* those subjected to its tortures.

Smith's lecture is yet another example of how assimilationist ideas can be. Rather than being a less severe form of racism than segregationist ideas, assimilationist ideas can be even more dangerous because they justify the degradation and brutality Black people experience under slavery by claiming that it is actually beneficial *to the enslaved.*

At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, slavery is initially taken off the agenda. However, after some time, delegate James Wilson, a future Supreme Court justice, argues that enslaved Black people should count as 3/5 of a person when it comes to political representation. This "compromise" is virtually unopposed, except for the lone dissenting voice of the abolitionist Eldridge Gerry. The 3/5 solution appeals to both assimilationists—who believe that, with the right efforts, Black people will one day prove worthy of being counted as full persons—and segregationists, who consider the 3/5 designation permanent. All explicit references to slavery are removed from the constitution in order to mask the hypocrisy of the document, centered as it is on freedom.

The notion that enslaved Black people count as only 3/5 of a person is one of the most devastatingly insulting and dehumanizing ideas in the history of American racism. At the same time, it is also a demonstration of racist ideas' absurdity. While the notion of 3/5 of a person sounds strangely mathematical or scientific, Kendi underscores that in reality it is complete nonsense. However, this does not stop it being instituted as policy.

In the summer of 1787, Jefferson's daughter Polly and her enslaved maid, 14-year-old Sally Hemings, arrive in Paris. Jefferson, now 44, begins having sex with Hemings, who cannot have had any choice in the matter due to her enslaved status. Throughout his life, Jefferson denounces racial "amalgamation," keeping this position even after he becomes the father of numerous biracial children with Hemings. Faced with returning to America with Jefferson when she is 16, Hemings attempts to turn to French officials in order to secure her freedom. In response, Jefferson gives her "extraordinary privileges" and promises that their children will all be freed. The two have as many as seven children together and those who survive into adulthood are granted freedom at the point as per Jefferson's promise.

The story of Jefferson and Hemings is often described as a sexual relationship; sometimes people even refer to it as a love story. But Kendi emphasizes that it is a dynamic of rape. Not only is Hemings only 14, but as an enslaved person "owned" by Jefferson, she cannot consent to being in a sexual relationship with him. While historians do not have access to Hemings' own thoughts about the situation, the fact that she attempts to refuse to return to America suggests that the lengths she is prepared to go to resist the abuse to which she is subjected.

In 1791, enslaved Africans in Haiti rebel against their enslavers. It is a beginning of a revolution that Jefferson and other enslavers around the world hope the Black rebels will lose, worried that the enslaved in their own countries will be inspired by this tremendous assertion of freedom.

In this passage, Hemings' personal attempt at rebellion is set against a broader context of enslaved people rising up and demanding their own emancipation in what is arguably the most daring and important revolt of all time: the Haitian Revolution.

CHAPTER 10: UPLIFT SUASION

Benjamin Banneker is a free Black man born to a free biracial woman (who was herself the daughter of multiple generations of free interracial marriage) and an enslaved Black man. A talented tobacco farmer, his inherited farm provides him enough free time to devote himself to reading and writing. In 1790, Benjamin Franklin, now 84, gives a speech to Congress demanding the end of slavery, which he characterizes as an "inconsistency" in "the land of liberty." He dies shortly after, but the ensuing debate rages on. Proslavery advocates argue that Black people's supposedly inferior characteristics mean that they will not be able to properly cope with freedom. In 1790, the first law defining American citizenship is passed; it states that only "free white persons" can be citizens.

Although some influential political leaders like Benjamin Franklin are starting to come around to the idea of abolition, this passage highlights the wider problem underlying the entire situation: because they do not count as citizens (or even as full people) under American law, enslaved people themselves get no say in whether slavery continues to exist.

Assimilationists fervently argue that if Black people are granted freedom, they will be capable of using it properly (which they understand to mean acting like white people). Of course, the whole debate is beside the point, as enslavers are not actually concerned about anything other than losing the profit and power they gain from slavery. In 1791, in the midst of these discussions, Banneker writes a letter to Jefferson. He invites Jefferson to offer real assistance to Black people and help stop the "train of absurd and false ideas and opinions" about them. Banneker's letter is clearly and resolutely antiracist. In his response, Jefferson assures Banneker that no one wants slavery to end more than he does and notes that he is impressed by Banneker's intellect.

Kendi emphasizes that the whole debate over Black people using freedom responsibly is entirely beside the point. As Kendi shows throughout the book, when it comes to the issue of race time is often wasted over arguments that do not need to happen. This is because racist ideas only exist to justify racist policies, so there is little point in getting caught in the trap of arguing about racist ideas if the ultimate goal isn't changing racist policies.

The ongoing Haitian Revolution, meanwhile, is a manifestation of every enslaver's worst fear. In 1793, Congress passes the Fugitive Slave Act, which allows enslavers to pursue Africans who've fled and criminalizes those who assist the escapees. To Jefferson, the Haitian Revolution is a "tragedy." During the 1790s, the number of free Black people in the North increases while the enslaved population declines. Abolitionists pressure those who are free to live respectable lives—attend church, become educated, marry, behave soberly—in order to "prove" that Black people should be allowed freedom. This comes to be known as "uplift suasion"; it places the responsibility for eradicating racist ideas on Black people themselves.

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793 is an important piece of evidence against the idea of gradual progress when it comes to the matter of racism. The story of slavery is not one of steadily increasing freedom that ultimately leads to abolition. In fact, as time goes on, slavery becomes even more *brutal and oppressive. Indeed, the reason for this enhanced brutality is greater resistance and agitation on the part of the enslaved, which in turn leads enslavers to double down on their repressive tactics.*

Uplift suasion is grounded in the racist idea that Black people have to disprove the negative stereotypes with which they are associated. It also misses the point that racist ideas are not logical and thus cannot be disproved anyway. However, this did not stop both white and Black activists from being optimistic about what uplift suasion could accomplish in the 1790s.

People do not necessarily invest in doomed tactics such as uplift suasion while knowing they will fail. Most of the time, they genuinely believe they will help eliminate racism. This leads to a lot of pointlessly wasted time and energy.

In 1793, Benjamin Rush falsely informs Black people that they are immune from yellow fever, an untruth that results in thousands of avoidable deaths. Jefferson, meanwhile, is days away from retiring as secretary of state when he receives a patent application from Eli Whitney. Whitney's hope that his invention, a cotton gin, will drastically speed up production of fabric comes true. Uplift suasion, never a reliable strategy to begin with, has no chance against the tsunami of profit generated by "King Cotton."

As the example of Benjamin Rush's false information shows, one of the most sinister and dangerous forms of racist ideas is medical racism, as it causes immeasurable suffering.

In 1796, Thomas Jefferson is running for president against John Adams. Benjamin Rush makes what he believes to be the extraordinary discovery of Henry Moss, a Black man with vitiligo, a condition that lightens skin. Moss has been exhibited across the country, perceived by some as a "freak" while heralded by others as an assimilationist miracle. Jefferson, who never sees Moss himself, knows a number of "white Negroes"—who likely have albinism—because they are enslaved on his own plantation. However, Jefferson does not share the excitement of "physical assimilationists," believing that whitened skin or features does not stop a Black people from being Black.

The fact that Henry Moses' skin condition is celebrated as miraculous by many of the most prominent thinkers of his era highlights how racist ideas corrupt people's common sense, perception of the world, and ability to act ethically. The desire to physically turn all Black people in the U.S. white seems like something out of a science fictional nightmare, yet it is a genuine wish harbored by some of the most esteemed leaders of the era.

In 1797, Rush tells Jefferson that he is writing a scientific paper in which he proposes that Black people's dark skin is "the effect of a disease." Rush, an abolitionist who considers himself a champion of racial equality, claims that this fictional skin disease causes Black people's supposed laziness, hypersexuality, and insensitivity to pain. He argues that Moss is evidence that "Nature had begun to cure Black people." The Northern assimilationists who support Rush's views come to hate Jefferson, whom they view as proslavery and anti-Black. Nevertheless, Jefferson wins the presidential election when he runs for a second time in 1800.

This passage contains further examples of how racist thinking can take the form of supposedly scientific ideas, which are nevertheless completely false. Even though Rush is an abolitionist, the culture of slavery in which he lives has shaped his views, making him embrace the completely false notions that Black people are lazy and insensitive to pain.

Shortly after he is elected, it is revealed that Jefferson is the father of several children with Sally Hemings. However, the rape of Black women by white men is so common at the time that this doesn't trigger much of a scandal, and in 1804 Jefferson is successfully reelected for a second term. To many, the rape of enslaved women—and the corresponding hypersexualization of Black women in the public imagination—are permanent parts of American society. Among those who are troubled by slavery, many accept it as a "necessary evil." Others are sympathetic to the plight of the enslaved but terrified of a vengeful race war. As the national territory expands westwards and cotton profits soar, the question of abolition is further marginalized. In this economically booming, increasingly secular environment, the polygenesis theory gains new life.

The second part of this passage contains an important point about the variety of reasons why people who oppose slavery might still also oppose abolition. For some, the reasoning is straightforwardly economic: slavery is a massive generator of profits and to eliminate it would radically alter the landscape of the country (and particularly the South). Others do not believe that slavery can be economically justified but fear living among free Black people, either because of their racist views or because they think that Black people will seek revenge for slavery.

CHAPTER 11: BIG BOTTOMS

Just before leaving office at the end of his second presidential term, Jefferson receives a book by the abolitionist scientist Henri Gregoire entitled *An Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties, and Literature of Negroes*. The book features a travel narrative describing "glorious Black nations"; while Gregoire insists that he is not advocating a view of racial *equality* between white and Black people, he presents the assimilationist view that Black people could successfully be incorporated into white society. Jefferson has begun speaking against slavery in public and oversaw the passing of a law banning illegal slave traders in 1807. However, because there were no stipulations as to how the law would be enforced, it ended up being "empty and mostly symbolic."

This passage serves as a reminder that even those who are adamant in their opposition to slavery are often still paralyzed with fear and confusion about what a post-slavery society would look like. These anxieties tend to get displaced into conversations about whether Black people would be "capable" of handling freedom and integrating into society. Yet the truth is that it is white people who are proving themselves to be incapable of living among Black people as equals and building a flourishing society together.

In fact, ending the international slave trade actually benefits enslavers by driving up the price placed on those they hold in bondage. Writing a response to Gregoire, Jefferson repeats the line that no one in the world wants to see Black people advance more than he does. Back in Europe, opinions about Black people are being transformed by a new "exhibit": a Khoi woman named Sarah Baartman, whose buttocks became an object of fanatical fixation for the French public.

The fact that ending the slave trade is actually profitable for enslavers is another reminder to be skeptical about narratives of racial progress. The end of the slavery trade might seem like an important step toward abolition and in some senses it is—however, in another sense, it is actually an intensification and solidification of slavery.

A segregationist anatomist who at the time is "Europe's most distinguished intellectual," Georges Cuvier, spends days observing Baartman. After she dies in December 1815, Cuvier manages to obtain her body and dissects it, removing her genitals to be preserved. Cuvier then concludes that the Khoi people are closer relations of monkeys than white humans. Parts of Baartman's body remain on display until 1974. She is finally buried in South Africa, her homeland, in 2002.

Baartman's story is one of the most disturbing in the long and brutal history of anti-Black racism. The violent "scientific" fascination with her body causes her to be horrifically dehumanized in both life and death, illuminating how sinister the pursuit of (racist) knowledge can be.

By 1809, the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations have taken to purchasing enslaved people and capturing fugitives. Meanwhile, across the country enslaved people are revolting, in some cases explicitly drawing inspiration from the Haitian Revolution. These rebellions are met with brutal retaliation. By the time Jefferson leaves office, it is clear that slavery is massively expanding, not declining. Facing fierce criticism from Europeans, leaders in America begin defending slavery as a temporary necessary evil. When Jefferson leaves office in 1809, he is a millionaire (in today's terms) yet also has "a mountain of debt." He settles happily into retirement, indulging his passion for science. He shies away from opportunities to publicly stand against slavery, claiming this is due to his old age.

It may seem as if Jefferson is not as responsible for the continuation of slavery as a furiously vocal proslavery segregationist. Yet by deliberately delaying the question of abolition throughout his career only to retire and blame his old age for his reluctance to discuss the matter, it's possible that Jefferson did more to hinder abolition than a proslavery advocate. While proslavery advocates at least make their position clear (and thereby open the possibility of debate), Jefferson demanded patience while making false promises, sapping abolitionism of its momentum.

CHAPTER 12: COLONIZATION

In 1800, two enslaved people in Virginia—Gabriel and Nancy Prosser—organize a rebellion, aiming to storm the city of Richmond with the help of other enslaved people, poor white workers, and Native Americans. Before they have time to put their plan in action, however, the rebels are betrayed, and Gabriel is captured and hanged. Following these events, a discussion begins among Virginia legislators about the possibility of sending enslaved rebels and other troublesome people to a colony. Jefferson looks into Sierra Leone, which has been functioning as "England's colony for freed people since 1792."

The issue of colonization highlights the irrational, even hysterical aversion to the idea of living alongside Black people as equals that exists among so many white Americans during this time. Leaders like Jefferson would rather consider the enormously expensive and impractical (not to mention morally bankrupt) idea of sending enslaved people to a colonized part of Africa than simply allow them to live freely in the U.S.

The Sierra Leone plan is unsuccessful, however by this point a large coalition of influential leaders—segregationists, assimilationists, anti- and proslavery figures alike—are invested in the prospect of removing Black people from America. In 1816, an organization is formed to help put this plan in action: the American Colonization Society, led by prominent enslavers. Meanwhile, in 1817, 3,000 free Black men attend a meeting at a church in Philadelphia to discuss the prospect of colonization. They express their vehement opposition to the prospect of returning to the "savage wilds of Africa." Despite being of African descent, these men have internalized the racist ideas about Africa propagated in the society in which they live. They issue a resolution against the American Colonization Society.

The fact that colonization receives support from a coalition of people with completely different views on race and slavery highlights how these divisions are undergirded by a fundamental similarity: racism. While they may debate each other fiercely and proclaim to hate each other, in a certain sense white abolitionists and slavery advocates have far more in common than they do differences.

Nevertheless, colonization remains unpopular, as enslavers are concerned it will undermine slavery and Black people refuse to consider moving back unless it is accompanied by the promise of freedom. Still, the Slave Trade Act is passed in 1819, providing funds to send Black people back to Africa. By 1824, American colonizers occupy a region they call Liberia, although only 154 Black people initially travel there. Back in America, slave rebellions continue to take place. In 1818, a free Black carpenter named Denmark Vesey begins organizing an "army" of thousands of enslaved people, inspired by the American, French, and Haitian revolutions. His rebellion is due to take place on July 14, 1822.

The fact that the U.S. goes ahead with colonizing Liberia shows how dangerous the wealth and power of a nation like the U.S. can be. Colonizing Liberia completely upends the lives of the indigenous inhabitants of the region, creating problems that last until the present day. The move also represents the total disregard and disdain for Black life that characterizes both the foreign and domestic policy of the U.S.

Before it can take place, Vesey's rebellion is betrayed by Peter Prioleau, a house slave who is freed as a reward and later becomes an enslaver himself. Despite the rebellion being crushed before it happens, it still terrifies enslavers, increasing support for the prospect of colonization. Increasingly, proslavery literature encourages white people to be "on guard" and remain alert to the threat of Black people rising up to "destroy" white society.

The very small minority of Black people (some of whom are themselves formerly enslaved) who go on to become enslavers is one of the most troubling parts of the history of slavery. While cases like Prioleau's are extremely rare, they show how anyone can participate in the brutally racist institution of slavery.

In the debates leading up to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, Jefferson initially remains calm, feeling that the dispute was fairly inconsequential. However, by the time the Compromise is settled, Jefferson is deeply concerned that tensions over slavery could lead to a "civil war." He begins to fantasize about relocating enslaved Africans to the newly acquired Louisiana Territory, spreading them out in the vast amount of land in the hope that the region could effectively "swallow" the problem of slavery. In Congress, he refused to entertain discussions of abolition, convinced that slavery was too profitable to be eradicated. At the same time, he is *also* convinced that all human beings are born to be free. He becomes increasingly invested in the idea of sending Black people back to Africa.

This passage highlights Jefferson's paradoxical way of thinking about Black people. Indeed, it brings to mind the rhetorical question W. E. B. Du Bois will ask of Black people in his 1903 book, The Souls of Black Folk: "How does it feel to be a problem?" Of course, Kendi emphasizes throughout that Black people themselves—both enslaved and free—are not the "problem" at all. The problem exists only in the minds of white racists like Jefferson.

As the colonization movement continues to gain momentum, it takes on an increasingly religious tone, linking it to the Second Great Awakening. Images of a distinctly white Jesus are mass produced in order to endow white people with religious authority. By 1832, every Northern state has moved to officially support colonization, but the idea remains unpopular among free Black people. Many choose to respond by increasing their uplift suasion efforts, including via the first Black newspaper in the country's history, *Freedom's Journal*. The editors are Samuel Cornish, a preacher, and John Russwurm, the third Black person to graduate from an American college.

Crucially, by the 19th century, there is a small but growing number of free Black people who are afforded substantial formal education and allowed (limited) access into American institutions. These individuals live in a world that seeks to undermine them at every turn and many turn to "uplift suasion" as a result, attempting to prove that they are the intellectual and moral equals of their white equivalents in a doomed effort to undo racist thinking.

Articles in *Freedom's Journal* often place blame on poor and working-class Black people for "bringing the race down." Cornish and Russwurm disagree on the question of colonization and this eventually leads Cornish to resign. While support for the ACS continues to increase, the group never achieves is goal of attaining Jefferson's backing—despite the fact that Jefferson is certainly in favor of colonization. In 1825, Jefferson suffers from poor health and by 1826, he remains housebound with illness. The last visitor he receives the half-brother of Robert E. Lee, who will go on to lead the Confederate army. Jefferson is too sick to attend the 50th anniversary celebration of the **Declaration of Independence**.

The fact that Jefferson's last visitor is the half-brother of Robert E. Lee again highlights the idea that the entirety of the white American elite—despite internal differences over issues such as colonization and slavery—have more in common than they do differences. On one level, Jefferson's career is defined by paradox; yet on another, he acted quite consistently and coherently, in that he always ultimately worked in the interests of whiteness.

Aside from Sally Hemings and the children he had with her, Jefferson does not free any of the enslaved people at Monticello. However, by the time of his death, he is so deep in debt that his entire estate is sold after his passing. He dies at home at the age of 83, surrounded by enslaved Black house servants.

The final image of Jefferson on his death bed, surrounded by the people he holds in bondage highlights the perverse intimacy of slavery, wherein the enslaved are forced to perform care for those who brutally subjugate them.

CHAPTER 13: GRADUAL EQUALITY

Remarkably enough, both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams die on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the **Declaration of Independence**. By this point, the abolitionist movement of the Revolutionary period has lost its power. Three years after the death of the two presidents, 23-year-old William Lloyd Garrison gives the address at the American Colonization Society's Independence Day celebration. Garrison was raised by a poor and devout Baptist single mother in Newburyport, Massachusetts. As a teenager, he was an indentured servant to the editor of a local newspaper. After finishing his seven years of indenture, Garrison became an editor at a temperance paper in Boston. His passion for the cause was influenced by the fact that both his father and older brother were alcoholics.

The trajectory of Garrison's career highlights the important differences between being an indentured servant and slave and between the material reality of Blackness and whiteness. While Garrison was contractually obliged to work as a teenager, this experience of indenture does not inflict him with stigma for the rest of his life. In fact, the experience he gains working for the newspaper editor becomes the basis for a flourishing career.

In 1828, Garrison meets Benjamin Lundy, the editor of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Garrison is deeply affected by hearing Lundy preach about the evils of slavery. It is likely that, up until this moment, Garrison shares the general sense of fatalism around slavery, believing that however evil it is, it will never end. However, this all changes after hearing Lundy speak of abolition. During his Independence Day speech, Garrison criticizes the colonization movement, saying that instead people should be fighting for the "gradual abolition of slavery." Ten days later, he gives another abolitionist speech at a Black Baptist church. He then moves to Baltimore to join the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* as a coeditor.

Thanks in part to the inaction of leaders like Jefferson—as well as the steeply increasing profits from slavery during this era—many people who oppose slavery in principle at this point in time feel resigned to the idea that it will always exist. This demonstrates the importance of people like Lundy constantly and vocally reminding others that slavery is intolerable. Indeed, Garrison's radicalization could even be seen to undermine Kendi's argument that racist ideas cannot be persuaded away.

The following year, Garrison publishes an article calling for immediate abolition. In November, a "disciple" of Denmark Vesey named David Walker publishes an antiracist, antislavery pamphlet entitled *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Yet even this features references to Black inferiority and characterizes Africa as a wretched, backward place. Walker also blames Black people for being too politically divided to build real power, when in fact it is white people who are far more divided across the political spectrum. Despite these racist elements, the pamphlet is still overall "intoxicatingly antiracist." He includes excerpts of the **Declaration of Independence** alongside his demand for freedom.

Some accounts of the abolitionist movement largely exclude Black people (with the exception of figures like Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass whose contributions are largely framed via white individuals and organizations). However, as Denmark Vesey's and David Walker's activism shows, Black people have always been at the forefront of the abolitionist movement, making the most urgent, clear, and antiracist demands.

