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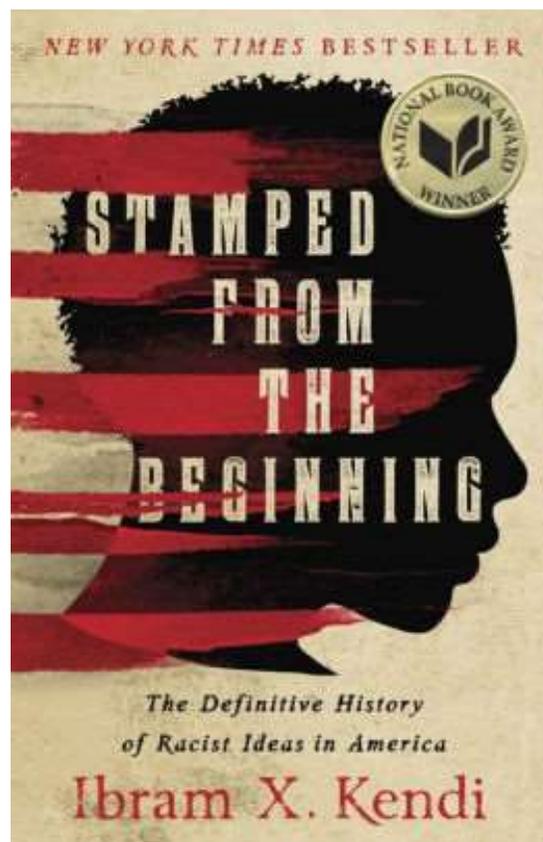
A Review of *Stamped from the Beginning*: On a definitive history of anti-Black racism

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In *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, Ibram X. Kendi (2016) makes the book's theme explicit and memorable: American racial progress and the progression of racism have advanced simultaneously throughout U.S. history. By racial progress, Kendi refers to antiracist ideas, policies, and practices, while the progression of racism indicates a continuation, even if altered, of racism. In the prologue, Kendi explains that:

Stamped from the Beginning is not merely a history of overt racism becoming covert; nor is it a history of racial progress, or a history of ignorance and hate. *Stamped from the Beginning* rewrites the history of racist ideas by exposing the incompleteness of these three widely believed historical storylines. (p. 8)

The book's major lesson teaches that three competing ideas – segregationist, assimilationist, and antiracist ideas – concurrently have shaped both the U.S. as a nation generally and U.S. race relations. Thus,



while antiracist reformers have made progress, so too have racist (segregationist and assimilationist) reformers.

To deliver this message, *Stamped from the Beginning*, a National Book Award winner and *New York Times* bestseller, surveys U.S. history through five parts, each featuring a prominent American: Puritan minister Cotton Mather, President Thomas Jefferson, White abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, founder of American scientific sociology W. E. B. Du Bois, and scholar and prison abolitionist Angela Davis. While chronicling how all three ideas are present in each character's generation, Kendi moves readers through an arch of overt racism (Mather), to