As a believer in nonviolence, Garrison is wary of Walker's *Appeal*, although he admits it contains some important "truths." In the midst of the panic surrounding the *Appeal*'s publication Garrison is imprisoned for seven weeks. After being released he expresses no anger about his imprisonment, explaining: "A few white victims must be sacrificed to open the eyes of the nation." Around this time Walker dies, but his ideas are taken up by others, including the early Black feminist Maria Stewart. Garrison moves back to Boston and in January 1831 publishes the first issue of a new abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*.

Garrison's pronouncement of self-sacrifice has echoes of the rhetoric used by some white allies in the present. This can be a controversial tactic, as language of self-sacrifice can lead to the further centering and enshrinement of whiteness through the idea of martyrdom. Indeed, at the very end of the book Kendi will critique the idea of self-sacrifice as a largely non useful strategy against racism.

From this point forward, Garrison commits to fighting for immediate emancipation, a cause he will support for the rest of his life. But he's also an assimilationist, advocating for "gradual *equality*" and arguing that Black people should strive to become like white people. He claims that if Black people properly assimilate, racism will dissolve on its own. In reality, the history of the early 19th century indicates that assimilation and uplift suasion are ineffective at eradicating racism. During this time, sensationalist media begins to issue hysterical reports about Black neighborhoods, depicting them as overrun with depravity and crime.

Not only do assimilation and racial uplift not work as strategies against racism, American history indicates that they often make racism worse. When white racists see Black people becoming part of white society, "acting like" white people, and partaking in the benefits of assimilation, the result is often an outraged surge of racist violence.

Many of the poor European immigrants arriving en masse to America face ethnic prejudice of their own and retaliate by expressing anti-Black ideas. This period is when the country's first minstrel shows take place, with white actors performing racist caricatures such as "Old darky," Mammy," "yaller gal," and "Dandy"/"Zip Coon." This last figure is a mocking representation of "an upwardly mobile northern Black male" whose assimilationist aspirations attract the scorn of audiences. Meanwhile, the young showman P. T. Barnum tours with an elderly Black woman "exhibit" who he claims is the 161-year-old former "mammy" of George Washington. Children's books and games are filled with slavery imagery, encouraging children to adopt racist ideas.

Like early modern England, 19th-century America is overrun with racist ideas being mass disseminated onstage under the guise of entertainment. Indeed, the history of minstrelsy highlights the disturbing reality that racism isn't necessarily associated with a racist's feelings of anger or fear. Throughout history, racists have found racism playful, lighthearted, and fun.

On August 21, 1831, the enslaved freedom fighter Nat Turner kills at least 57 enslavers in a rebellion that lasts two days. Before being hanged, Turner testifies that his actions were the will of God. When asked if he repents, he replies, "Was not Christ crucified?" Garrison is disapproving of Turner's rebellion's violent method and concerned that it would dissuade people from supporting abolition. In reality, Kendi notes, Garrison misses the point that "some, if not most, enslavers would die rather than set their wealth free." Racist thought refuses to accommodate enslaved people's resistance. When the enslaved don't resist, they are framed as inherently submissive and docile, but when they do, it is blamed on white "agitators."

Although Garrison passionately believes in the cause of abolition, his patronizing view of Black revolutionaries like Turner and his unwillingness to consider violence as a reasonable tactic illuminates the limits of his thought. One could argue that Garrison's racism prevents him from truly understanding both the reality of slavery and the urgency of abolition. It also makes him read the actions of people like Turner as examples of merciless brutality rather than as reasonable responses to the violence of slavery.

Turner's rebellion pushes the government to start taking abolition seriously. Yet enslavers continue to develop racist ideas because they want to justify slavery—a process that Garrison does not grasp. In 1832, he publishes a critique of the ACS entitled *Thoughts on African Colonization*. This ends up being a devastating blow to the ACS, which never returns to its former power. It is not just abolitionists like Garrison that oppose colonization, however; many enslavers do as well. The proslavery opposition to colonization is summarized in Thomas Roderick Dew's book *Review of the Debate in the Virginia Legislature of 1831 and 1832*—a book that actually makes some fairly similar arguments to Garrison's *Thoughts*.

Once again, this passage highlights a surprising alignment of people from oppositional ends of a given ideological spectrum. While some abolitionists oppose colonization because they do not believe it is feasible (or right) to send free Black people to Africa, enslavers also oppose it because they want to maintain a supply of enslaved labor in the U.S. Similarly, there are also both abolitionists and enslavers (like Jefferson) who support colonization as a solution to slavery.

Back in 1828, the U.S. Senate had already denied funds to the ACS due to concerns that relocating Black people to Africa would "create a vacuum in cheap labor in seaboard cities," thereby raising labor costs. In 1833, a group of 66 abolitionists found the American Anti-Slavery Society, gaining the support of a number of wealthy and powerful individuals. Garrison is given a "minor" role in the organization. While the AASS proclaims to advocate for racial equality, in reality members are deeply concerned about the prospect of Black people becoming part of white society or seeming themselves as the true equals of white Americans.

This passage introduces another important theme in the history of racist and antiracist ideas: false claims of antiracism that attempt to mask the fundamental racism lying beneath them. The members of AASS proclaim to be in favor of racial equality, perhaps in order to advance their abolitionist arguments. But Kendi emphasizes that—like many white abolitionists—they are actually fairly resistant to the prospect of true equality.

CHAPTER 14: IMBRUTED OR CIVILIZED

In 1825, over one million abolitionist tracts are published in America. These texts characterize enslavers as "evil"; they criticize some racist ideas but produce and disseminate others. After the AASS is founded, white vigilantes start terrorizing Black neighborhoods in Northern cities, destroying properties; gangs of white men rape both white and Black women. A fervent proslavery leader emerges in the form of the South Carolina senator and two-time former vice president John C. Calhoun. Calhoun rejects the idea that slavery is a "necessary evil," instead firmly claiming that it is "a good—a positive good." Like Garrison, Calhoun is considered an extremist; both men perceive the other as a potential destroyer of the nation.

While it probably seems obvious to contemporary readers that John C. Calhoun's position of praising slavery as a "positive good" is extremist, it might be surprising to learn that Garrison's position is also considered so. Yet bear in mind how deeply entrenched slavery is during this time period. While this is not an ethical excuse for maintaining slavery, it explains how to many people ending slavery (particularly in one sudden move) is considered drastic and unimaginable.

The abolitionist movement continues to grow, although the more supporters it gains, the more rifts emerge. When it comes to formal scholarship on race, there is a "virtual consensus" around white superiority and scholars still remain gripped by the monogenesis versus polygenesis debate. In 1842, a scientific controversy emerges when Harvard-educated psychiatrist Edward Jarvis realizes that Northern Black people are 10 times more likely to be deemed insane than the enslaved, leading him to conclude that slavery must have a positive impact on Black people's psychology. Shortly after, the Southern scientist Dr. Josiah C. Nott publishes a paper arguing that biracial women are less fertile than women of either solely European or African descent. He bases this argument on the idea that biracial women descend from "two distinct species."

This passage helps explain why the pro- and antislavery positions, despite being theoretically oppositional, actually share a fundamental outlook. The debate over slavery may be raging, but the debate over white superiority is nonexistent (at least among the white men who occupy the formal intellectual institutions of the nation).

In the 1840s, a debate erupts around the annexation of Texas as a slave state, which broadens into a general discussion of slavery and emancipation in Congress. This horrifies Calhoun, who decides to cite the recent work of an Egyptologist, George R. Gliddon, in his pro-slavery arguments. Gliddon argues that, since ancient times, Black people have been enslaved and kept distinct from white people.

Gliddon's argument is historically inaccurate. At the same time, it (unintentionally) touches on an important debate within contemporary Black Studies about the extent to which dark-skinned peoples have always *been the most oppressed across different historic and geographical contexts.*

In 1841, Garrison spends three days at a gathering of abolitionists on Nantucket Island, during which he meets a young fugitive named Frederick Douglass. Impressed by his rhetorical skill, the Massachusetts Antislavery Society gives Douglass a job as a traveling speaker. Although the aim of Douglass's role is to persuade audiences into opposing slavery, the reality of being such an "exhibit" is extremely dehumanizing. Furthermore, whenever Douglass starts speaking philosophically (rather than purely autobiographically), he is told to stop talking. Moreover, audiences regularly protest that Douglass is too intelligent and refined to have ever been enslaved.

In the simplified (and whitewashed) account of abolitionism, white abolitionists are presented as kindly allies or saviors of Black people, including the formerly enslaved. Yet as the cruel, tokenizing, and dehumanizing treatment of Frederick Douglass illuminates, this simplified image does not represent reality.

In 1845, Douglass publishes *The Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, which becomes a bestseller. The book profoundly changes the American public imagination and leads the way for many more slave narratives to be published in the future. Garrison writes the preface but—despite speaking from a staunchly abolitionist perspective—he ends up emphasizing Black inferiority in a way that is sometimes barely distinguishable from his proslavery opponents. Overall, he provides the book with an assimilationist framing in hope that this will win greater support from readers. The preface is "a compellingly racist counterweight to Douglass's *Narrative*."

One of the most important decisions Kendi makes in the book is to be uncompromising in his detection of racism. The fact that Garrison is an abolitionist who dedicates his life to fighting slavery does not make his racist ideas—including those expressed in his "racist counterweight" of a preface to Douglass's "Narrative—any less racist.

It is during this period that the telegraph is invented, revolutionizing American media. Writing in the new Southern journal *De Bow's Review*, the physician Samuel A. Cartwright—a former student of Benjamin Rush—claims that enslaved people who resist suffer from a disease called "dysesthesia," which is cured by submitting to the authority and care of white people. Cartwright recommends treating enslaved people like children. Meanwhile, the Alabama doctor J. Marion Sims conducts brutal medical experiments on 11 enslaved women without giving them anesthesia, citing the racist idea that Black people feel less pain.

While this racist pseudoscience and medical racism may seem absurd, Kendi argues that the power of racist ideas does not lie in their plausibility. In fact, the opposite is often true. The more outlandish and absurd a racist idea is, the more extreme a demonstration of commitment it is to believe in it anyway. As such, racist ideas that are the most obviously wrong are in some sense also the most powerful.

In 1845, Texas is admitted to the U.S. as a slave state. A border war with Mexico erupts in 1846. An attempt is made to ban slavery in territories seized from Mexico during the war, but President James K. Polk rejects this proposition as "foolish." In 1847, Garrison writes that proslavery sentiment and racial prejudice is on the decline, though he emphasizes that the battle is still far from won. He has come to understand that resentment of elite, assimilated Black people is a powerful force, but he still cannot bring himself to abandon the tactic of uplift suasion. In 1850, a bargain is struck that attempts another compromise between enslavers and abolitionists: California is admitted as a free state, while the disciplinary force of the Fugitive Slave Act is increased.

The escalating tensions over slavery are heading toward a dramatic climax: the American Civil War of the 1860s. As tensions rise, a number of leaders loosen their individual ideological commitments in favor of hoping to find a compromise that will keep the country intact. In the midst of all this, the lives of enslaved people are carelessly used as pawns.

In 1850, a debate over polygenesis erupts at the American Association for the Advancement of Science's annual conference in Charleston. Attendees discuss the physical differences between the races, emphasizing the idea that white people's bodies represent the ideal standard from which Black people deviate. The meeting is attended not just by scholars, but many members of the general public as well. Days after the conference ends, John C. Calhoun is pronounced dead.

Once again, the debate over polygenesis at this esteemed academic conference highlights how nonsense ideas are upheld and respected by the supposed intellectual leaders of the time. Again, Kendi argues that the power of racist ideas does not hinge on their plausibility.

CHAPTER 15: SOUL

Harriet Beecher Stowe is a middle-class white woman from Maine, the daughter of a prominent religious family and wife of a distinguished professor. Like many of those involved in the early women's rights movement, she also has experience in abolitionist campaigning. At a universal suffrage conference that takes place in Ohio in 1851, one of the speakers is a middle-aged Black woman named Sojourner Truth. Treated with hostility by the white women and men in attendance, Truth perseveres in delivering her powerful address, in which she demands: "Ain't I a Woman?" It is one of the most important moments in the burgeoning movement of antiracist feminism. Stowe likely heard Truth's speech at the Ohio event.

Stowe and Truth represent two very different forms of abolitionism and feminism, social movements that are, as Kendi explains, closely linked during the 19th century. For Stowe, engaging in abolition is more of a charitable project, a reflection of the values of the Northern Christian intellectual milieu in which she is situated. For Truth, abolitionism and feminism are matters of life and death; as one of the earliest prominent Black feminist voices, she is isolated and shunned from many sides, including by white women.

In 1852, Stowe publishes a book entitled *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in which she praises Black "docility," fondly describing Black people's "childlike simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness." Essentially, this is what Garrison has been attempting to do throughout his career: not dissuade people from holding racist ideas, but rather persuade them to see the characteristics racism attributes to Black people in a positive light. Stowe implies that "Blacks [are] spiritually superior because of their intellectual inferiority." Stowe's ultimate recommendation is that white people should teach Black people so that they can reach "moral and intellectual maturity," at which point they should be relocated back to Africa, where they can improve their ancestral homeland via the principles they absorbed in America.

This passage clarifies what is so sinister about the racism that both Garrison and Stowe harbored. Although they are both opposed to slavery, both of them still hold profoundly racist views about Blackness. Indeed, by incorporating these racist views into the abolitionist movement—for example, by arguing that Black people should be allowed to be free because they are weak and docile—individuals like Stowe and Garrison corrupt and weaken the movement.

Garrison praises *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, although he is troubled by its emphasis on submissiveness. Douglass offers an assimilationist critique of Stowe's support of colonization. Yet the Black writer and doctor Martin R. Delany is most unequivocally critical, due to his rejection of the paternalism of the white abolitionist movement. Black men more broadly feel critical of Stowe's approving depiction of the submissive, effeminate character Uncle Tom. At times during this era, Black men's rejection of racism and slavery takes the form of a desire to "rule women."

Here, Kendi makes the complex argument that while it is reasonable (and important) to critique Stowe's depiction of the meek, submissive Uncle Tom, this should not be done through a masculinist rejection of Uncle Tom's softness and seeming femininity. To do so risks further marginalizing Black women and femininity in service of macho ideals.

In 1852, the Democratic candidate and former Mexican-American War general Franklin Pierce wins the presidential election in a loss for the abolitionist movement. In 1852, a group of authors including Josiah C. Nott and George Gliddon publish an 800-page book on polygenesis, *Types of Mankind*. The book is an enormous success. Meanwhile, Herman Melville publishes "The 'Gees" in *Harper's Magazine*, an antiracist parody of 19th-century race science and polygenesis in particular. In his own reflections, Douglass points out that no one believed in polygenesis before Atlantic slavery and that polygenesists almost all tend to be proslavery. With this observation he "sum[s] up the history of racist ideas in a single sentence."

Polygenesis may be a political fiction with no scientific basis, but this doesn't stop Nott and Gliddon—two supposed experts in their fields—from writing 800 pages about it. Melville's satirical response and Douglass's insightful observation both show that even at the time, many people are aware of how absurd racist ideas truly are.

At the same time, Douglass embraces the climate theory notion that the hair and skin of Black people in America is steadily becoming whiter in appearance (and that this is a good thing). Despite their mutual opposition to slavery, polygenesis, and segregation, Douglass and Garrison's friendship dissolves. Douglass dislikes the patronizing "paternalism" of the white abolitionist movement, whereas Garrison suggests that the enslaved are not able to properly understand the aims and tactics of abolition. Stowe steps in, attempting to stop the two men from quarreling. They agree to "forg[ive], but […] not forget."

This passage is a reminder that the history of the abolitionist movement is not a history of harmonious cross-racial friendship and collaboration. Indeed, Kendi highlights that when Black abolitionists do build relationships with their white peers, it is usually only possible because they force themselves to ignore their white peers' racism.

CHAPTER 16: THE IMPENDING CRISIS

In 1854 the Missouri Compromise is repealed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act. One of the figures who emerges as a leading antislavery voice during this time is Abraham Lincoln, an Illinois lawyer and congressman. At this point, Lincoln is an abolitionist in favor of colonization; he argues that it would be terrible to end slavery and maintain white supremacy, but he also opposes the idea of white and Black Americans living together as equals. Lincoln is originally from Kentucky, and some of his family members are enslavers. Despite being an abolitionist, he is firmly opposed to extending voting rights to Black people.

While Abraham Lincoln is often framed as an antiracist ally due to his legacy of "freeing" enslaved people, Kendi's account paints a more nuanced picture of the man.

In the period leading up to the 1856 presidential election, the new Republican Party emerges as a leading antislavery voice in government, although Democrat James Buchanan is elected. In 1857, the Supreme Court denies the freedom suit of Dred Scott, thereby ruling the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional and barring Black people from citizenship. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, a former enslaver who freed his own captives yet continues to fight for enslavers' property rights, argues that Black people were not counted as part of the American "political community" when the nation was founded and thus should not count now. This is actually a misreading of American history.

Proslavery advocates and other racists often reference the founding of the country in order to argue that only white people were there at the time and thus should be the sole full members of the American political community. Of course, this is untrue; before white colonizers arrived in the U.S., it was already inhabited by an enormous network of indigenous nations. Not only that, but the earliest white settler communities of course also included Africans.

In the aftermath of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, a debate emerges between Lincoln and the Democratic senator Stephen Douglas. Douglas issues a warning about the "Black Republican Party," claiming Lincoln wants to give Black people citizenship rights. In response, Lincoln maintains that he believes in the "physical difference" between Black and white people and that this means there will always be a hierarchical relationship between the races. Within this hierarchy, he adds, white people should remain superior. Yet Lincoln also uses this moment to double down on his opposition to slavery.

Lincoln's response to the accusation that he views Black people and white people equally highlights the danger of capitulating to racist ideas. In assuaging racists, Lincoln ends up making a deeply racist statement himself. This is why, Kendi says, the only reasonable response to racist ideas is unequivocal antiracism.

In 1857 Hinton Rowan Helper, a critic from North Carolina, publishes a highly successful book entitled *The Impending Crisis of the South*. The book is a racist argument against slavery, proposing that slavery should end in order to promote the labor rights and economic opportunities of white workers. This is exactly what Lincoln and the Republicans had been waiting for. Meanwhile, the white radical abolitionist John Brown organizes a rebellion, which is crushed by Robert E. Lee. Garrison describes Brown's revolt as "insane," though he soon switches to characterizing Brown as a white martyr for the abolitionist cause. His death by hanging prompts a prolonged outpouring of mourning from white and Black people alike.

As strange as it might seem, many abolitionists are desperate to find an argument against slavery that is not grounded in Black people's humanity. Indeed, Kendi points out that John Brown is one of the few white abolitionists in history who truly appreciates this humanity and acts with the urgency required to defend it. Yet even the reaction to his rebellion is another example of a white person receiving disproportionate attention in favor of countless similar Black revolutionaries.

In 1860, Mississippi senator Jefferson Davis presents a proposal of unlimited rights for states and enslavers; he also objects to federal funds being directed toward Black education, claiming: "This Government was not founded by negroes for negroes." He argues that the racial hierarchy of white supremacy and Black inferiority was "stamped from the beginning." It briefly seems as if polygenesis will become the broadly accepted story about human origins once and for all. However, everything changes with the publication of *The Origin of Species* by the British antislavery biologist Charles Darwin. Rejecting the idea that every species was individually and specifically created, Darwin proposes that species evolve over time, moving toward "perfection." He mainly focuses on nonhuman animal life, but the implications for humanity are enormous.

Polygenesis may have never had any basis in scientific truth, yet it did reflect other broadly accepted ideas about humanity at the time. Prior to Darwin's intervention, most people believed that each species was created separately by God. Even when religious explanations of the world began to give way to more secular understandings, for a period of time it was still assumed that each species (and, for polygenesists, each human race) emerged in a distinct separate form. However, Darwin intervenes to show that this is not true.

After the publication of *The Origin of Species*, Darwin and his work enter into dialogue with scholars across "the entire Western world." Sir Francis Galton takes up his cousin Darwin's work and invents the concept of "nature versus nurture," before going on to advocate for a policy of social cleansing he calls "eugenics." In 1871, Darwin publishes *Descent of Man*, a book that confirms that evolution also applies to humans and argues that there is intellectual similarity across people of different races. His comments about the future of the races are interpreted differently by assimilationists and segregationists, who both praise the text. Assimilationists believe Darwin proposes that Black people will "evolve into White civilization," whereas segregationists believe he argues that Black people will go extinct.

The second half of this passage underlines the point that when one looks beyond the surface, there are usually more similarities between assimilationists and segregationists than there are differences. Indeed, the fact that assimilationists believe that Black people will become white is arguably just another way of claiming that Black people will become extinct. Both forms of racist thought, then, imagine that one day Black people will cease to exist.

In 1860, the proslavery journal *De Bow's Review* concludes that no "moral, happy, and voluntarily industrious community" of free Black people exists on earth. The magazine also speaks about the necessity of Southern slave states seceding from the North. This starts with Southern Democrats leaving the Democratic Party. Douglass refuses to vote for Lincoln in the 1860 presidential election, despite admiring Lincoln's courage and determination, because Lincoln had not proved himself an advocate of Black people's rights while serving as a congressman for Illinois. Garrison, meanwhile, is scornful of the idea that Lincoln actually poses any threat to slavery. Meanwhile, the secessionist movement gains power through stirring up fear of slave rebellion.

The claim about no thriving Black society existing on earth is, of course, outlandish and unfounded. However, it also reflects a current of thought that still exists today. Consider how Western reporting on African and Caribbean countries often overemphasizes poverty, sickness, corruption, and violence, often without mentioning much else.

CHAPTER 17: HISTORY'S EMANCIPATOR

When announcing their plan to secede at the end of 1860, South Carolina legislators make reference to the **Declaration of Independence**. When Florida secedes, representatives declare that Black people have to be enslaved everywhere because otherwise they sink into crime and depravity. Southern states begin producing propaganda that claims Black people themselves support slavery and citing examples of fugitives who regretted fleeing enslavement. In reality, the number of Black Confederates was likely extremely small. By the early months of 1861 the country is headed for war, and by summer, thousands of fugitives have fled their plantations in order to join the Union army and fight against Southern enslavers. Ironically, Union forces strictly adhere to the Fugitive Slave Act and forcibly return most of the self-emancipated back to their enslavers.

Over the course of American history, the Declaration of Independence is put to very different uses by very different historical actors. In the leadup to the Civil War, proslavery Southern leaders use it to justify their secession from the Union. Yet at different points abolitionists and antiracist leaders also use the Declaration in service of arguments about human equality and freedom. Some might argue that the document's versatility makes it powerful; others might say that it makes it meaningless.

In July of 1861, Lincoln reluctantly signs a bill establishing that the Union army had a right to seize any Confederate property—including enslaved Black people—as "contraband." This leads to contraband camps being established where Black refugees from the South are kept. Health conditions in the camp are so poor that a quarter of all those housed there die. Nonetheless, conditions on plantations are also "abysmal," and the numbers of enslaved people fleeing the Deep South continues to rise. This phenomenon finally starts dissuading people from believing the racist idea that Black people are submissive and "docile."

While some historical accounts frame Lincoln and the Union as altruistic liberators of the enslaved, the reality that Kendi illuminates here is quite different. The Union Army may be fighting against the enslaving South, but this does not make it antiracist. Indeed, the disregard, neglect, and cruelty with which the Union Army treats those fleeing slavery exposes its lack of care about the wellbeing of the vulnerable Black people.

Meanwhile, in the South, a number of Confederate deserters begin to persuade other non-enslaver white people that wealthy enslavers are the true enemy. Another "Underground Railroad" even forms to help white Unionists escape the Deep South. Meanwhile, Northern Republicans pass more antislavery measures; by the summer of 1862, it is illegal for Union soldiers to force self-emancipated people back to enslavers, meaning that the Fugitive Slave Act is "effectively repealed." On July 17, Lincoln passes the Second Confiscation Act, a law stating that any fugitive who manages to escape the Confederacy is free forever. Days later, Lincoln drafts a bill that comes to be known as the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation; it states that any enslaved person in any state is free.

While it may seem like Lincoln is finally acting in the interests of Black people here, Kendi is careful to point out that this strategy is beneficial for the Union Army itself. Repealing the Fugitive Slave Act and allowing those who escape the South to remain free significantly weakens the Confederacy and increases the supply of formerly enslaved Black people who will now fight for the Union.

Few take this early version of the Emancipation Proclamation seriously. Lincoln remains in favor of colonization, which earns him the scorn of both Garrison and Douglass. In 1862, Lincoln writes an article in the *National Intelligencer* clarifying that his primary intention is to save the union; for him, the issue of slavery is secondary. This triggers further denouncements from abolitionists. Yet in September, Lincoln issues Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Abolitionists are shocked and overjoyed. The Proclamation promises compensation to enslavers as long as they agree to uphold a slavery-free society. It also allows enslaved people to join the Union Army.

While some histories of the Civil War argue that Lincoln was acting to "save" the enslaved, here he personally admits that this is not the primary reason for his actions. Some might claim that Lincoln was only saying this in order to avoid alienating important allies or to seem more neutral in service of holding the nation together. But Kendi implies that, given the record of the rest of Lincoln's political commitments, it might be wise to take Lincoln at his word.

Lincoln is soon heralded as the Great Emancipator, although to some extent his actions are limited to making it more possible for enslaved people to risk seizing freedom on their own. Many Black Christians as well as the New England elite nonetheless shower Lincoln with praise. Garrison welcomes the Emancipation Proclamation, expresses admiration of Lincoln, and becomes a "tenacious Unionist." Still, the Black-owned San Francisco journal *Pacific Appeal* criticizes Lincoln's actions as a "halfway measure."

Because white people like Lincoln are the ones in power during the Civil War, it is often said that white people choose to "free" the enslaved. However, from another perspective, it is the enslaved who fight for centuries to free themselves. Considering this other angle, Kendi suggests throughout his book, is an important dimension of antiracist history.

CHAPTER 18: READY FOR FREEDOM?

In 1863, Garrison's son Willie brings home a friend, the German-American journalist Henry Villard, who tells Garrison about the Gullah people of the South Carolina coast. Not able to understand their creole language or African religious practices, Villard calls the Gullah people "brutes." His words are typical of the almost uniformly racist position of the American elite. By this point in the Civil War, Lincoln has started actively imploring Black people to join the Union Army. Yet some white Union soldiers viciously resent the idea of having to fight alongside Black people. During the war, the racist ideas of both Republicans and Democrats shifted to suit the new environment wherein Black people were suddenly fighting alongside white people against slavery.

The seemingly banal story of Henry Villard telling Garrison and his family about the Gullah people and calling them "brutes" is an example of the way that racist knowledge is disseminated via those in unearned positions of authority. Because he is a journalist and a member of the white male elite, Villard is endowed with authority within the culture of his time. Yet when it comes to the Gullah people, who have a complex, rich culture that he doesn't understand, this authority is unearned, leading him to dismiss them as "brutes."

The debate about Black men's suitability as soldiers comes to a head during a hand-to-hand battle between around 600 exhausted Black soldiers and the Confederate army in South Carolina. Lincoln faces pressure to drop the issue of colonization, as people argue that by serving in the Civil War, Black people have "earned" their American citizenship. Sure enough, by the summer of 1863, Lincoln signals that the prospect of colonization is no more. Yet the question of how a unified nation could rebuild itself after war remains far from resolved. The abolitionist Wendell Phillips protests that Lincoln is a half-hearted centrist and that his plan for the South "frees the slave and ignores the negro."

The notions that Black people must "prove" their suitability as soldiers and "earn" their right to American citizenship are prime examples of the absurd illogic of racism. Meanwhile, Wendell Phillips pronouncement that Lincoln "frees the slave and ignores" Black people becomes one of the most famous lines describing the political climate of this era. Black people may be granted freedom from slavery, but their leaders like Lincoln as well as ordinary white people still refuse to acknowledge their humanity.

Yet Garrison, who has made a career out of urgency, insists that his fellow abolitionists be patient before judging Lincoln's plans. As Maryland begins to rebuild as a free state in 1864, Lincoln delivers a powerful speech in which he reflects on the hypocrisy of slavery in America, the land of freedom. By this point, Lincoln certainly thinks of himself as the Great Emancipator whose job it now is to educate and "civiliz[e]" Black people. Yet Maryland's new constitution prevents Black people from economic advancement; following emancipation thousands of Black children in the state are involuntarily placed in "long-term indentures to their former masters." Lincoln *speaks* about rights for Black people, but in reality he engineers policies that ensure Black people remain oppressed.

The divide between Lincoln's rhetoric and his actions sets a new, enduring trend for American politicians. The fact that Lincoln and leaders like him use the language of antiracism while instituting policies that continue to harm Black people means that it is a mistake to focus on language and intention when it comes to racism. Instead, people should scrutinize the outcomes *of political actions to see if they actually have an antiracist effect or not.*

In 1864, the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission lays out a set of recommendations including equal rights, opportunities for Black people to buy land, and the founding of a Bureau of Emancipation to assist the formerly enslaved. Yet even this recommendation of rights stops far short of treating Black and white people as truly equal. Garrison, meanwhile, continues to comment on the "brutishness" of the formerly enslaved and advocates for Lincoln's limited offer of rights, which precludes Black people without formal education from voting.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, a myth circulates that both Black people and white leaders do not know how to address the social problems left in slavery's wake. Yet as this passage indicates, the issue wasn't ignorance around solutions—generally, people knew what should happen in order for the formerly enslaved to flourish. There was instead an absence of will to implement it.

By August of 1864, it looks as if the Union is going to lose the Civil War. Yet against the odds, Lincoln is reelected. The formerly enslaved editor of the *The Liberator*, Garrison Frazier, insists that Black people cannot be truly free without owning land of their own. In this way, Black advocates make a clear distinction between abolishing slavery and actually freeing the enslaved. Many also object to the idea of assimilating into white society or the use of uplift suasion. By June 1865, thousands of formerly enslaved people are given plots of land and mules. Yet this policy remains highly controversial, as many Americans cling to the idea that the emancipated have been so damaged by slavery that they cannot be left to their own devices.

This passage contains another reflection on the question of what freedom actually means. Is it enough to abolish slavery and pronounce that Black people are now free? Or is it, as Frazier suggests, not really freedom unless basic economic justice for the formerly enslaved is instituted as well? This question is particularly urgent given how much slavery has robbed of those subjected to it. The formerly enslaved have no wealth, no access to resources, and usually no education. They also face a world that is still heavily discriminatory toward them.

In January 1865, the House of Representatives passes the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolishes slavery. This is a welcomed development amidst fierce infighting among abolitionists. Garrison remains stubbornly opposed to the prospect of granting voting rights to the formerly enslaved. In March Congress founds the Freedmen's Bureau, which is charged with the highly challenging task of bestowing legal rights on those who formerly had none. On April 9, Lee's army surrenders, and the Civil War is officially over. In a speech immediately following this, Lincoln hints that he plans to extend voting rights to "very intelligent black people and black soldiers." This is the first time an American president has openly considered any form of Black suffrage. Only five days later, the president is murdered at the theater by Confederate assassin John Wilkes Booth.

In popular understandings of this period, Lincoln is often framed as a martyr killed for his support of abolition and Black people. As this passage mentions, it's true that shortly before his death, Lincoln begins talking about the possibility of Black enfranchisement, and it is true that Boothe is furious at Lincoln about the end of slavery. But Kendi underscores that Lincoln is not a martyr for the cause of antiracism because he is not remotely antiracist. Just because proslavery segregationists like Boothe perceive him as such does not make it true.

CHAPTER 19: RECONSTRUCTING SLAVERY

Following Lincoln's assassination, Andrew Johnson assumes the presidency and introduces sweeping conciliatory measures to Confederate leaders. Crucially, the Thirteenth Amendment outlaws slavery "except as punishment for a crime," and it is via this caveat that the postwar South comes to strikingly resemble the South of the antebellum period. The oppressive "Black Codes" are introduced, purportedly to solve the problem of Black people's apparent vices. In reality, of course, these "vices" are nothing more than racist fictions. The formerly enslaved are quick to illuminating the absurd hypocrisy of these fictions, pointing out that if anyone can be accused of laziness and incapability of independence, it is white enslavers.

The caveat in the abolition of slavery—which outlaws slavery "except as punishment for a crime"—is one of the most important piece of legislation in American history. It is the reason why Black people have been subjected to enhanced surveillance, criminalization, and incarceration from 1865 to the present. It indicates that the abolition of slavery is not a true historical break so much as a pivot during which the nature of slavery and anti-Blackness takes on a new form.

In 1865, Thaddeus Stevens suggests that land from the wealthiest 10% of Southerners is taken and redistributed to the formerly enslaved, so that each would get 40 acres. The rest of the land would be auctioned to pay for the cost of war. Ultimately, this plan is not enforced; the only people whose land is seized are the Native Americans who allied with the Confederacy. Opponents of land redistribution claim that giving Black people land will have a corrupting effect—they need to work for it. Garrison, meanwhile, focuses on the importance of assimilation for Black people in the North. Once the Thirteenth Amendment is officially added to the Constitution, *The Liberator* shuts down. Without it and the project of abolition to fight for, Garrison is somewhat aimless.

Kendi implies that Thaddeus Stevens' proposal, despite being moderate and stopping short of true economic justice, could have had a transformative impact on lives for the formerly enslaved. Moreover, taking some of the land of the richest 10% of Southerners would have diminished the stark hierarchies that exist in the South between rich and poor (including both poor white people and the formerly enslaved).

In 1866, Douglass attempts to persuade Andrew Johnson to grant Black people voting rights, but Johnson is resistant. He argues that Black people look down on poor white people and thus would vote against them even if it meant aligning with wealthy white planters. Douglass denies it, but there is truth in this statement. Some claim the term "white trash" was invented by enslaved people, although there is no solid evidence for this. In any case, idea of "white trash" underlines the false belief that most white people are wealthy, powerful, and elite by making poor white people seem like the exception, rather than the majority.

This passage elaborates on how race creates divisions between people who would otherwise have shared economic and political interests. While the lives of formerly enslaved people differ in many ways from those of poor white workers, there are also similarities, particularly when it comes to the source of the injustices and exploitation they face (wealthy white planters). Yet white racism prevents solidarity from existing between the two.

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President Johnson attempts to veto the Freedmen's Bureau bill in February 1866, claiming that it will make Black people lazy. Members of Johnson's Democratic Party claim that if Black people are allowed the vote, this will lead to "nigger domination." Congress overrides Johnson's veto in April. During this time, an epidemic of brutal racist violence takes over the South, including a horrific riot in Memphis. While uplift continues taking place among the Black elite in the North, this does not deescalate racist violence nor racism in general. Meanwhile, Congresses votes to pass the notoriously vague Fourteenth Amendment, which could be used to bolster either antiracist *or* racist policies.

In this passage, Kendi recounts some of the most egregious and ludicrous racist ideas shared during this historical period. The notion that the formerly enslaved—who have been forced to work without pay for their entire lives until this point—are "lazy" is, of course, deeply insulting and absurd. Moreover, the idea that granting Black people basic rights such as the right to vote would lead to Black "domination" shows how warped and nonsensical racist thinking truly is.

This same year, white women suffragists join their Black male peers in founding the American Equal Rights Association to campaign for the extension of voting rights. Throughout the 1860s, dozens of Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are founded across the country. While the purpose of these institutions to provide a high-quality learning environment for Black students, many who run them believe that it is best that they employ white teachers. Moreover, liberal arts HBCUs often refuse to accept darker-skinned applicants, a phenomenon that reflects a growing wave of colorism across the country.

The issue of colorism has been a part of American history since the nation's founding. Under slavery, light-skinned enslaved people were often granted comparative "privileges," such as working in the house rather than engaging in brutal labor in the fields. Now that slavery has been abolished, it is light-skinned Black people who are granted access to the elite, assimilationist institutions that arise during this period.

In 1867 and 1868, Congress passes four Reconstruction Acts that set out stipulations for Confederate states to be readmitted to the Union. In an address to Congress, President Johnson warns about "tyranny" if Black men are given voting rights. In 1865, the Ku Klux Klan is founded as a social club in Tennessee; it quickly becomes a terror group, assassinating Republicans and forcibly stopping Black people from voting. Nonetheless, millions of Black men *do* cast a ballot in the 1868 presidential election, mostly for the Republican war hero Ulysses S. Grant. Yet many within the Republican Party itself express revulsion about the idea of Black people voting. Meanwhile, a number of white women suffragists spout racist objections to the fact that Black men have been granted the vote before they have.

The 1868 presidential election illuminates an important political hypocrisy. Black men use their new voting rights to help elect Ulysses S. Grant, yet many members of Grant's own Republican Party oppose Black enfranchisement—despite the fact that it gives them greater political power.

At its 1869 convention, the National Labor Union welcomes Black people, asserting that the organization "knew neither color nor sex on the question of the rights of labor." This color- and gender-blind approach may not be ideal, but it is something. In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment, which extends voting rights to Black men, is ratified despite fervent opposition from Democrats, who call it a "nigger superiority bill." Celebrations take place among Black communities across the country.

The period immediately following the Civil War, known as Reconstruction, is one of the most important challenges to the idea of linear progress in American history. During this period, Black people have some rights and opportunities—such as the right to vote for Black men—that, despite stopping far short of justice, are more substantial than what will be in place for decades to come.

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CHAPTER 20: RECONSTRUCTING BLAME

William Lloyd Garrison is delighted by the Fifteenth Amendment, which he considers a "miracle." Some celebrate the amendment as a chance for Black people to develop political autonomy, but others warn that voting will do little to save them from the terror of the Klan and other white supremacist vigilantes. The Klan demonizes ordinary Black people, white antiracists and other "radicals," and—most of all—Black men accused of raping white women. Meanwhile, Kendi writes, the Klan justifies the extreme violence *they* exert on the basis that they are defending white women's purity.

From this point in American history onward, there's a substantial gap between the laws that are technically in place and the reality for most Black people. Black enfranchisement in the Reconstruction era is a classic example of this problem. Black men are technically allowed to vote, but they might be killed for it—or at least strategically prevented from actually accessing the voting booth and exercising their right.

Black suffrage does have an impact on the South; there are a substantial number of Northern and Southern Black delegates, some of whom were formerly enslaved. They help found a number of public institutions and stimulate the economy, although Black people are rarely able to reap the benefits of this. The region still remains highly reliant on cheap labor. President Grant resurrects the idea of colonization, suggesting that Black people relocate to the Dominic Republic. Douglass joins this plan, enthusiastic about the racist idea of Black Americans helping "uplift the impoverished and backward Dominican people." In the 1872 presidential election, a former champion of "emancipation and equality," Horace Greeley, runs as the Democratic candidate, telling white Southerners: "Segregate yourself; employ each other."

As this passage shows, the issues that plague the South in the immediate aftermath of slavery tend to be based in economics. For centuries, the region has depended on a supply of forced labor in order to generate profits. It is deeply inequitable, with enormous income gaps between the rich and poor. The question of how the economy will be reorganized is arguably the fundamental issue that will determine if there is to be any racial justice in the region following slavery. But as the end of the passage shows, segregation and white greed becomes the economic order of the day.

The year of the election, Congress reproduces a report on Southern violence that blames the violence on expanded Black political power, not the white people that are actually perpetuating that violence. Politicians and the media alike being pronouncing Reconstruction a failure. For many white Republicans, and all Black men in the South, voting to reelect Grant means "risk[ing] death." In a landmark Supreme Court ruling, the civil rights protections in the Fourteenth Amendment are gutted, effectively allowing discrimination to take place as long as explicitly racist language is not used to justify it. Kendi notes that this legal precedent is still used to shield and enshrine racist discrimination today.

Throughout, Kendi highlights how the idea that something is only racist if it is framed using explicitly racist language is a ludicrous idea in itself. Unfortunately, this falsehood has had a major impact on American society. Over time, people have come to believe that racism is a matter of intention, not outcome. Stamped from the Beginning *is part of a wave of efforts to undo this misguided idea.*

The Panic of 1873—a financial crisis that triggers a recession—affects poor Black Southerners most intensely. Many lose their land and are forced into sharecropping, which allows them to be exploited by landowners. Witnessing this erosion of civil rights, Garrison writes a series of articles denouncing the "abandonment" of Reconstruction. Yet many other commentators, even those who claim to support the racial equality and freedom promised by Reconstruction, blame Black people for its failure. Meanwhile, Grant's every act of support for Black people deepens his unpopularity. His time as a key player in the political arena, like Garrison's, is up.

The end of Reconstruction is one of the starkest examples of regression when it comes to the issue of racism that has ever happened in American history. Not only are the (already limited) efforts to support Black people instituted in Reconstruction denounced as failures and abandoned, but those who supported those efforts are similarly denounced and ostracized from the political sphere.

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In 1875, Congress passes the Civil Rights Act, the final piece of legislation from the "Radical Reconstruction" era. This bill makes racial discrimination in a number of public institutions illegal. However, this legal protection is not enough to stop Black Southerners from being terrorized by ordinary white people, nor does it stop the resurrection of slavery by another name. Grant realizes that white people in the South are resentful of being prevented from killing Black people and Republicans with impunity. At the same time, the early field of criminology is developing extensive ideas of Black people as naturally lawless, violent, and depraved.

This passage highlights the dangers of capitulating to racist resentment and false perceptions of injustice. Many white Southerners oppose every form of rights given to Black people and take it open themselves to terrorize Black communities simply because they resent no longer being legally permitted to treat Black people with however much violence they please. But Kendi points out that it is impossible and morally wrong to capitulate to—or attempt a compromise with—such a position.

Furious white people promise to bring about the "redemption of the South," a promise that ends up being fulfilled. The 1876 presidential election is extremely close; the Republican Rutherford B. Hayes is declared the winner by a narrow margin. A second Civil War seems imminent; Grant privately regrets extending suffrage to Black men. In order to quell the growing conflict, Hayes arranges the Bargain of 1877, promising to end Reconstruction in order to save his presidency and avoid war. The Bargain is immediately recognized as a move to eliminate Black people's role in the political world, and Garrison denounces it as a return to the "covenant with death" (slavery).

Here, Kendi reminds readers about the foolishness of believing that leaders like Hayes and Grant are actually commendable when it comes to their support for Black people. While these two Republican presidents may have been less viciously racist than their Democratic peers, their investment in delivering any real justice to the Black community is essentially nonexistent.

While Democrats proclaim that the new rights granted to Black people will remain in place, this is far from the case. In order to reestablish control over "rebellious Blacks and White women" white men enact a new reign of terror: lynching. While lynching is an obvious manifestation of hate, lurking behind this hate is not ignorance, but a complex system of racist ideas produced by discriminatory policies implemented by the white elite.

Kendi rejects the white elite's efforts to distance themselves from the problem of lynching, which is sometimes characterized as being the fault of poor, uneducated, immoral white people. Kendi underscores that by implementing racist policies, the white elite share responsibility for the problem of lynching.

The journey from Emancipation through Reconstruction and its demise was an emotional one for Black Southerners. Many felt unable to continue living among their former enslavers and sought freedom in the North. In April 1879, Garrison cancels what would have been his final speech due to illness, speaking via a proxy instead. He remains resolutely optimistic about the possibility of imminent racial equality freedom. Within a month, he is dead.

Emancipation did not wipe the South's slate clean, allowing Southerners to start fresh. Instead, during Reconstruction, Black people live in close proximity to those who exploited, terrorized, raped, brutalized, and murdered their families, communities, and themselves.

CHAPTER 21: RENEWING THE SOUTH

W. E. B. Du Bois's description of Reconstruction and its aftermath is as follows: "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again towards slavery." Du Bois was born in 1868 in Great Barrington, a small town in Massachusetts. After his Franco-Haitian father abandoned the family "Willie" was raised by a single mother, Mary Silvina Burghardt. He recalls becoming aware of his race for the first time at the age of 10, when another young girl refused to take his visiting-card. From this point forward, Du Bois became determined to prove that he was as worthy as (if not better than) his white peers.

The incident described here, in which Du Bois becomes aware of his difference, is a motif within autobiographical writing that critically examines race. Note, however, that this motif is almost always used by writers of color. Few white writers recall the moment in childhood in which they discovered that they are white. This is because whiteness has been made into the invisible, "neutral" norm, enabling white people to ignore their own racialization.

The world within which Du Bois grows up is hostile to this mission. In 1883, the Supreme Court rules the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional; Du Bois's first publication, at the age of 15, denounces his local community's apathy to this ruling. Meanwhile, much "propaganda" is issued regarding the emergence of the so-called New South. White Southerners proclaim that in the antebellum era there existed a friendly, even loving, relationship between Black people and their enslavers, and that this positive relation is now returning. This is also the moment at which the segregationist fiction of "separate but equal" is born. The idea that Black people were aided and bettered by slavery helps justify intensified racist oppression in the post-Reconstruction South.

As Kendi explains in this passage, the young Du Bois has a sharp intellect and strong sense of justice, but he grows up in a world filled with nonsensical racist fictions. Kendi implies that this is one of the most maddening things about the history of racist ideas. Those who are intelligent and clear-sighted, with a strong instinct for justice, are often ostracized, belittled, misunderstood, or treated as delusional extremists, while those who hold racist views are rewarded.

The teenage Du Bois's dream is to attend Harvard; local white people in his town raise money for him to attend Fisk instead, the best Black college in the country. Fisk is run by white philanthropists and its students are taught by white teachers. Overall, the institution is a "factory" of assimilationist ideas, and Du Bois quickly begins churning these ideas out as editor of the student newspaper *The Herald*. One of his pieces for the newspaper is a glowing review of George Washington Williams's *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880*.

As this passage indicates, institutions like Fisk represent both progress and regression. The university allows the extremely talented Du Bois to gain a rigorous formal education alongside other intelligent Black students. But at the same time, his curriculum is embedded with assimilationist thinking that is ultimately designed to help maintain the racist status quo.

Faced with centuries of racist scholarship, Williams encounters a conundrum that will plague Black scholars for centuries to come: let these false racist ideas go unquestioned in his work or revise them and be accused of lacking scholarly objectivity. Ultimately, Williams challenges some racist ideas but reproduces others. His book is also notable for its sexist portrayal of Black women. In 1888, Du Bois gives the graduation speech at Fisk, in which he describes the first chancellor of Germany, Otto von Bismarck, as the ideal leader Black people should model themselves on—despite von Bismarck's participation in brutal colonialism in Africa. Leaving the South after graduating, Du Bois achieves his longstanding dream of attending Harvard.

The notion of scholarly objectivity plagues Black intellectuals from before Du Bois's time until the present, and this passage helps explain why. In a world where racist ideas are the norm, challenging racist ideas can make a person seem biased. But Kendi underscores that antiracist scholarship is objective scholarship because it pierces through the fiction of racist ideas in order to access the truth.

CHAPTER 22: SOUTHERN HORRORS

In 1890, a new colonization bill proposes paying for Black Americans to move to Africa. Proponents of colonization argue that God's purpose for slavery was to civilize Black people so that they could return and "redeem Africa." Walter Vaughan, a Nebraska Democrat who was born into a family of Alabama enslavers, argues that the federal government should provide a pension to the formerly enslaved, which would help stimulate the struggling Southern economy. In 1891 a formerly enslaved woman named Callie House founds the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association partly inspired by Vaughan's pamphlet. This is the beginning of the reparations movement, which attracts little interest from the Black elite. House condemns this lack of support, arguing that "The most learned negroes" actually seem to be "fighting against the welfare of their race."

Callie House is one of the many Black leaders depicted in the book who refuses to capitulate to racist, assimilationist, elitist ideas, even when these ideas are the norm of the time. Indeed, House's visionary plan for economic justice becomes the basis for the reparations movement. Kendi points out that her condemnation of the Black elite highlights a difficult truth about the fight for racial justice: while the racist ideas and actions of white people are always the original and biggest obstacle to justice, sometimes Black people have stood in the way through embracing racist ideas, too.

In 1890, Du Bois graduates from Harvard and gives another graduation speech in which he praises Jefferson Davis and expresses racist ideas about the superiority of Europeans to Africans, whom he characterizes as weak and submissive. In the fall, Du Bois begins his Ph.D. in history at Harvard. With study abroad funding from former president Rutherford B. Hayes, Du Bois travels to the University of Berlin, at this point "the most distinguished university in the European world."

Du Bois's assimilationist message about how European culture is superior to African culture shows how racist thinking can distort a person's self-perception. Du Bois's education and broader society have led him to believe that Blackness is inferior despite being Black himself.

Meanwhile, Massachusetts congressman Henry Cabot Lodge propose a bill allowing voters to be granted election supervision if they request it from the federal government. Southern segregationists call this anti-discrimination bill "hateful." Many Southern states introduce literacy tests and other methods to prevent Black people voting. Ultimately, Lodge's bill does not pass anyway. Du Bois is not particularly concerned by voter suppression, arguing, "When you have the right sort of Black voters, you will need no election laws." At this point, a wave of segregationist laws are passed in the South, dividing almost every aspect of life along the color line and creating a society that is "separate but (un)equal."

Kendi shows how the notion that protecting people's voting rights is "hateful" is absurd but doesn't stop people from making the argument. This is a powerful example of how racist ideas work in spite of not making sense, and how they even carry part of their power through being nonsensical. By claiming that something is "hateful," racists blatantly project their own actions onto those trying to implement antiracist policies. Kendi suggests that, in doing so, such people demonstrate that they do not care about the truth, only their own beliefs.

Black people mount protests to this segregation movement; white people respond with a massive escalation in lynching, all while blaming the increase in lynching on a supposedly growing rate of Black crime. Both Du Bois and the elderly Frederick Douglass accept this false excuse, but journalist and anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells does not. In 1892, Wells publishes a pamphlet entitled *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, and the following year, she travels to England for an "anti-lynching tour." In 1896, the National Association of Colored Women is founded, with the motto "Lifting as We Climb."

Throughout the book, Kendi reminds the reader that while most political figures in American history harbored racist views (either assimilationist or segregationist), there have always been exceptions. People like Ida B. Wells are ahead of their time and singular in their commitment to true antiracist views.

Du Bois returns from Germany in 1894 after his request for funding extension is denied. In 1895, he becomes the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard, which invites racist mockery from many, including future president Franklin Delano Roosevelt (at this point a Harvard freshman). Du Bois's time in Germany gave him experience of relating to white people as equals. His first professorial job is at a Black college in Ohio, Wilberforce. At this point Du Bois still believes in the uplift suasion principle that "racism could be persuaded and educated away."

Spending time in Europe has a profound impact on Du Bois's life—as it does for many 20th-century intellectuals, such as Angela Davis and James Baldwin. That he experiences relating to white people as equals in Germany is not to say that anti-Black racism does not exist in Germany at the time; instead, Du Bois's time in Germany gives him an experience of a social world outside the distinct codes of American racism.

Booker T. Washington is an influential educator who takes over as the nation's most prominent Black leader following Douglass's death in 1895. He encourages Black people to accept a lower status in life in exchange for tolerance from white people in his famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech. Du Bois sends Washington a telegram expressing his admiration for the speech. In 1896, the Supreme Court rules 7-1 in favor of upholding segregation in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. Even the sole dissenting opinion insisted that white supremacy will and should always exist in America. At this point, the segregationist policies that already exist throughout the South are confirmed to be legal.

This passage highlights the problems of "compromises" with racist ideas and policies. Individuals like Washington want Black people to be able to advance yet are willing to strike bargains with racists. Although this might seem reasonable and strategic at first glance, Kendi underscores throughout his book that racists have no willingness or incentive to make compromises.

CHAPTER 23: BLACK JUDASES

In the late 19th century, the British doctor Havelock Ellis introduces the term "homosexual" to the English language and attempts to defend queer people from discriminatory laws and treatment. Like sexologists, racist scholars constantly search for ways to "prove" that Black people's supposed immorality and criminality is physically embedded in their bodies. In 1896, the insurance statistician Frederick Hoffman publishes a widely read book entitled *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro*, which argues that Black people are heading toward "gradual extinction" brought on by criminality and disease. This argument becomes the basis of many insurance companies refusing to provide Black people with insurance on the basis that they are "a supposedly dying race."

In the early 20th century, a large number of sociologists, sexologists, and other social scienctists produce a substantial amount of knowledge about particular populations, especially marginalized populations such as queer people and Black people. While this might seem innocent and productive, Kendi highlights how this research is often used to further demonize, pathologize, suppress, and control these populations.

Du Bois rejects the argument that Black people are going extinct but does not challenge the assertion about Black people's supposedly higher rates of criminality. In an 1897 address given to the American Negro Academy, Du Bois supports the idea that the races are "biologically distinct" and that Black people are prone to "immorality, crime, and laziness" due to the lingering effect of slavery. In 1899, he publishes *The Philadelphia Negro*, a generally antiracist account of how discrimination is at the root of the social problems Black people face. But it nonetheless still contains condemnation of supposedly immoral poor Black people and sexually deviant Black women.

Here, Kendi shows how Du Bois is complicit in disseminating the negative stereotypes about Black people that have become commonplace in the social sciences. On one level, it is easy to understand how Du Bois came to participate in spreading this knowledge, given that this is the norm in his academic field. But Kendi also notes that Du Bois occupies a position of privilege and power via his academic role and that this comes with a need for accountability.

Booker T. Washington earns substantial funding and support from white philanthropists due to his ability to put white people "at ease" (even if it means making racist jokes). In 1899, Du Bois is disturbed by the lynching of a Black man who killed his white employer in self-defense. In 1890, he attends the first Pan-African Conference in London and recommends the "gradual decolonization" of Africa and the Caribbean on the basis that "the darker races" are currently inferior but capable of progressing. Around this same moment, the U.S. acquires Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in the Spanish-American War. Both segregationists and antiracists oppose U.S. imperialism, though for different reasons; assimilationists support it, and for the most part it is this position that "wins."

Kendi reminds readers in this passage that as complicated as internal U.S. politics are, it is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to the nation's role in perpetuating racism globally. At the turn of the 20th century, much of the impact the U.S. has on the issues of racism and racial justice takes place beyond its own borders.

Meanwhile, a large number of European, Asian, and Latin American immigrants arrive in the U.S. and face prejudice of their own. Some choose to act in solidarity with Black people but most work hard to distance themselves and quickly internalize anti-Black ideas. In 1901, the last Black representative in Congress leaves. Aggressive disenfranchisement and intimidation have all but totally destroyed the existence of Black politicians. During this period, William Archibald Dunning trains a generation of historians through the Dunning School of Reconstruction, which blames Reconstruction's failures on "barbarous freedmen." The histories of slavery that Dunning School members create characterize enslavers as benevolent using the "evidence" of plantation documents.

The fact that the Dunning School uses plantation documents in order to build its history of slavery might seem like an obvious use of "objective" historical evidence. However, Kendi underscores that no piece of historical evidence is in itself objective, nor is it a route to scholarly truth. Historical evidence like plantation documents in particular are filled with gaps, misrepresentations, and dehumanized ways of representing the world (for example by listing the people enslaved on the plantation by their price).

The most influential member of the Dunning School is a novelist named Thomas Dixon Jr., who is horrified by how (he thinks) white Southerners are demonized in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Dixon writes a trilogy of historical fiction that most readers falsely assume to be true, which again portrays white Southerners as helpless victims of Black corruption and evil during the Reconstruction era. Meanwhile, in 1901, Booker T. Washington publishes his autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, which emphasizes how "White saviors" were crucial to his success. In Du Bois's review of the lauded book, he defends antiracist thought against assimilationist accusations that opposing racism was just as bad as segregationist thinking.

In considering Washington's depiction of white saviors, it is important to remember that much of his career is defined by skillfully manipulating white audiences and making them feel comfortable. While this can be viewed as an unnecessary compromise or capitulation, Kendi implies that Washington is not naïve—his choice to do so is strategic. (Of course, whether or not this strategy actually works to diminish racism in the long term is a whole other question.)

In the same year, Black writer and legislator William Hannibal Thomas publishes *The American Negro: What He Was, What He Is, and What He May Become*. This book describes Black people as naturally criminal and driven by immoral instincts. Despite Thomas's attempt to distance himself from whiteness, white audiences take him as a representative "expert" about his race; *The American Negro* is hailed as "the most authoritative, believable, and comprehensive tract ever published on the subject." However, Black readers accuse Thomas of being a "Judas."

From this point forward in the book, Kendi regularly describes instances like this where readerships and audiences are strongly split in their reaction to a given piece of media along racial lines. What white people often hail as insightful, intelligent, accurate, and/or entertaining, Black people regularly dismiss as substandard, offensive and filled with false stereotypes. The comparison between Thomas and Judas is a reference to the biblical figure Judas, the disciple that betrayed Jesus for silver.

In 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, who has just been sworn in as president, invites Booker T. Washington to the White House. Black communities across the nation celebrate this event, while segregationists furiously denounce it. In 1903, Du Bois publishes what will become his most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. The book falsely characterizes Black people as possessing a "simple faith" in the midst of a corrupt, materialistic world. Yet it also powerfully describes the "double-consciousness" that Black people are forced to inhabit in a racist world. Du Bois expresses his wish for a future in which being both Black and American does not feel like a contradiction. Kendi writes that the book conveys the contradiction in Du Bois's own thinking: his struggle in straddling antiracist and assimilationist thought.

The Souls of Black Folk *is an incredibly complex work that still fascinates, challenges, and frustrates scholars today. But the simplicity of Kendi's framework—declaring an idea either racist or antiracist—prevents readers from being too forgiving on the basis that a given idea is sophisticated and nuanced. However complex and subtle an idea might be, Kendi argues, it is always either racist or antiracist.*

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois critiques Booker T. Washington's compromising tendencies while expressing the classist idea that poor Black people discredit the race and that the "**Talented Tenth**" will be able to uplift the Black community as a whole. *Souls* receives mostly glowing reviews in the Black press. Following its publication, scholars of race and other leaders embrace the idea of uplift suasion and the Talented Tenth. This cements the notion that Black people are "responsible for changing racist White minds." It also ignores the reality that decades of uplift suasion have not worked, Kendi writes, as the U.S. of 1903 is perhaps more racist than ever.

For Du Bois, the "Talented Tenth" describes the elite minority of Black people who (like himself) are especially skilled, intelligent, and high achieving. He claims that, via its flourishing, this group will create opportunities for other Black people and convince racist that they are wrong about Black inferiority, thereby uplifting the rest of the Black race.

CHAPTER 24: GREAT WHITE HOPES

In 1906, the famous German-Jewish anthropologist Franz Boas arrives at Atlanta University, where Du Bois is hosting a conference entitled "The Health and Physique of the Negro-American." Two days later, Boaz gives a commencement address in which he stuns the audience by rejecting the notion that Black people are inferior and describing the "glories of precolonial West African kingdoms."

It's certainly possible to make an argument against the idea of Black inferiority without describing the rich and impressive cultures that existed in precolonial Africa. But Kendi implies here that, given how much of African history is erased and misconstrued, properly acknowledging these cultures is vitally important.

By the end of that same year, President Theodore Roosevelt reacts to devastating results for the Republicans in the midterm elections by discharging the 25th Infantry Regiment, a Black military unit that had been "a huge source of Black pride." Horrified by the fact that the soldiers were discharged over an obviously false accusation, the majority of Black voters come to despise the Roosevelt administration. Meanwhile, scholars across the country (including Du Bois himself) continue to prop up the false idea that Black people's criminality is partly to blame for lynchings.

The tragic story of the 25th Infantry Regiment is yet another example Kendi gives of white American leaders using Black people as political pawns.

Black boxing superstar Jack Johnson achieves a historical victory at the heavyweight championships semifinal in Australia. Much is made of the fact that Johnson's wife is white; he explains that he refuses to date Black women because they will not "spoil" and "pamper" their men. These comments, Kendi writes, indicate the extent to which Johnson has internalized racist fictions. Jim Jeffries, the former heavyweight champion nicknamed the "Great White Hope," comes out of retirement to challenge Johnson. The upcoming match triggers a surge of racist violence. However, the match never even takes place: Johnson is arrested on fabricated charges, flees the country for seven years, and spends a year in jail on his return.

It is of course deeply wrong for the media to be so scandalized by Johnson's interracial relationship, which is based in deeply racist ideas about "pure" white womanhood and the supposed transgression of interracial sex. At the same time, Kendi points out that Johnson's comments about Black women are also *wrong and perpetuate the double-bind of racism and sexism Black women are forced to endure.*

Edgar Rice Burroughs' 1912 novel *Tarzan* helps repair the damage to white masculinity that Jack Johnson has wrought. This profoundly racist book depicts a white man brought up by monkeys and features "ape-Africans" who are both sexually aggressive and "childlike." Its enormous popularity endures for decades.

Readers might recall Tarzan *from Disney's film adaptation of the story, which does not seem to have any obvious racial overtones. Yet as Kendi explains here, the entire premise of the original story is a powerful conduit of racist ideas.*

Du Bois, meanwhile, has become embroiled in a debate with William Lloyd Garrison's grandson, Oswald Garrison Villard, the "darling of White liberal America." At this point, Du Bois has moved from Atlanta to New York in order to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's journal, *The Crisis*. Villard is a cofounder of the NAACP and had tried to push Ida Wells out of the organization due to his feeling that she was insufficiently humble and that her antiracism was too steadfast. By 1910, both Social Darwinism and eugenics have come to play a serious role in American intellectual life, despite a marked lack of evidence to support eugenicists' beliefs.

Kendi notes the contrast between the fact that Ida Wells' views are considered too extreme for the NAACP and the fact that eugenics and Social Darwinism are taken seriously as academic fields to highlight how warped the perception of intellectual legitimacy is at this time. As a committed antiracist, Ida Wells is one of few figures who is truly able to access the full truth (rather than what is subsumed in racist fictions). Yet it is these fictions—not Wells—that continue to be taken seriously.

Du Bois lambasts eugenics and other forms of "race prejudice" in *The Crisis*. Boas, meanwhile, champions the idea of the U.S. as a diverse "melting pot" where all races eventually assimilate into whiteness. In 1911, he writes the preface for a book by NAACP cofounder Mary White Ovington that blames Black women's apparently wayward behavior on the "higher ratio of Black women to men." Ida B. Wells denounces this book in strongly antiracist terms. Meanwhile, Du Bois dedicates a section in *The Crisis* to talented individuals break through "racial barriers" to become the first Black person to perform a particular achievement.

The idea of the "melting pot" is often perceived to be innocuous and even positive, a representation of the ways in which distinct ethnic and racial all bring unique contributions to American society. However, as Kendi indicates here, the "melting pot" can also be understood to represent the sinister aspiration that every form of racial and ethnic difference in the nation will eventually collapse into whiteness.

Du Bois dedicates an issue of *The Crisis* to the topic of women's suffrage. In general, the argument used in favor of white women's suffrage—that women have an "innate (childlike) morality"—does not appear in the issue. However one contributor, Nannie H. Burroughs, argues that whereas Black men are more weak-willed, Black women can be trusted not to "sell out" their vote. It is possible that Burroughs still feels resentment over the "loud minority" of Black men—including Du Bois—who chose to vote for the Democrat Woodrow Wilson in the 1912 presidential election. Once elected, Wilson compromises with Southern segregationists, thereby cementing Jim Crow.

Stamped from the Beginning *contains many reminders that even those who fought for progressive goals (such as women's suffrage) often did so using problematic and regressive arguments (such as the idea that women are inherently moral in the same way as children). While some might argue that the end justifies the means, Kendi's analysis of racist ideas has shown how relying on destructive ideas to make one's argument is usually unhelpful and outright harmful.*

For the White House's first-ever film screening, President Wilson chooses the profoundly racist *Birth of a Nation* (1915). This film actively fuels the lynching crisis still gripping the nation by featuring a violent Black man who attempts to rape a white woman (who commits suicide in order to escape). Black people across the U.S. protest the film. Du Bois, meanwhile, publishes *The Negro*, a work of history that challenges racist myths. By this point, he has "seemingly dropped his biological concept of race."

This passage provides a further challenge to the narrative of racial progress that is so often invoked to describe American history. While cinema drastically transforms society, bringing vivid new worlds into people's perception, Kendi suggests that in reality this new medium is often deeply regressive and racist.

CHAPTER 25: THE BIRTH OF A NATION

During World War I, the U.S. government halts immigration from Europe, which means that Northern employers head South seeking a new supply of industrial laborers. Meanwhile, many Black people in the South are desperate to escape a place that, in the words of Du Bois, can feel "worse than hell." This is the beginning of the Great Migration. Those who arrive in Northern cities soon realize that they still face the discrimination and racist ideas that they fled in the South. Meanwhile, a smaller migration is also taking place of African and Caribbean individuals moving to the U.S. This includes Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican who arrives in New York in 1916.

The early years of the 20th century are a time of enormous change in America and across the world. While World War I drastically changes the world forever, migration to the North (and in the case of African and Caribbean immigrants, to the U.S. in general) profoundly changes the nature of these regions, creating excitement, instability, and new a sense of possibility.

Visiting the offices of the NAACP, Garvey is shocked by the number of white faces he sees there. He soon founds his own organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which uplifts Black autonomy, African culture, and "the beauty of dark skin." Those who resent the NAACP's "colorism, class racism, assimilationism, and nativism" eagerly join UNIA instead. As light-skinned biracial people take on a more prominent place in American culture, some react with the racist (and colorist) interpretation that all of Black people's talent and achievements should be credited to biracial people alone. At the same time, others commit to the idea that biracial people are "abnormal"; there is a particular anxiety over those who can pass as white.

The perception that biracial people are both of higher status and more abnormal highlights the complex and contradictory way in which racist ideas work. Kendi emphasizes that light-skinned biracial people are undoubtedly afforded privileges in American society that are withheld from those who are dark skinned. At the same time, these privileges are accompanied by a sense of perceived "wrongness" in order to keep interracial reproduction as a marginalized issue within a society still profoundly averse to racial mixing.

Eugenicists and other segregationists vehemently oppose interracial marriage and reproduction, stressing the importance of upholding the "purity of the White race." At the end of World War I, an "embittered" Austrian soldier named Adolf Hitler enters the German political arena championing eugenicist ideas. Eugenicists such as Stanford psychologist Lewis Terman—the inventor of the IQ test—develop standardized intelligence tests as a way of measuring the comparative intellectual power of different races. The SAT test is also invented by a eugenicist who believes that higher intelligence is produced by white genes.

By narrating Lewis Terman's career in such close proximity to Hitler, Kendi emphasizes that the post-World War I period is one in which extensive (yet often false) ideas about human hierarchy, capacity, and intelligence are being produced. While there are of course many differences between Terman and Hitler, both falsely believe that human intelligence can be measured and hierarchized across different racial groups.

In 1918, Du Bois travels to Paris and reports on the challenges and heroism of Black soldiers in Europe for *The Crisis*. This body of writing shows that Du Bois is still struggling to reconcile his assimilationist and antiracist tendencies. He still writes about colonization as a largely positive and "benevolent" phenomenon. When Germany is forced to pay reparations by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, its African colonies are divided up among the victorious European nations. President Wilson fears that the comparatively better treatment Black soldiers experienced in France during the war will lead them to expect more upon returning home to the U.S.

The story of Du Bois's career shows the profound extent to which it is possible to hold multiple different ideas at once, including both racist and antiracist ones. While this can make a person's legacy confusing and create feelings of ambivalence about them, Kendi implies that it also must be accepted as a universal fact of human nature. Indeed, by accepting the self-contradictory nature of thought, it is easier for people to allow themselves and each other to change.

President Wilson's concerns are well founded: in an issue of *The Crisis* so controversial the U.S. Postal Service refuses to deliver it, Du Bois calls for an escalation of the fight for racial equality. This moment marks a turning point for Du Bois, who has finally come to see that the uplift suasion and education do not work. In their place, he calls for Black people to "protest and fight" against racism. Those who, like Du Bois, are refusing to accept the racist treatment directed at them are termed "New Negroes". This wave of resistance in turn provokes a vicious white backlash, particularly during the Red Summer of 1919. This is largely separate from the Red Scare—the fear of communism—that erupts around the same time.

The simple fact about the U.S.P.S. refusing to deliver a particular issue of "The Crisis" highlights the profound extent of the opposition that even Du Bois (who at this point is still an assimilationist and a moderate) faces at this time. Indeed, given this opposition, it seems almost miraculous that Du Bois is able to achieve anything at all.

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Despite the fact that capitalism and modern racism emerged in the same historical period and are inextricable from each other, communists of the early 20th century largely fail to appreciate how integral race is to capitalist exploitation, and they adopt a discriminatory attitude to Black workers. It is during this time that Du Bois himself devotes himself to reading Karl Marx and in 1920 publishes an essay collection entitled *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. In this book, Du Bois argues that segregationist beliefs in Black inferiority are not produced by ignorance but by passionate belief and thus cannot be educated or persuaded away.

It is at this moment in Du Bois's career that his ideas begin to undergo a profound change. Although Kendi doesn't mention it explicitly, this passage suggests that Du Bois is beginning to let go of his assimilationist ideas about uplift suasion and the "Talented Tenth" and instead embrace the importance of economic justice and self-determination as the foundation for justice for Black people.

Darkwater also contains one of the only testaments to the beauty, value, and dignity of Black women that has thus far been published in print. At the same time, Du Bois's redeeming mission ends up creating a false stereotype of the Black "super-woman." Overall, however, *Darkwater* is a remarkably antiracist book, and as such it earns ire from the white press. Black readers tend to praise it, although some critique the elitism still very much present in Du Bois's worldview. For his part, Du Bois is highly critical of Garveyism; he describes Garvey's followers as "the lowest type of Negroes, mostly from the West Indies." Du Bois also denies the existence of colorism within the African American community. In doing so, Kendi writes, Du Bois denies a reality of which he must have been aware, yet afraid to discuss.

While Du Bois's thought about Black people native to the U.S. is steadily becoming more sophisticated and antiracist, he remains prejudiced against those who immigrate to the country from elsewhere. His words about Garvey's followers indicate that he still believes in a hierarchy among Black people. The fact that he considers immigrants from the West Indies the "lowest type" is significant, considering these individuals are likely to be poorer, less assimilated into white American culture, and—at least when it comes to Garvey's followers—more radical.

In 1921, Du Bois and Garvey engage in a major dispute over President Warren G. Harding's condemnation of "racial amalgamation." While Du Bois denounces Harding in *The Crisis*, Garvey supports a separatist—though not segregationist—approach to race relations. These two positions reflect broader splits among the Black American community between "assimilationists, antiracists, and separatists, between the classes, between natives and West Indians, between nationalists and Pan-Africanists, and between light skins and dark skins." Yet the real threat Garvey faces is not from any Black person but rather from the U.S. government, who have deemed him a national threat.

For all its differences, many aspects about the 1920s world Kendi describes here are similar to the present. For example, debates still occur around the issue of whether interracial marriage should be seen as inherently progressive, a perspective that is increasingly represented in mainstream culture yet draws criticism from those who see it as an assimilationist or colorist view.

In 1924, the Immigration Act is passed in order to stem the flow of non-Nordic immigrants to the U.S. Du Bois himself dreams of a world in which people of all races and nationalities contribute to the U.S.'s diversity. Yet in advocating for the positive role Black people have played in the nation, Kendi writes, Du Bois falls back on racist stereotypes such as the assertion that Black people are naturally sensual, with a "tropical love of life."

Again, Kendi argues that Du Bois's absorption of racist ideas has warped his perception of his own race. Even if he genuinely holds the belief that Black people are disproportionately sensual, this will be because he was predisposed to do so through exposure to racist ideas.

CHAPTER 26: MEDIA SUASION

In March 1924, Du Bois attends an "artistic gathering" in New York with the Howard University professor Alaine Locke, who the following year will go on to publish *The New Negro*. Locke and others in attendance believe that "media suasion" is the best new method for fighting racism. These discussions are taking place in the midst of the Harlem Renaissance and also a wave of protests instigated by "New Negro students." Throughout the 1920s, students at dozens of HBCUs protest the outdated, repressive, assimilationist policies at their institutions. During a protest at Fisk, striking students chant Du Bois's name.

After Locke publishes his book in 1925, the eponymous figure comes to play a significant role in popular understandings of this historical moment (and the Harlem Renaissance in particular). This figure, for which the book is named, is understood to be someone who is vocal, dignified, and assertive in the face of racism.

However, there are also a group of young Harlem Renaissance artists who reject Du Bois and his ideas. Calling themselves the "Niggerati," this group includes Wallace Thurman and Zora Neale Hurston, who at one time is a student of Franz Boas. This group may be "the first known fully antiracist intellectual and artistic group in American history." Not only do they unequivocally denounce racism but all forms of prejudice, such as classism and homophobia. Among their members is the poet Langston Hughes, who in a 1926 article in *The Nation* denounces assimilationism among Black people, lamenting how common it is for Black people to orient their lives around a secret wish to be white. Hurston, meanwhile, points out that the desire to be white is less common among Black people of the lower classes.

Rather than seeing the tensions between different camps of writers and artists within the Harlem Renaissance as a sign of weakness, Kendi shows how friction between groups often helps make a movement or social world more rich, sophisticated, and interesting. Thanks to the critiques of assimilationist elitism presented by Thurman, Hurston, Hughes and others, the Harlem Renaissance takes on a more radical edge, paving the way for the social and aesthetic movements of the later 20th century (especially Black Power).

In 1926, Hughes infuriates Du Bois by endorsing "*Nigger Heaven*," a book by a white patron of the Harlem Renaissance, Carl Van Vechten. This novel, a melodramatic and sensationalist story of Black life filled with stereotypes, is praised by the white press and lambasted by Black reviewers. The novel attacks the **Talented Tenth** and "spoiled" assimilationists; it also suggests that Black talent is all instinctive rather than highly trained and honed. Following the book's publication, white people begin flocking to Harlem in order to catch a glimpse of the world described in the novel. The assimilationist elite agonize over the depiction of poor Black people as hypersexual, wild, and vulgar. They desperately want to replace this image with an impression of Black people as refined, restrained, and chaste.

Throughout history, white individuals like Carl Van Vechten have chosen to immerse themselves in Black culture, thereby coming to be perceived as "experts" on Blackness within the white world. Many of these individuals have gone to profit from selling this image to white audiences eager to get a glimpse of a world that—because of racism—both fascinates and repels them. This is what Carl Van Vechten does with his book.

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The antiracist elite, however, defend poor Black people and choose not to worry about the supposedly "negative" stereotypes about Blackness circulated among the white public. Horrified by the representation of Black people in fiction of the time, Du Bois writes his own novel, *Dark Princess: A Romance*, which underlines assimilationist ideas in its effort to reject negative stereotypes. In 1928, a group of "leading race scholars" publish a special issue on "The Negro" in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. They argue that the Great Migration has disproved the belief that Black people should be segregated from the rest of the American population.

The reaction of the antiracist cultural elite might at first seem puzzling. Isn't choosing not to worry about racist stereotypes about poor Black people the opposite of "defending" them? Yet as Kendi has shown, choosing not to fixate on the opinions of white people is itself a form of care. Writers like Hurston and Hughes insist that it doesn't matter what white people think of poor Black people. In doing so, Kendi suggests, they betray a rigorous understanding of how racist ideas work and how to avoid wasting energy on them.

This same year, a number of American communists take up the issue of antiracism, declaring that the "central slogan" of the Communist Party should be "Abolition of the whole system of race discrimination." After reading yet another false account of Reconstruction that accuses Black people of having literally tortured helpless white Southerners in the Reconstruction era, Du Bois begins writing what will become his personal favorite of his works: *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*. In this book, he characterizes Reconstruction as the only blip of true democracy that the nation has ever experienced. He also introduces the term "wages of whiteness," which describes the privileges and benefits white people gain through racist structures.

Black Reconstruction *is considered by many (including the author) to be Du Bois's best work; its publication marks a turning point in his career. In this work, Du Bois's sophisticated analysis of the economic structures of racism and his account of poor Black people (including the formerly enslaved) as influential historical actors revolutionizes people's understanding of the Reconstruction era.*

The stock market crash of October 1929 and ensuing Great Depression was a difficult era for both the Republican Party and Black people in the U.S. In a period of mass unemployment, the Deep South adopted the slogan, "No jobs for niggers until every white man has a job." With so little work available, employers are free to abuse and exploit workers with impunity. Meanwhile, a new academic discipline called physical anthropology—which attends to the physical variation of human beings—splits from cultural anthropology, which remains led by Boas. Using ideas from physical anthropology, the U.S. Public Health Service begins a study in 1932 in which it deliberately withholds medical treatment from Black sharecroppers infected with syphilis in Tuskegee, Alabama. The study continues for 40 years.

The field of anthropology is one of the best examples of how racist knowledge is produced and legitimated through the academic world. While it would be simplistic to say that all anthropology is racist, many point to the colonial origins of the discipline as evidence that a racist framework is inherently built into it. Moreover, as the infamous Tuskegee experiment demonstrates, there is a history of anthropological research being conducted in a morally indefensible manner.

Racism in cinema continues with the release of *King Kong* in 1933, in which an enormous ape becomes obsessed with possessing a beautiful white woman. Black audiences can tell that the film has racist undertones, though at times struggle to articulate this as it is not *explicitly* racist.

Because racism so often works in covert, implicit ways, trying to identify it can be difficult. Yet Kendi underscores that this doesn't mean it's not there; indeed, the covert nature of racism is part of its power, allowing it to survive so long.

CHAPTER 27: OLD DEAL

In 1933, nine Black teenagers who come to be known as the "Scottsboro Boys" are falsely convicted of gang raping two white women in Alabama. Du Bois, now 65 and almost entirely committed to antiracism, believes that this is exactly the kind of case the NAACP should support. He has also been increasingly incorporating Marxism into his thought and trying to address Marx's inadequacies on the question of race. By 1940, he will publish a book devoted to his vision of "antiracist socialism," *Dusk of Dawn*. At the time, there is still much conflict over whether Black professors and the study of Black people should be part of the curriculum at HBCUs.

As Kendi has explained, the Communist Party and other socialist organizations do not necessarily have good records on antiracism at this point in time. Nonetheless, Du Bois and many other influential Black leaders and intellectuals across the 20th century embrace communist ideas and come to see socialism as a necessary element of ending racism worldwide. They help shift the socialist movement in a new direction by doing so.

Between 1933 and 1938, President Franklin D. Roosevelt publishes a series of relief and labor rights bills that are collectively known as the New Deal. In order to pass this legislation in Congress, Roosevelt capitulates to the segregationist desires of Southern Democrats. Abandoned by the government, Black people in the South develop their own secret unions. Northerners are able to benefit from the support of some unions but are turned away from others. Across the country, Black people are devasted by pervasive housing discrimination. At the same time, the limited support that Roosevelt (a Democrat) offers Black people as well as the 45 Black people in his administration (nicknamed the "Black cabinet") do persuade a number of Black former Republicans to become Democratic voters.

Kendi recounts how Black voters come to support Roosevelt despite the deal he makes with segregationists—and despite the fact that he is a member of the Democratic Party, which at the time is still associated with a proslavery legacy—to show how dismal the political landscape is for Black people at this time. While they at times proclaim otherwise, neither of the major parties prioritize Black people's interests, and both have a track record for capitulating to racist extremists.

If Roosevelt hadn't been so "beholden to his party's segregationists," 1933 could have been a year of landmark progress against racism in the U.S. In this same year, Du Bois publishes an essay entitled "On Being Ashamed" in which he rejects his previous assimilationist thinking. He acknowledges that Black people's *voluntary* segregation is not at all equivalent to the *forced* segregation racists implement. The reaction to this essay is one of shock; assimilationists of all stripes feel betrayed by Du Bois. Yet he remains resolute; from this point forward, he never advocates for uplift suasion again. After his new views get him dismissed from the NAACP, Du Bois travels to Berlin, where he witnesses the ascent of Nazism with horror.

Throughout the book, Kendi praises the act of being able to revise one's thinking and admit to having been wrong. While this can be a difficult task, the fact that Du Bois—a singularly influential Black leader and one of the leading American intellectuals of all time—can do it suggests that no one should be exempt from following suit. Particularly because racist ideas are so pervasive, Kendi implies that almost no one will go through life without absorbing some. It is thus essential that people are able to change their minds.

After traveling through Germany, Japan, China, and Russia, Du Bois returns to the U.S. in 1937. White American intellectuals, disturbed by the specter of Nazism, feel increasingly uncomfortable about Jim Crow segregation. In 1938, the American Anthropological Association unanimously votes to condemn biological racism. The term "racism" is itself an invention of the anthropologist Ruth Benedict, who had been a student of Franz Boas. She defines racism as "the unproved assumption of the biological and perpetual superiority of one human group over another." This definition notably only includes segregationists, not the assimilationists who at this point have taken "the helm of racial thought."

This passage describes a crucial pivot in the history of race and racism in the U.S. Segregationism begins to give way to assimilationism, while a growing awareness of racism emerges. However, this is not necessarily a moment at which the country starts to become "less racist." Rather, racism transforms, adapting itself into a form more suited to this new era.

Another significant assimilationist book published during this era is E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family in the United States*, which draws on research Du Bois conducted years ago in order to pathologize Black families as "disorganized" and immoral. Frazier recommends assimilation into whiteness—including via intermarriage—as the solution. Kendi notes that many Black people have internalized racist ideas about the superior beauty of white features. Starting in the 1920s, Black people straighten their hair. Reflecting on the first time he did so in the early 1940s, Malcolm X will pronounce that this was his "first really big step toward self-degradation."

The act of straightening one's hair might seem innocuous, a simple aesthetic choice based in personal preference. While to some degree this is true, thinkers like Malcolm X help illuminate how aesthetic norms such as hair straightening can be rooted in white supremacy.

The year 1939 sees the release of *Gone with the Wind*, a film that—like the Pulitzer Prize-winning book it is based on—depicts white enslavers as benevolent and the enslaved character Mammy as happily submissive and loyal. Once again, Black people protest the movie while white viewers adore it. Du Bois, meanwhile, is heartened after meeting a young writer named Richard Wright, who in 1945 will publish the autobiography *Black Boy*. Wright expresses some racist ideas about the lasting impact of slavery's dehumanization on Black people, but he also refutes the idea that African culture is somehow less "resilient" than European culture.

Richard Wright represents a next wave of Black writers, one that also includes Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. These writers come into their prime after the Harlem Renaissance but before Black Power, thereby containing traces of both movements.

Zora Neale Hurston is singular in her steadfast antiracism. Yet she struggles to make a living, despite writing "the finest collection of Black folklore ever recorded," *Mules and Men* (1935), and the majestic novel about Black Southern life, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Despite positive reviews in the white press, *Their Eyes* does not sell well. Wright critiques the novel as resembling a minstrel show. Yet Hurston is defiant in her antiracism and pride in being a Black Southern woman; *Their Eyes* is eventually recognized as "one of the finest—if not *the* finest—American novels of all time."

Like many other antiracists (especially other Black women) whose visionary outlook is before its time, Hurston is unfairly overlooked, mistreated, and neglected in her lifetime. It is only after her death that people are able to understand her talent, both as a prose writer and a theorist of Black life. This can be taken as a reminder from Kendi to reconsider those considered extremists in the present, who might in fact be visionaries.

In 1940, Wright publishes *Native Son*, the story of the tragic Bigger Thomas, a Black man caught "unwanted between two worlds." This bestselling novel is celebrated by white and Black critics alike until James Baldwin critiques it as a "protest novel" in the tradition of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Baldwin's critique of Native Son *rests in the fact that Wright's purpose is to convey a political message rather than write from his own truth (heedless of what racists think). In this sense, Baldwin's position resembles Hurston's.*

CHAPTER 28: FREEDOM BRAND

The Holocaust has a drastic impact on Du Bois and the world around him. Toward the end of World War II, Black Americans discuss the "Double V Campaign," which refers to defeating both Nazism and American racism back home. In 1936, the Carnegie Foundation commissions a major report on Black people but leaves it in the hands of white scholars, who they claim will be uniquely unbiased. In 1944, the study is published under the name *An American Dilemma*. It laments the existence of racism, which it claims is caused by ignorance. Du Bois rejects this conclusion, acknowledging that Americans are indeed aware of the reality around them. Yet despite its assimilationist bent, Du Bois praises the study.

The idea that Black scholars are biased when it comes to the study of race whereas white scholars aren't is untrue and based in the fact that whiteness is an unmarked category. Here, Kendi shows how white people are mistakenly perceived (and mistakenly perceive themselves) as not having a race, meaning they would not harbor bias around the issue. But Stamped from the Beginning *suggests that, in reality the opposite is more true: white people are more biased on the subject of Black people due to the racist ideas of white supremacy.*

As World War II draws to a close, Du Bois unsuccessfully fights for the new UN charter to oppose colonialism. In 1945, he attends the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester alongside future decolonial leaders Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta. Rejecting the prospect of gradual decolonization, the delegates demand immediate independence from colonial rule. The U.S. emerges from World War II as the most powerful nation in the world. The developing field of Black historiography is losing some of its racist tendencies, though remains distinctly masculinist. Meanwhile, Social Darwinism drops eugenics from its agenda.

Having initially expressed prejudice against non-U.S. Black people (in the context of his opposition to Garveyism), Du Bois has now come around to seeing the unity of Black people across the world as one of the most important aspects of the fight for racial justice. Alongside other attendees at the landmark Fifth Pan-African Congress, he connects the racism of the U.S. to colonialism abroad.

In 1942, Boas' protégée, Ashley Montagu, publishes *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, a book that rejects the biological race hierarchy and emphasizes cultural relativism. As scholars increasingly accept that humans (and thus racial groups) are shaped by both genes and social conditions, segregationists still fight to insist that Africans generally have the fewest good genes. Moreover, it is still possible to argue that social conditions have made Europeans the superior culture. In 1947, President Harry Truman introduces the "Truman Doctrine," arguing that it is the U.S.'s job as "leader of the free world" to protect the freedoms of people around the world. Of course, this invites accusations of hypocrisy given the stark racism that still exists in the U.S.

Kendi suggests that there is truth to the idea that race is a "myth" and a "fallacy," but that this is also the source of much confusion (including for people living in the present). On one level, race is not real in the sense that sorting human beings into racial categories is a social invention, not a reflection of the way humanity actually works. At the same time, race has become real in the sense that it is a myth that people are raised to believe in and that significantly shapes the way the world works. In other words, race is not real in that it does not reflect a pre-existing reality; instead, it has created a new reality.

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In 1947, Truman's Committee on Civil Rights issues a report that follows up on *An American Dilemma* and condemns the nation's failure to protect freedom and equality among its own people. Truman is keen on implementing policies promoting racial equality despite substantial opposition from many white politicians and voters alike. A wave of desegregation cases sweeps the nation. The housing desegregation movement gains the support of a number of different parties, many of whom are not acting on egalitarian principles (for example, the Black elite who do not want to be forced to live among poor Black people). When Black people do start moving into white neighborhoods, white residents frequently react with violence.

Kendi suggests that an uncomfortable truth about social movements is that they often depend on the support of people who choose to back them for the "wrong" reasons. As Kendi explains here, those in favor of housing desegregation are not necessarily invested in justice; many hold deeply prejudiced views and are working in their own self-interest.

The extensive welfare benefits of the G.I. Bill help stimulate the enormous postwar economic boom. This bill "give[s] birth to the White middle class," increasing the economic disparity between the white and Black communities. It is also at this point that non-Nordic European immigrants such as Italians, Jews, and Irish people are become fully incorporated into the category of whiteness. In the background, the government aggressively pursues anyone they suspect of having communist ties. At 82 years old, Du Bois is arrested; although he is exonerated, the State Department revokes his passport. In 1951, William Patterson delivers a petition to the U.N. signed by Du Bois and other Black leaders entitled *We Charge Genocide*. The petition condemns the U.S.'s self-styling as "leader of the free world" given its appalling record of anti-Black racism.

Here, Kendi shows that the U.S. government's treatment of Black radicals—even those who are elderly, unwell, or otherwise vulnerable—continues to be brutal. It seems unlikely that an 82-year-old scholar would pose any kind of threat to national security, but this does not stop the government from harshly penalizing Du Bois.

In response, the government issues a pamphlet entitled *The Negro in American Life*, which demonstrates how much better life has become for the elite minority of Black people Du Bois once called the **Talented Tenth**. When Dwight D. Eisenhower assumes the presidency in 1953, he reverses the Truman Doctrine on the basis that racism is not a problem of social structures, but rather "a failure of individual feelings." As the debate around desegregating schooling intensifies, those in favor point out that segregated schools have had a devastating impact on Black children's self-esteem. However, this argument is often grounded in the racist, assimilationist belief that separate Black schools could never be "equal" because they would not be of high quality without white people involved.

To Kendi, suggesting that racism is an individual rather than structural matter—and that it only counts in the form of deliberate, conscious prejudice—is a serious misunderstanding of what racism is. Furthermore, it exonerates structural systems by placing all the blame on individuals.

Drawing on this understanding of the psychological damage of segregation on Black children, the Supreme Court rules in *Brown v. Board of Education* that "in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place." At age 64, Zora Neale Hurston is one of few voices to acknowledge the problem with assuming that Black schools could never deliver quality education on their own. Segregationists and antiracists both praise Hurston's view; unsurprisingly, assimilationists denounce it. Even as desegregation is now legally mandated, white segregationists prepare "massive resistance" to oppose it.

Today, mainstream historical accounts of the civil rights movement almost uniformly assert that desegregation is necessarily a good thing. However, this passage points out an assimilationist belief that sometimes underpinned this push for desegregation: that Black schools and Black teachers couldn't provide high-quality education without white people's involvement.

CHAPTER 29: MASSIVE RESISTANCE

Emmet Till is one of the victims of the massive resistance that follows the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Despite the brutal opposition of white Southerners, "the civil rights movement ke[eps] coming." Du Bois is surprised to see that the 27-year-old "figurehead" of the Montgomery Bus Boycott is a Baptist preacher, Martin Luther King, Jr. The two men exchange letters in which King expresses his admiration of Du Bois's work. King is also an admirer of E. Franklin Frazier, whose book *Black Bourgeoisie* caused significant controversy when it came out in 1957. In the book, Frazier portrays Black women in a demeaning light while also critiquing the assimilationist, consumerist tendencies of the Black bourgeois class. In this sense, Kendi writes, Frazier echoes Elijah Muhammad and his emerging Black separatist group, the Nation of Islam.

Because Martin Luther King, Jr. ends up becoming such a prominent representation of the civil rights movement (and arguably the most famous Black leader of all time), it can be easy to forget that Black activism before his time didn't necessarily have a Christian bent. Indeed, ever since the first enslaved Africans resisted their captivity when they were brought to American shores, Black activists have drawn on precolonial African faiths, Islam, and secular principles in order to fight oppression—not just Christianity. Yet King's prominence means the civil rights movement is often perceived as having a Christian element.

When the governor of Arkansas deploys the National Guard to stop a high school in Little Rock from desegregating, Eisenhower declares the incident a disaster for the U.S.'s global reputation. He sends federal troops to enforce desegregation and protect the Black students nicknamed the "Little Rock Nine." At age 90, Du Bois is hopeful about the possibility that the country is coming to embrace socialism and reject colonialism. After being reissued his passport, he visits China and the Soviet Union. He comes to feel more critical of King and his emphasis on Christianity. In the first ever televised presidential debate, Democrat John F. Kennedy tries to mention civil rights as little as possible and names the civil rights opponent Lyndon B. Johnson as his running mate.

This passage emphasizes that U.S. politicians—including those praised for helping the civil rights movement's success—usually do not act out of a belief in justice for Black people. Whereas Eisenhower is concerned about the global reputation of the U.S., Kennedy's focus is on gaining power (even if this means choosing an opponent of civil rights, Lyndon B. Johnson, as his running mate).

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As the campaign of sit-ins at segregated Southern businesses continues, Du Bois grows disillusioned with the civil rights movement's demands. He feels that only a radical program of economic redistribution will actually change the status of Black people in the U.S. Just before turning 93, Du Boise journeys to Ghana and soon grows sick from a prostate infection. His 94th birthday dinner is attended by President Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of the now-decolonized Ghanaian state. Back in the U.S., Northern universities slowly begin to admit a small number of Black students, while Southern universities are desegregated by force.

Du Bois's decision to travel to and die in Ghana can be interpreted as a sign of his resignation about American politics and the possibility of achieving racial justice there. At the same time, Kendi suggests that there is also a personal element to the decision as Du Bois—like many Black Americans—chooses to go "home" and spend his final days on African soil.

In 1958, Alabama Governor George Wallace becomes one of several influential politicians who deliberately escalate their racist rhetoric in order to gain popularity. In a famous speech, he proclaims: "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." In doing so, he comes to symbolize American racism as a whole, even though he actually represents only one side of it. Assimilationists continue to argue that both discrimination and Black people themselves are responsible for the problems they face—but Kendi points out that, in actuality, Black people have long been taking far too much of the burden of responsibility for these issues themselves. Instead of blaming white people and racist structures, the assimilationist Black elite "polic[e] the masses" and fixate on respectability.

This passage explores how limiting one's perception of racism to outspoken segregationists like George Wallace prevents a true understanding of how racism operates. Crucially, it allows many forms of racist thought and action to continue unheeded because they are falsely perceived as not being racist. Perhaps the most important takeaway from Kendi's book is this lesson about learning to detect all *forms of racism, not just overt segregationist thinking.*

After being arrested while protesting in Birmingham, Alabama, King writes his famous "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," in which he critiques the patronizing attitude of the "white moderate." At the same time, he conflates defiant antiracists with segregationists. By this point, a growing number of Black people have become disillusioned with King's nonviolence and emphasis on persuasion. Instead they turn to Malcolm X, who firmly rejects assimilationist thinking and advocates for the necessity of self-defense. Concerned with the ongoing damage racist discrimination is causing to the U.S.'s global reputation, the Kennedy administration moves to pass civil rights legislation. The day before King delivers his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington, Du Bois dies in his sleep.

In contrast to the widely revered King, Malcolm X is often represented as an extremist whose violent views jeopardize what would otherwise be an important message. But as Kendi has shown, antiracists throughout history have been characterized as extremist radicals who are full of hate. They earn this reputation, Kendi suggests, simply by opposing racism.

CHAPTER 30: THE ACT OF CIVIL RIGHTS

Angela Davis, a Brandeis Junior from Birmingham, Alabama, is on study abroad in Biarritz, France, when she learns of the deaths of her four girls in a bombing at a church in her city. Three out of four of the girls are personal friends of hers. Angela's parents raised her on "a steady diet of anticapitalist and antiracist ideas"; as a result, she recalls never having had any "desire to be white." As a teenager, she became interested in socialism and joined a youth activist organization through which she participated in sit-ins. She finds the student movement at Brandeis patronizing to Black people. At a youth summit in Helsinki in 1962, she listens to one of her idols, James Baldwin, criticize the nonviolent, assimilationist bent of the civil rights movement.

Angela Davis is unique in the book as the only central figure to not hold racist ideas at any point in life. This puts her in a tradition of other visionary antiracist Black women, such as Ida B. Wells and Zora Neale Hurston, who faced ostracization in their own time for being so uniquely steadfast in their antiracism. These women provide a note of optimism: racist ideas may be everywhere, but as Wells, Hurston, and Davis show, they are not inescapable.

At Brandeis, Davis becomes a student of the Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse. Her junior year is cut short by the news of the Birmingham church bombing. Davis comes to feel that through its complicity in ongoing racism, the entire U.S. is "guilty of this murder." President Kennedy launches an investigation into the bombing, but within weeks he is assassinated in Dallas, Texas. New president Lyndon Johnson vows to pass the Civil Rights Act in Kennedy's memory. Meanwhile, after his *hajj*—the pilgrimage to Mecca all Muslims are encouraged to complete at least once in their lifetime—Malcolm X encounters Muslims of all races and ethnicities harmoniously united. He retires some of his previous hostile rhetoric about white people, instead focusing his ire on racists (of all races).

Kendi shows that one recurring conflict in the Black radical tradition rests in the tension between religion and separatism. For many antiracist Black separatists, interacting with and working alongside white people is profoundly undesirable. At the same time, most of the world's major religions—including Christianity and Islam—encourage a close sense of kinship among believers of all races. Malcolm X's hajj *shifts him from the former to the latter view, a pivot that receives mix reactions among his supporters.*

When Malcolm returns to the U.S., the 1964 Civil Rights Act is stuck thanks to the longest filibuster in the Senate's history. While the Act eliminates Jim Crow segregation, it also inaugurates a whole new era of racist ideas. These are based around the notion that because (one form of) segregation is over, racism is over, and thus Black people are to blame for the injustices and disparities that continue to afflict them. The 1964 Act bans only the explicit intention of racial discrimination; this preserves the "myth" that only the South is racist, when the disparities that exist in the North makes clear that the North is, too. Discrimination continues, albeit in a different form. Instead of open eugenicist policies, for example, eugenics-inspired intelligence tests are used to discriminate instead.

The era of blaming Black people for the struggles and injustices they face because racism is supposedly over is one that persists to this day. Indeed, although the final section of the book begins in the 1960s, many of its lessons are as relevant to the present as they are to that time. This makes it an especially useful guide for those trying to understand how racist ideas work currently and how to eliminate them from one's thinking.

In the 1964 presidential election, George Wallace runs against Lyndon Johnson for the Democratic nomination. Wallace's popularity leads him to observe of the white American public: "they all hate black people […] The whole United States is southern!" During the same election, Barry Goldwater's ultra-conservative candidacy brings many longtime Democrats over to the Republican Party. Johnson feels far more worried by the left radicalism of protestors against police brutality and economic injustice than he does by the conservative radicalism of Goldwater. In February 1965, Malcolm X is assassinated at a Harlem rally. Both Baldwin and King express their sorrow, although the *New York Times* pronounces, "The Apostle of Hate Is Dead."

Kendi suggests that Wallace's pronouncement, while misguided in many ways, illuminates an uncomfortable reality. Throughout American history, Northerners displace blame by creating the impression that only the South is racist. But as Kendi shows, this is not and has never been true.

Later that year, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, co-written with Alex Haley, is published posthumously. Kendi writes that it is perhaps the single most important antiracist book in American history. Speaking to a Howard University audience in March 1965, President Lyndon Johnson makes the surprisingly antiracist observation that it is nonsense to pretend that Black people can suddenly compete freely and fairly with others after having been so severely disadvantaged for so long. Johnson also openly admits that advances in status and opportunity are largely limited to the Black elite, while for poor Black communities, life is getting increasingly difficult. At the same time, he still manages to blame these ongoing issues on both structural inequity *and* Black people themselves, specifically citing "the breakdown of the Negro family structure."

The fact that Johnson makes an antiracist claim in the middle of a speech riddled with assimilationist thinking suggests that he—like many other racists—actually does understand the truths lurking behind racist fictions. However, Kendi shows how Johnson chooses to indulge racist fictions instead, likely because they suit his self-interest, which in Johnson's case revolves around maintaining political power.

Aligning with this last observation of President Lyndon Johnson's, Daniel Patrick Moynihan develops a report on Black families that laments the "matriarchal structure" disproportionately found within Black communities. The report combines racism and sexism to pathologize Black communities and blame them for the issues they face. It is leaked to the press in August 1965, around the same time the Voting Rights Act is passed. This Act bans the discrimination that for decades has been disenfranchising Black people in the South. Unlike the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act focuses on outcomes (the disparity in Black and white voting rates) rather than intentions (explicit announcements of racist intent). In this sense, it is "the most effective piece of antiracist legislation ever passed" by Congress.

This passage is about the Moynihan Report, which Kendi underscores as one of the most significant—and damaging—documents in the history of racist ideas in America. In pathologizing Black family structures, it paves the way for generations of harmful ideas and policies. Indeed, it can be placed in a lineage that began during slavery, when enslavers forcefully broke up families and disrespected the kinship structures that existed among the enslaved. While the Moynihan Report may be less obviously violent, Kendi argues that its devastating impact should not be underestimated.

CHAPTER 31: BLACK POWER

The racist pronouncements of the Moynihan Report overshadow celebrations of the Voting Rights Act. Two days after the report is leaked, six days of race riots begin in Los Angeles. Davis, meanwhile, is en route to Frankfurt, Germany. Around the same time, the Race and Color Conference takes place in Copenhagen; there, scholars critically examine how phrases like "black sheep," "blackmail," and "blacklisting" with negation and harm. Other euphemisms that come to be associated with Black people around this time are the terms "minority" and "ghetto," which have a similarly marginalizing effect. Kendi notes that the word "ghetto," with its suggestions of neglect, poverty, and crime, is often lazily invoked to describe anywhere Black people live (regardless of their class) or even as an adjective that denotes Black culture.

Again, Kendi provides crucial context here about terms and ideas that are still active in contemporary culture. Crucially, the reason why so many euphemisms come into play during this time is because of the switch Kendi has described from overt segregationist to covert assimilationist racism. It is no longer acceptable to describe Black people and communities in the way that segregationists did early in the 20th century and before. But as Kendi points out, although the language has changed, the substance of the ideas remains fundamentally similar.

A 1966 *New York Times* article contrasts all the negativity associated with Black people to the supposed "model minority" of Asian Americans. Meanwhile, a new group of activists focus on rejecting the negativity associated with Blackness, including Stokely Carmichael, a Trinidad-born, Brox-raised Howard University graduate who idolized Malcolm X. In 1966, Carmichael is serving as the chairman of the powerful Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and immersed in antiracist activism. During one rally, he ignites a chant of "BLACK POWER!" News of this demand quickly spreads around the country yet earns the condemnation of some Black leaders.

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee is one of the most important organizations within the civil rights movement and the radical movements of the 1960s in general. It is within this climate of exuberant youthful radicalism that Stokely Carmichael escalates the demands of Black activism, shifting from a discourse of "rights" to one of "power."

However, the movement keeps spreading, and by the end of 1966, a Black Power conference takes place at UC Berkeley. Two young Oakland residents, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, draft a 10-point platform for a new organization, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. In the platform, which demands autonomy and economic justice, they quote from Jefferson's **Declaration of Independence**. Reading about the Black Power movement from Frankfurt is frustrating for Davis, who decides to travel back and finish her Ph.D. at UC San Diego in order to be closer to the action. Her involvement with the movement begins with founding a Black Student's Union at UCSD.

In the contemporary moment, there is renewed interest in the Black Panther Party, triggered in part by books and movies about the era and by an adoption of the aesthetics of the Panthers. But what many people might miss—and Kendi carefully points out here—is the extent to which economic justice is at the heart of the Panthers' platform.

Black Power has an impact on King, who repeats one of its messages (that "black is beautiful") during a speech in August 1967. By this point, assimilationists have lost patience with King, who is becoming too radical for them. He decides to focus on a Poor People's Campaign aimed at securing an "economic bill of rights." In Carmichael's *Black Power*, coauthored with Charles Hamilton, the authors discuss the difference between "individual racism" and "institutional racism." After three summers of Black-led protesting and rioting, President Lyndon Johnson promises to crack down on "rising crime and lawlessness." By 1968, politicians of both parties being repeatedly promising to (re)institute "law and order."

Just as Malcolm X's reputation as the "Apostle of Hate" does not match up to the reality of his life and work, King's reputation as a nonviolent, rights-focused peacemaker also misconstrues the reality of what he thinks. Particularly toward the end of his life, King becomes increasingly focused on economic justice and increasingly impatient with assimilationists and racist white people in general. Yet this side of his thinking is rarely emphasized in popular recollections of him.

Another "disciple" of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, writes a devastating account of how the police enforce the existing white supremacist social hierarchy in his controversial and enormously popular book *Soul on Ice*. In the book, Cleaver dwells on damaged Black masculinity and openly admits to having committed rape. He is married to Kathleen Cleaver, the first woman to serve in the Black Panther's Central Committee (as national communications secretary). He expresses passionate disdain for Black men who shun women of their own race and choose to date white women instead.

Eldridge Cleaver is a complicated figure with a controversial legacy. Kendi highlights how Cleaver's contributions to the Black Power movement are significant but also doesn't gloss over his derogatory attitude toward women, which jeopardizes his antiracism.

In 1968, the government's Kerner Commission releases its report on the Black-led rebellions that have been occurring across the country. The report emphasizes that white society is responsible for creating the conditions that led to the uprisings, but that this message has been distorted by the racist media. It warns that the country is becoming more "separate" and "unequal." While Richard Nixon condemns the report, King stresses its urgency and necessity. Lyndon Johnson commissions a second report (written by different individuals), which recommends increased funding for police.

After many examples of how the government and academic researchers collaborate to produce racist research, this passage contains an example of the opposite phenomenon. Without intending to, the government accidentally commissions a piece of antiracist research. It is extremely telling, Kendi notes, that the reaction to this report is to suppress it and attempt to rewrite its conclusions via a second report.

Angela Davis is at the SNCC office in Los Angeles on April 4, 1968, when she learns that Martin Luther King has been killed. The night before his assassination, he had promised a "colored peoples'" revolution. King's death pushes countless Americans to support Black Power, assisted by James Brown's hit single "Say It Loud—I'm Back and I'm Proud." In schools and universities, activists demand the instigation of a Black Studies curriculum. Protests at educational institutions across the country lead to the creation of the first Black Studies departments. Countless non-Black allies join the fight against anti-Black racism, with non-Black people of color forming their own antiracist movements (such as Brown Power) that act in solidarity with Black people.

Martin Luther King's assassination is a prime demonstration of a claim made by the Black Panther Fred Hampton (who is himself killed by the police in 1969 at the age of only 21): "You can kill the revolutionary, but you can never kill the revolution." Kendi points out that while King's assassination is an act of injustice, the result is that it attracts even more people to the Black Power movement, radicalizing them into refusing to accept meagre compromises and the excuses of white racists.

Both the SNCC and Black Panther Party are plagued by sexism. In 1968, Frances Beal helps found the Black Women's Liberation Committee within the SNCC. Literature emerges about the dual oppression Black women face, analyzing the ways in which white men, white women, *and* Black men oppress Black women. Tension over sexism is part of what leads the SNCC Los Angeles chapter to shut down in 1968. That same year, Davis joins the Communist Party and begins working on the campaign for the party's presidential candidate, a Black woman named Charlene Mitchell.

Kendi shows that while the sexism that plagues the Black Power movement weakens its strength, it also helps birth a new wave of thought and activism: Black feminism. Of course, there were Black feminists long before the 1960s, many of whom—such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Zora Neale Hurston—are mentioned in this book. Yet in the 1960s the movement begins to be formally consolidated.

CHAPTER 32: LAW AND ORDER

Presidential candidate Richard Nixon wants to appeal to racist voters but knows that by being too explicit, he will only attract the support of hardcore segregationists, a minority of the larger group of racist voters. Instead he pursues what historians call the "southern strategy," which involves signaling racist ideas without ever naming race. Nixon pulls this off by claiming that "Law and order has broken down in this country" and promising to restore it. The strategy is successful; Nixon wins the election.

As Kendi indicates here, the compromise represented by the "southern strategy" isn't reached because Nixon and others like him want to appeal to antiracists as well as racists. Rather, they know they need to appeal to assimilationists who tend not to think of themselves as racist. As a result, Nixon must express racist ideas in a veiled, covert way.

In 1969, Davis is due to start her first academic job at UCLA. However, after the FBI learns that she is a member of the Communist Party, California Governor Ronald Reagan orders her to be fired from her post. Fighting this move, Davis manages to be successfully reinstated thanks to intervention from the California Superior Court. In February 1970, a campaign begins to free three Black Power activists incarcerated at Soledad State Prison in San Jose. Davis gives a speech at a rally demanding that the "Soledad Brothers" be released. Reagan doubles down on his efforts to fire her, citing her condemnation of a UC Berkeley psychologist whose research supports segregationist ideas.

Kendi uses the story of Angela Davis' early years as a professor in the University of California system to highlight how "free speech" has always been restricted for Black radicals. Although Davis is a highly pedigreed and accomplished scholar, Reagan and other forces relentlessly conspire to characterize her as dangerous and incompetent in order to get her removed from her post.

In August 1970, the Soledad Brothers make an escape attempt aided by Jonathan Jackson, taking three hostages in a courtroom. A shootout ensues in which two of the inmates, Jackson, and the judge are killed. Police claim that one of the guns Jackson used belongs to Davis, and they charge her with counts of murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy. Davis flees her arrest warrant in the manner of "a fugitive trying to avoid slavery or worse." She is placed on the FBI's 10 most wanted list and images of her are circulated with her famous Afro. By this point, Kendi notes, the Afro has become a symbol of the Black Power movement, although it is also associated with Black cinema and especially the genre of Blaxploitation. Some Black people rebuke Blaxploitation for its vulgarity and flirtation with racist ideas.

Like many Black Power activists, Davis is indicted on dubious charges involving resistance to police violence and political imprisonment. Kendi shows how, throughout this era, the police spy on, intimidate, assault, incarcerate, and murder Black activists. If any defend themselves or fight back, they are immediately killed or incarcerated. In this sense, Davis is only a "criminal" in the sense that she falls within a category invented to suppress Black freedom. The comparison of her flight to an enslaved person's escape is therefore apt.

In October 1970, Davis is captured and incarcerated in New York. It is while she is in prison that she begins developing what she later calls "embryonic Black feminist consciousness." Back in August, Frances Beal attended the National Organization for Women's Strike for Equality in New York, representing the Third World Women's Alliance and demanding that the pursuit of Davis be dropped. Meanwhile, in the world of literature, both Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou publish narratives with a distinctly antiracist worldview. In December, Davis is extradited to California. She spends her time in prison reading.

This passage contrasts two very different phenomena that Kendi suggests are nonetheless inextricable from each other: the brutality of incarceration and the Black Power movement suppression and the burgeoning Black feminist literary culture that emerges via Davis, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou in this era. It is against the former violence that these three authors and others like them write, building a vision for a new, antiracist world.

The mode of antiracism Davis practices is different from the civil rights model still being enacted in the country at large. Where the latter form only prohibits overt and explicit discrimination, Davis and other Black Power activists seek to focus on eliminating Black poverty. In the ensuing years, more Black politicians are elected around the country, but it soon becomes clear that they will not necessarily work in the interests of Black people. When Davis' trial takes place, the prosecutor intends to show that Davis was not interested in freeing the Soledad Brothers *as* political prisoners, but rather fleeing her George Jackson only because he was her lover. This argument is ultimately unsuccessful, and Davis is acquitted. As she walks free, she promises to devote her life to freeing others from prison.

Like many radicals throughout history—and particularly Black radicals—Davis undergoes an intellectual transformation while in prison. Whereas she had already always been committed to fighting racism and economic exploitation, it is while she is incarcerated herself that she comes to focus on the prison system as an equally key point of focus. Kendi shows that, by incarcerating Angela Davis, prosecutors inadvertently helped give birth to the modern abolitionist movement.

The Watergate scandal of 1973 highlighted the hypocrisy of Nixon, the "law and order" president, evading a single day in prison. In 1975, Davis takes an academic position at Claremont College's Black Studies Center and is disappointed to find assimilationist ideas such as uplift suasion still circulating there. At the same time, the momentum of the Black feminist and LGBT movements is gradually building. Black lesbian feminist Audre Lorde renounces the idea that people of color, women, and queer people should be "expected to educate" their oppressors into seeing their "humanity."

Kendi suggests that, like other figures in the book, Audre Lorde is ahead of her time in her insistence that injustice must be examined through the lens of intersectionality and that no group of oppressed people should be excluded from the fight for justice. Her visionary worldview is part of why she is still so frequently cited to this day.

Black feminist writer Ntozake Shange, meanwhile, writes a play that debuts on Broadway in September 1976. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf* comes to be embraced as the "black feminist bible." Like Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* (1982), *For Colored Girls* attracts condemnation for those who are concerned it portrays Black men in a negative light, adding fuel to racist fires. At the same time, Kendi suggests that part of the problem of these concerns is their insistence on reading individual Black characters as representative of all Black people.

One of the lessons of Kendi's book is that Black cultural production should be allowed to be complex, challenging, and controversial. Kendi notes that, rather than decreasing its literary and political value, the debate that ensues around The Color Purple *confirms what an important novel it is.*

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Tensions continue to rise with the publication of Michelle Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of Superwoman* in 1979, which critiques the sexism of Black men and the false stereotype of the headstrong, invincible Black woman. Yet Wallace's book also contains some racist arguments as well. After critique from fellow Black feminists, she ultimately revises her original claim that Black machoism was the main reason the Black Power Movement failed (while acknowledging the reality that it was *one* important reason). Meanwhile, another controversy arises when the white actress Bo Derek chooses to wear her hair in cornrows in 1979, which are soon nicknamed "Bo Braids." This all takes place in a moment in which Black women are still regularly punished at school and work for wearing their hair in braids and other natural hairstyles.

As Kendi's example of "Bo Braids" shows, conversations around cultural appropriation have been happening since the 1970s and earlier.

In 1977, the TV show *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* airs on ABC, depicting the story of an African named Kunta Kinte who is kidnapped from Gambia and enslaved in Virginia. Writer Alex Haley, on whose book of the same name the series is based, claims to be a direct relation of Kinte and traces Kinte's descendants through history over the course of the narrative. The show is wildly successful, inaugurating a new era in the representation of slavery.

Here, Kendi encourages readers to think back to the many examples he's provided of racist ideas that assert that Black people have been corrupted and dehumanized by slavery. In many ways, Roots *is a challenge to this notion, highlighting the strength, dignity, beauty, and resilience of enslaved people across multiple generations and endowing the descendants of the enslaved with a new pride.*

CHAPTER 33: REAGAN'S DRUGS

The racist retaliation against Black Power materializes in the form of Ronald Reagan, the "law and order" governor of California. While campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination, Reagan makes false claims about a Black woman abusing the welfare system in order to make $150,000. Reagan narrowly loses the nomination, but the Democratic candidate, Jimmy Carter, introduces a series of welfare cuts anyway. Poverty and unemployment rates soar, and racist white people choose to blame the Black community—and policies such as affirmative action—for their struggles.

The fact that Jimmy Carter adopts Reaganite economic policies shows how racist and right-wing extremism can have an impact in government even when the "extreme" candidate is not elected.

In *Regents v. Bakke*, affirmative action in the California public university system is challenged. During the case, neither side even mentions the fact that the standardized tests used in university admissions have been designed to covertly exclude Black people and other marginalized groups. A paradigm shift has emerged: whereas in the 1950s racists advocated for explicitly "race-conscious" policies (such as Jim Crow segregation) to protect the existing social hierarchy, by the late 1970s racists fight against "race-conscious" policies (such as affirmative action) *also* in the hope of maintaining the existing hierarchy. In 1978 the University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson publishes *The Declining Significance of Race*, in which he argues that class is more important than race in "determining black access to privilege and power."

The way in which racists pivot from supporting to opposing explicitly "race-conscious" policies can be confusing. Like many other pivotal moments in the history of racist ideas, it resembles change, yet in reality this change is only superficial and masks a fundamental continuity lying underneath. Kendi suggests that, in an era in which racial barriers to opportunity have officially been removed, it is necessary to have policies that account for the still-existing reality of racism because superficial "color-blind" equality does not actually mean equality.

William Julius Wilson's argument glosses over the inherent racialization of class, ignoring that in the moment he is writing, middle-class Black people are facing an escalation of racist discrimination. Three years after the book's publication, Wilson takes the unusual step of publicly acknowledging that his analysis had been wrong. Meanwhile, Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun warns against the way that "race-blind" policies are used to implement racism. Unfortunately, his warnings are not heeded. Between the 1978 *Regents v. Bakke* ruling and 2004, the disparity between the number of white students and Black students enrolling in highly selective universities doubles.

The idea that race and class are mutually constitutive, meaning they help build each other and are inextricable from each other, has been around long before Wilson publishes his book. From Du Bois to the Martinican theorist Franz Fanon to the Trinidadian communists C.L.R. James and Claudia Jones, plenty of Black theorists had articulated the way in which race and class always exist in relation to each other. However, Wilson overlooks this insight in order to deemphasize racism.

Because of the U.S. government's ongoing regression, persecution, and neglect when it comes to Black communities, many Black people choose to withdraw from U.S. electoral politics and not vote, which earns them the ire of others within the community. In 1979, Angela Davis, now a member of faculty at San Francisco State University's historic Black Studies department, joins Gus Hall on the Communist Party's ticket for the 1980 presidential election. Davis is demoralized by the decline in antiracist activism, the resurgence of the Klan and other white supremacist terror groups, and the escalating issue of police brutality. Reagan, meanwhile, successfully manages to win the election by appealing to racist desires without ever mentioning race explicitly.

Kendi shows that the early 1980s represents another era of steep regression after the radical activism and hope of the '60s and '70s. While Davis is personally no longer facing as intense government surveillance and targeted repression as she was earlier in her career, she has to deal with seeing the man who unjustly attempted to fire her lead the nation into a new era of escalating police violence, increasing income inequality, and intensifying anti-Black racism.

As soon as he's in office, Reagan begins decimating the economic stability of low- and middle-income Americans. As Black communities become poorer and poorer, the new discipline of sociobiology claims that all social behaviors are rooted in genetics, thereby implying that racial inequities are rooted in Black people's biology without ever explicitly saying so. Davis is one of a number of antiracist scholars who rebuke this new stream of segregationist thought. In 1981 she publishes her famous *Women, Race, and Class*, "a revisionist history of Black women as active historical agents." She points out that myths of Black male rapists have historically been used to obscure the reality of white men's pervasive sexual abuse of Black women.

As Women, Race, and Class *shows, the idea that Black feminism is necessarily detrimental or derogatory to Black men is a myth. Davis' analysis of the class, race, and gender system of American society highlights the fact that Black men have been scapegoated for the sexual abuse white men inflicted on Black women. This nuanced theoretical framework highlights how both Black men and women would be liberated by Black feminism.*

In 1982, Reagan announces "one of the most devastating executive orders of the twentieth century": the inauguration of the War on Drugs. Kendi notes that it's a strange moment to do so, as at the time rates of drug use are declining and only a small fraction of the population view drugs as a political priority. Horrified by the move, Davis runs for vice president again on the Communist Party ticket in 1984. Basking in false claims about increased prosperity (which, Kendi notes, is in reality limited to the wealthy and white), Reagan is reelected. The following year, CIA-supported rebels in Nicaragua begin smuggling cocaine into the U.S., which is made into the cheaper crack form to be sold in poorer neighborhoods. A new era of racist hysteria about crack use begins.

As many critics argue at the time (and Kendi notes here) drugs are simply a convenient excuse for Reagan to target Black people (as well as other marginalized populations) without being seen to do so. The seemingly apolitical issue of drugs masks the deeply political issue of racism.

In 1986, Reagan passes "the most racist bill of the decade," the Anti-Drug Abuse Act. Under this legislation, sentencing for crack use and distribution is five times more severe than for powder cocaine (which, Kendi points out, is disproportionately used by white wealthy people). The era of mass incarceration begins. Black drug users and dealers are imprisoned at massively higher rates despite the fact that Black people are statistically *less* likely to deal and use drugs than white people. Policing escalates, fueled by racist ideas about dangerous Black neighborhoods spread by politicians and the media. If the Reagan administration were truly invested in reducing crime, Kendi writes, it would focus on eliminating poverty and economic exploitation; instead, it focuses on the racist "law and order" approach.

Throughout the book, Kendi emphasizes that, in order to properly understand racism, it is necessary to look beyond the stated function of policies and critically examine what their true purpose might be. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act sounds somewhat innocuous, even to those who oppose drug criminalization (the act proclaims not to penalize drug "use" but rather drug "abuse"). But as Kendi shows, the reality is that the Act represents a new wave of oppression that amounts to widespread social cleansing and the mass incarceration of Black people that many have compared to a new slavery.

A media frenzy helps stimulate the national obsession with crack use even though this is statistically not an especially prominent cause of violence and death. Meanwhile, the media also fixates on pathologizing the Black family with stereotypes of "young welfare mothers and estranged fathers." In her own research, Davis points out that these stereotypes do not actually correspond to reality. They are in fact little more than propaganda used to support Reagan's racist policies. Nonetheless, even some Black leaders fall for the illusion that there is "something wrong" with Black families and that a return to traditional family values is what is needed.

Crack is an example of how reality ends up being filtered through the lens of racist ideas, creating widespread confusion and misunderstanding. Because of government policy and media hype, the ordinary American public then comes to associate Blackness with criminality, drug use, and especially much-feared crack addiction. This becomes the framework through which Black people are perceived even though it doesn't actually reflect reality.

CHAPTER 34: NEW DEMOCRATS

In 1984, NBC's *The Cosby Show* makes its debut. The show is a masterpiece in "uplift and media suasion"; assimilationists are convinced of its power to "redeem the Black family in the eyes of White America." While some minds may be changed by the stereotype-busting representation of the fictional Huxtable family, others see the family as "extraordinary Negroes" who are exceptional for being distinct from the racist image of the Black community generated by Reagan's War on Drugs. Indeed, media propaganda continues to rage with the invention of the "crack baby," a myth about deformed children born to crack-using mothers that has no basing in science.

The stark contrast between The Cosby Show *and the "crack baby" is a clear example of two very different forms of racist ideas that are nonetheless both damaging. While the fictional Huxtable family might not seem like it conveys derogatory ideas about Blackness, Kendi suggests that, when viewing the overall context of assimilation and respectability that* The Cosby Show *perpetuates, it becomes clear that the Huxtables and crack babies are two sides of the same pathologizing coin.*

In the 1988 presidential election, vice president George H. W. Bush soars ahead of his opponent, Democrat Michael Dukakis, by claiming that Dukakis is soft on crime. Meanwhile the Supreme Court case *McCleskey v. Kemp* ruled that despite Black people being sentenced to death at four times the rate of white people in Georgia, this does not constitute grounds to override death sentences for Black inmates unless explicitly racist language is used to justify the sentence. This ruling solidifies the anti-Black infrastructure of mass incarceration. A new wave of resistance to this racist infrastructure emerges in the form of early hip hop culture, with tracks like N.W.A.'s "Fuck tha Police."

The Bush/Dukakis election underlines the extent to which Nixon and Reagan changed American politics forever. From the 1970s and especially '80s onward, it becomes increasingly mandatory for politicians from every side of the political spectrum to announce that they are "tough on crime," emotive language that usually means introducing harsh criminal legislation, increasing funding for police, and building new prisons.

The emergence of hip hop dovetails with the blossoming of Black Studies. In 1988, Temple University's Black Studies department becomes the first to offer a Ph.D. in the field, led by the founder of Afrocentrism Molefi Kete Asante. The following year, Public Enemy releases its resistance anthem "Fight the Power." That same year, UCLA professor Kimberlé Crenshaw organizes a retreat with a number of other legal scholars. She has just written "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." In this essay, she proposes a new paradigm called "intersectional theory," which takes into account how sexism, racism, classism, and other axes of oppression interact together.

Kendi himself was trained in Temple University's historic Black Studies department, which remains under the leadership of chair Molefi Kete Asante. As the founding theorist of Afrocentrism, Asante has an enormous impact in shifting Black Studies away from Eurocentric models of thought.

In a speech at California State University at Northridge in 1990, Angela Davis warns that "African Americans are suffering the most oppression since slavery." This infuriates those who cling to a belief in racial progress. In 1991, the Cold War officially ends; Reagan laments that the West has now lost its "common, uplifting purpose" (of opposing communism). At home, Black women (especially low-income Black mothers) continue to be demonized via the "welfare queen" stereotype," a myth politicians use in order to gain popularity.

Davis' bold statement in this passage is another devastating blow to the idea of linear progress. While those focused on the achievements of the Black intellectual, cultural, and economic elite might find it ludicrous to say that in 1990 Black people are facing the worst oppression since slavery, Kendi suggests that if one focuses on poor communities, then Davis' statement appears much more plausible.

In 1991, footage is released of the Black taxi driver Rodney King being brutally beaten by members of the Los Angeles Police Department. An uproar ensues. Yet while Bush condemns King's beating, he maintains his "law and order" approach. Around this time, Bush nominates a Black justice, Clarence Thomas, to the Supreme Court. Thomas is a lifelong advocate of "self-reliance." His nomination is disrupted by his former assistant, Anita Hill, who accuses him of having sexually harassed her while she was working for him. Thomas denies the charges, claiming the whole affair is a "high-tech lynching for uppity blacks who in any way deign to think for themselves." While Black feminists come out in support of Hill, Thomas is still confirmed, joining a Supreme Court that has effectively "gutted" the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

The beating of Rodney King by members of the LAPD and ensuing riots in Los Angeles were one of the early defining moments of the 1990s.

As the AIDS crisis intensifies in the late 1980s and early 1990s, HIV-positive individuals fight against demonization that often takes an anti-Black character. In 1991, Angela Davis and 800 other members of the Communist Party cosign a critique of the party's "racism, elitism, and sexism." After the party refuses to reelect any of the signatories to office, Davis and others leave for good. By this point, the Democratic Party is undergoing a transformation into the "New Democrats" under the leadership of Bill Clinton, who proudly defines himself by refusing to be "soft on crime."

Kendi suggests that the anti-Black nature of HIV stigma originates in the fact that the earliest AIDS cases tended to be gay men and Haitians. As the epidemic spreads, transmission occurs disproportionately among Black, Latinx, and poor communities. And at the time Kendi is writing, Black people still have the highest rate of HIV infection in the U.S.

In April 1992, an all-white jury acquits the LAPD officers who beat Rodney King. Immediately, a six-day insurrection takes place in Los Angeles. The antiracist congresswoman Maxine Waters argues against terming it a "riot," explaining that this makes it seem directionless rather than a reasonable reaction to injustice. Clinton, however, calls the rioters "savage" and "lawless vandals." Soon after, he promises to "end welfare as we know it." In November, he is elected president. At the National Congress of Black Women in 1993, the civil rights activist C. Delores Tucker indicts the apparent misogyny, materialism, and violence, of "Gangsta rap."

Here, Kendi highlights how Bill Clinton's rhetoric sounds much more like that of Reagan, Bush, and other Republicans than it does that of a Democrat, which highlights a general shift rightward in American politics that occurred during and after the Reagan era.

In 1994, MIT scholar Evelyn Hammonds organizes a conference entitled "Black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name." For the first time in American history, Black women scholars come together to discuss their work and lives. Davis, who at this point is the "most famous African American woman academic," gives the closing keynote address. In her speech, she rebukes "contemporary law and order discourse" and encourages the formation of a "new" abolitionist movement aimed at dismantling police and prisons. The Clinton administration's plans, however, are quite the opposite: that same year, Clinton signs the $30 billion Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act. It marks yet another escalation of mass incarceration.

For many years, abolitionists like Davis are marginalized and characterized as radical extremists. Throughout the book, Kendi argues that those truly committed to antiracism are demonized as too radical before the importance of their vision is eventually acknowledged.

CHAPTER 35: NEW REPUBLICANS

By the mid 1990s, there is a growing consensus among scholars that intelligence is too "transient," "multifaceted," and "relative" that it cannot be measured with anything as crude as a standardized test. Mounting a defense of standardized intelligence tests against this backlash, Harvard professors Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray publish *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. The authors insist that general intelligence is real and can be comparatively measured between humans. They call antiracist critiques of general intelligence "naïve" and assert that "cognitive ability is substantially heritable, apparently no less than 40 percent and no more than 80 percent."

Kendi's book has thoroughly demonstrated the tenacious resilience of racist ideas. No matter how many times science proves these ideas wrong—no matter how little evidence can be found to support them—racist ideas keep being produced by those situated in the country's most esteemed institutions.

Herrnstein and Murray even warn that because the lower-intelligence "underclass" is having more children, the intellectual elite risk dying out. The book has a major impact. It arrives at a time when politicians are increasingly emphasizing the notion of "personal responsibility," which becomes yet another way in which racists blame Black people for the problems they face. In this way, the antebellum idea that Black people are naturally lazy and irresponsible gains renewed life. After the "tough" Violent Crime Act is passed by the New Democrats, Republicans refuse to be outshone and promise to become even "tougher." Kendi writes that both parties are ultimately vying for "the racist vote," which in the mid 1990s is made up of a coalition of people of different races.

This passage illuminates that most racist ideas aren't actually new, but are rather recycled versions of previous ideas. Kendi suggests that the supposedly new insights being offered by Herrnstein and Murray are in fact from one perspective simply new versions of ideas that were produced during slavery.

When Angela Davis is awarded a President's Chair professorship at UC Santa Cruz in 1995, Republicans once again renew their efforts to drag her down. They accuse her of attempting to incite a race war, echoing the accusations of Southern segregationists earlier in the 20th century and enslavers in the 19th. Although in some ways racist ideas have changed over the centuries, Kendi writes that they have also remained the same. Segregationists are still using the same tactic they've used forever: attempting to persuade others that racism does not exist. Former Reagan aide Dinesh D'Souza defends the idea that Black people as a group could be less intelligent than other races while also declaring "The End of Racism" in his book of this title. He uses his Indian heritage to dodge accusations that he is racist.

Although Kendi does not devote much of the book to it, anti-Black racist ideas are also produced by non-Black people of color, as the example of Dinesh D'Souza shows. Kendi shows that in a society with a poor understanding of racism, D'Souza is able to posture as if he is not racist because he has Indian heritage. In reality, as Kendi has shown, not only can anyone of any race hold racist ideas, but all non-Black people harbor responsibility for anti-Black racism in particular.

In this moment, segregationist thinking is bolstered by the establishment of white supremacist websites. Yet assimilationist ideas are also thriving, as debates around interracial adoption lead many assimilationists to imply that Black children will be "better off" if adopted by white parents. Meanwhile, Princeton professor John J. DiIulio invents the term "super-predators" to describe young Black men growing up in what he calls "moral poverty." Rather than considering the massive economic discrimination these young men face, DiIulio recommends religion as the solution to their supposed moral bankruptcy.

The dehumanizing term "super-predators" highlights how, in the supposedly color-blind, nonracist 1990s, racist ideas that imply Black people are "savage" animalistic "brutes" are as strong as ever. Indeed, the term "super-predators" fuses the dehumanizing language of the colonial and slavery eras with the new language of criminality introduced in the latter half of the 20th century, highlighting the continuity between these two forms of racism.

In 1995, the biggest political mobilization in Black American history takes place in Washington, D.C.: the Million Man March. Davis and other Black feminists critique the masculinism of the March and its organizers. Meanwhile, a campaign begins to save the Black political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal from being executed for killing a white police officer in Philadelphia in 1982. After activists work to raise awareness of the vastly disproportionate rates at which Black people are given the death sentence, Abu-Jamal is granted an indefinite stay of execution, although he remains incarcerated.

Mumia Abu-Jamal is a journalist and activist who joined the Black Panthers at the age of 14. He was a supporter of MOVE, a Black liberation community in Philadelphia that was bombed by the Philadelphia Police Department, killing 11 people (including five children). Kendi shows that his near execution and continual incarceration is a prominent example of the brutality and profound injustice with which the U.S. treats Black radicals.

Clinton does not acknowledge the Million Man March. Instead, he gives a speech in Texas emphasizing his belief in racial progress and encouraging "racial reconciliation." However, in the very same speech he invokes myths about Black criminality, welfare dependence, absent fathers, and "out-of-wedlock pregnancy," claiming that belief in such racist myths is "not racist." In 1996, he signs the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which cuts welfare. That same year, California votes to ban affirmative action with Proposition 209; almost immediately the proportion of Black people in the University of California system begins to decline. Crucially, the Proposition 209 used antiracist rhetoric and ideas in order to style itself as antiracist even though, Kendi writes, banning affirmative action is obviously a racist move.

Like many other politicians of the contemporary period, there is an enormous gap between (parts of) Clinton's rhetoric and the reality of the policies he is instituting. His emphasis on progress and "reconciliation" could be read as a celebration—and encouragement—of assimilationism. Rather than continuing to fight for racial justice, Clinton effectively tells Black people to mollify themselves by invoking the myth that the U.S. is less racist than it used to be. With evidence like the ongoing demonization of Black families and repeal of affirmative action, it is clear that this is not true.

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On the same day that Proposition 209 passes, Clinton is reelected. In June of the following year, he gives a speech at UC San Diego, promising to lead "the American people in a great and unprecedented conversation on race." Yet many white Americans have already started to prefer a different tactic, which has come to be known as the "color-blind" approach. "Color-bind" racists, Kendi writes, insist that anyone who so much as *mentions* race is the true racist.

While Clinton claims to want to have a productive conversation about race, the era he helps usher in is one of silence about racial issues. As Kendi points out, this silence is designed to mask the racist policies that Clinton's administration continues to implement.

CHAPTER 36: 99.9 PERCENT THE SAME

As the new millennium approaches, investment in the idea of "multiculturalism" takes over the U.S. Many proudly describe the U.S. as a multicultural nation yet fail to acknowledge that if this were really true, Christianity, the English language, and other white European customs would not all be the norm. In 1998, Davis publishes a landmark study of sexuality, gender, race, and class in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, and in 2003 she follows this with the abolitionist manifesto, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* In it, she argues that in the U.S., the figure of the "criminal" has effectively been coded as Black.

Here, Kendi implicitly encourages readers to consider that the country's original indigenous inhabitants speak languages and practice other religions, or that a large proportion of the population is Spanish speaking. Kendi argues that the ongoing implementation of English and Christianity are a manifestation of white (European) supremacy.

Back in 1973, the social psychologist invented the term "Ebonics" to replace "Nonstandard Negro English" as the descriptor of the distinct vernacular language of Black Americans. In 1996, the Oakland Unified School District recognized Ebonics as a distinct and legitimate language with roots in West Africa. This antiracist gesture was controversial, with even some Black figures lamenting it as a form of "teaching down" to Black children. Ebonics was castigated as "lazy," "mutant," and "ungrammatical." Some assimilationists supported the use of Ebonics in the classroom but only if it was in service of teaching "standard" English.

In the present, the term Ebonics has largely fallen out of use and been replaced with AAVE (African American Vernacular English). The conversation that begins in 1996 around the Oakland School District's decision foreshadows contemporary conversations about AAVE, which often revolve around the issue of cultural appropriation. AAVE is now culturally mainstream, yet Black people are still punished and dismissed for using it.

Conservative Black linguist John McWhorter argued that allowing bilingual education for Ebonics-speaking students was "self-sabotaging." He claimed that white racism barely existed anymore and that Black people needed to let go of their "victimology." He also claims that Black children would bully those who perform well in school for "acting White." This latter issue, while not always complete untrue, is far more complex than McWhorter allows. Three years later, McWhorter goes on to argue that the majority of Black people blame the "culture-internal ideologies" of the Black community itself for the ongoing struggles and disparities it faces in *Essays for the Black Silent Majority*. In reality, only a minority of Black people hold this view—and they do not tend to be "silent" about it.

McWhorter is part of the minority of Black people who are responsible for producing new, highly influential racist views. The idea that Black children bully those who are high achievers at school on the basis that they are "acting white" is a particularly powerful idea because, as Kendi points out, it is not entirely untrue. Yet rather than being an act of "self-sabotage," there are other reasons why this can happen, such as the fact that some parents do teach their children to "act white" either in order to protect themselves from racism or based on assimilationist, elitist ideas.

In June 2000, President Clinton holds a special event at the White House in which he unveils the first survey of the human genome and proudly announces that scientists have found "that in genetic terms, all human beings, regardless of race, are more than 99.9 percent the same." In the wake of this announcement, many segregationists continue to insist that the 0.1% of differentiation in human genes "must be racial." In reality, this is not true at all, as University of Pennsylvania scholar Dorothy Roberts describes in *Fatal Invention*, which examines how race is a "political category" that is falsely assumed to be biological.

The fact that segregationists try to insist that the 0.1% variation in the human genome must account for race shows how stubborn people are in clinging to racist ideas that have long been disproven. Again, Kendi underscores that the conviction with which people hold onto racist ideas is not evidence of the plausibility of these ideas. Instead, it is a testament to the ongoing desire people have to commit to a racist worldview.

In the 2000 presidential election, tens of thousands of Black Floridians are unable to vote (or do not have their votes counted), which allows George W. Bush to narrowly win the electoral college and thus the presidency. In August 2001, one of the biggest antiracist meetings in history takes place in Durban, South Africa. The United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance is attended by 12,000 people. However, the antiracist movement suffers a serious setback in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11. With anti-Islamic and anti-Arab racism on the rise and a new war in Iraq on the horizon, critical examination of U.S. anti-Black racism diminishes.

Just as, in Reagan's view, the Cold War brought the American people together against a common enemy (communism), Bush uses 9/11 to create an artificial sense of unity based on the demonization of Arabs and Muslims. Of course, Kendi emphasizes that there is no such thing as real unity based on hatred of a particular group. But it nevertheless enables politicians like Reagan and Bush to posture as if they are bringing people together through instituting divisive policies.

In 2003, the Supreme Court upholds the University of Michigan's affirmative action policy in a ruling that comes as a surprise to many. However, standardized testing still remains firmly in place, fueled by the 2003 No Child Left Behind Act, which continues to place blame for achievement disparities on Black children themselves. The Act's "No Excuses" maxim means that Black and Latinx children often find that the punishment for acting out in school is arrest. Meanwhile, Bill Cosby goes on what is nicknamed his "blame-the-poor tour," giving a series of talks across the country in which he condemns poor Black people as responsible for the problems they face. A young, freshly elected Illinois senator named Barack Obama criticizes Cosby, pointing out that it is impossible for Black people to take "responsibility" without adequate resources.

The fact that the No Child Left Behind Act ends up further criminalizing and marginalizing vulnerable children is an example of the political doublespeak that Kendi has discussed throughout this section of the book. Doublespeak is a term invented by the English writer George Orwell for words that describe the opposite of what they mean.

CHAPTER 37: THE EXTRAORDINARY NEGRO

In 2004, Obama publishes *Dreams from My Father*, a memoir in which he laments the desire that so many other biracial people feel to be treated as a special, exceptional "individual" (which means distancing themselves from Blackness). It is therefore ironic that when Obama becomes the only Black American in the Senate in 2005, people all over the country frame him as an "extraordinary Negro." That same year, Hurricane Katrina has a devastating impact on the poor Black communities of southern Louisiana. The destruction wrought by the hurricane becomes a convenient excuse to stimulate gentrification, generating profits for the wealthy, while President Bush delays the response of the Federal Emergency Management Agency in a gesture widely understood to be racist.

To say that Barack Obama is treated as an "extraordinary" Black man is not to say that people are simply acknowledging his notable intelligence, achievements, and charisma. Obviously, by 2005 Obama has achieved an unusual amount for any person, and there is nothing wrong with acknowledging this. Yet by characterizing him as an "extraordinary" Black man, commentators distance him from Blackness, making the racist implication that it is unusual or unexpected for a Black person in particular *to be so talented and accomplished.*

However, the looting that follows Katrina provokes a racist media frenzy of its own; an outrageous lie even circulates that Black Louisianans are shooting the rescue workers coming to help them. Speaking on NBC in 2005, Kanye West famously pronounces: "George Bush doesn't care about black people." Yet in a stubbornly "color-blind" environment, many white people refuse to read Bush's neglect as racist. In 2006, a Black single mother and college student named Crystal Mangum accuses white members of the Duke University lacrosse team of gang raping her at a party. The accusation turns out to be fake; some choose to interpret the incident as evidence that both the antiracism and anti-rape movements have spiraled into a baseless frenzy.

Kendi suggests that in a "color-blind" world, something as simple as West's statement—that the president "doesn't care about black people"—is treated as outrageous.

In 2006, Angela Davis gives a talk at Syracuse University's "Feminism and War" conference in the midst of widespread protests against the war in Iraq. Davis rebukes the use of feminism as an excuse for invading other countries (as the U.S. had done in promising to "liberate" Afghani and Iraqi women). When Barack Obama announces his run for president in 2007, Delaware Senator (and another candidate for the Democratic nomination) Joe Biden calls him "the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy." Although Biden later retracts this statement, there are soon countless others like it circulating within American media. Barack and his wife, Michelle, are subject to a torrent of racist fascination and degradation.

Davis's attentiveness to the way that American imperial policy affects women in the Middle East highlights the importance of antiracism—and Black feminism in particular—having a strongly internationalist perspective. Kendi notes that, at times, the interests of women and Black people in the U.S. are pitted against those in other countries, particularly countries that the U.S. invades or otherwise has control over. It is therefore crucial to extend solidarity beyond U.S. borders in order to have a valuable antiracist movement.

During Obama's campaign, he manages to appeal to what's known as the "ambivalent majority": assimilationists who acknowledge that Black people continue to be harmed by discrimination yet also use this as a "crutch." Obama himself expresses assimilationist sentiments when he argues that Black people have been profoundly damaged by the legacy of slavery and discrimination. He labels antiracist anger as unhelpful and draws a false equivalence between them and angry segregationists. He refuses to condemn white bigots and reactionaries, declining to even acknowledge them as racist. This message, which is expressed in the "More Perfect Union" speech Obama gives in Philadelphia in 2008, is praised by elected officials, scholars, and commentators from across the political spectrum.

Kendi explains that, during Obama's presidential campaign, he pulls off something truly remarkable: appealing to assimilationists while avoiding alienating (most) Black people and also refusing to criticize white segregationists and other racist extremists. This tight-rope walk is impressive, particularly given that he is perceived through a racist lens that skews his actions and predisposes people to have negative opinions about him. At the same time, Kendi argues that Obama's skill at securing this mass appeal does not necessarily make him a principled, just leader.

Republican segregationists remain steadfast in their opposition to Obama, investing in a conspiracy surrounding his birth certificate and the false rumor that he was not born in the U.S. Meanwhile, Obama recites racist myths about absent Black fathers. At the election, Angela Davis—now 64 and retired from academia—votes for Obama, who wins the presidency. She recalls the jubilation pouring out of the streets of Oakland upon the announcement of his victory. Most people see Obama's election as a triumph of antiracism, but racist ideas do not stop there. Instead, they adapt to a new nation—one that is for the first time led by a Black president.

Throughout Stamped from the Beginning, *Kendi highlights how major steps towards eradicating racism—like the Emancipation, for instance—doesn't mean that racism* is *indeed eradicated. Similarly, Kendi points out here how the election of a Black president, while a positive step, doesn't suddenly end racism.*

EPILOGUE

Kendi writes that many of those who vote for Obama in 2008 are racist; voting for him does not make them any less so. While his electoral success may seem like a victory of antiracism, it could also be seen as the convergence of a large number of auspicious factors (many of which have little to do with race). Nevertheless, commentators soon begin to declare that the U.S. is officially "post-racial"—a notion, Kendi says, that is obviously false. Fox News commentator Glenn Beck claims that Obama has "a deep-seated hatred for white people or the white culture," declaring Obama "a racist." But Kendi writes that, in reality, Obama publicly critiqued Black people constantly—yet in the new environment of "post-racial" America, this is not perceived as racist.

During the Obama years, a paradox develops within racist thought. According to this paradox, which Kendi describes in this passage, racism is over and *reverse racism is real. This recalls the claims made by Southern Democrats during Reconstruction that simply affording Black people the right to vote would result in Black "supremacy." As Kendi has shown many times by now, the ludicrousness of this racist idea makes it even more powerful.*

Postracialists choose to completely ignore the starkly enduring disparities that exist between the Black and white communities. Yet despite being silenced by both assimilationists and segregationists, antiracists keep fighting. They join the Occupy movement of 2011, demand reparations for slavery, fight in the struggle for LGBT rights, and—most of all—continue to oppose the racism of the criminal justice system. In Michelle Alexander's 2010 bestseller *The New Jim Crow*, the law professor points out that all the forms of racist discrimination technically outlawed (such as housing discrimination, the inability to vote, and forced labor at less than minimum wage) are still in place when it comes to criminals.

Much of the argument in Stamped from the Beginning *draws on the research of* The New Jim Crow, *which is one of several books that argues that rather than seeing Black history as a series of discrete eras (slavery, Reconstruction, segregation, civil rights) it should be viewed as one continuous line, where slavery was never properly ended but instead just remade.*

A new wave of antiracist activism emerges when George Zimmerman murders an unarmed Black teenager, Trayvon Martin, in Florida in 2012. Outrage ensues after Zimmerman's acquittal and the murders of Shereese Francis, Rekia Boyd, Shantel Davis, and so many others. Kendi writes that Racists find ways to blame Black people for the violence inflicted on them through the idea of the "thug," which some argue is nothing more than the "post-racial" version of the n-word. The acquittal of George Zimmerman leads the activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometti to found the #BlackLivesMatter movement in 2013—a movement that opposes anti-Black racism in conjunction with all other forms of oppression.

At the time Kendi is writing, the #BlackLivesMatter movement is very much still ongoing. Readers might wonder how people in the future will conceptualize the movement as Kendi has done with the first abolitionist movement, the Harlem Renaissance, the civil rights movement, and Black Power.

By studying the history of racist ideas, it becomes clear what tactics antiracists need to retire in order to win the battle against racism. These chiefly include "self-sacrifice, uplift suasion, and educational persuasion." The idea that racism "materially benefits" most white people is actually a myth, which means that it is not helpful to invest in ideas of white "self-sacrifice" in order to advance the cause of antiracism. Antiracism should not be seen as a matter of altruism and nor should racism be seen as a matter of selfishness. While it might superficially seem as if white people benefit from supporting racism, this is only true of a tiny minority of very wealthy, white, straight, non-immigrant men. It is actually in most white people's "intelligent self-interest" to oppose racism.

In this passage, Kendi argues that it's a myth that most white people materially benefit from racism, and that acknowledging this reality will help more people oppose racism.

Similarly, Kendi notes that uplift suasion has proven to be completely ineffective in combating racism and has in fact *accelerated* racism in many cases. When Black people achieve higher status, they are often met with a fiercer racist backlash than ever. Moreover, the status of any individual Black person is not indicative of the status of Black people as a whole. Finally, despite how many people believe that education is the remedy for racism, history has proven this false, too. Racist ideas are not born out of ignorance, but in order to justify racist policies, which are themselves the result of the self-interested actions of a small elite. Having been one of education persuasion's biggest advocates, Du Bois came to abandon the tactic, having realized that the torrent of facts and information he and other Black scholars produced did little to mitigate racism.

Here, Kendi encourages readers to learn from history and to avoid repeating the same mistakes such that the fight against racism no longer becomes an infinitely repeating cycle. But while he clearly highlights what doesn't *work (education and uplift suasion), it is also worth remembering that the question of how to eliminate racist ideas is far from simple. It continues to bewilder and frustrate even those who, like Kendi, are professionally trained scholars of race.*

Kendi writes that, if they choose to, legislators today could eradicate racial discrimination and institute true "immediate equality" at last. Doing so would invite the criticisms of postracialists who would falsely claim such legislation discriminates against white people. Unfortunately, those with the power to end racism tend to be the tiny elite whom racism actually benefits, which means they have little incentive to end it. The truth is that very few people in positions of power volunteer to give that power up. Yet by acting together, antiracists can focus their efforts on those in power and try to force them to end racist discrimination.

Kendi's emphasizes that discrimination needs to be eliminated before racist ideas are. As he has shown, much energy has been wasted on trying to dissolve racist ideas, which—as long as discrimination continues to exist—will simply continue to be produced.

The history of antiracist protest shows that it can be highly effective in forcing those in power to act. At the same time, protesting against racist power should not be "mistaken for seizing power." In this sense, Kendi writes, antiracists must seize and maintain control of "institutions, neighborhood, counties, states, nations—the world." This is sure to happen eventually. It may even be happening now.

Kendi's sweeping call to action at the end of Stamped from the Beginning *points back to the idea that, when examining the history of racist ideas, moderation has rarely worked as an antiracist strategy.*

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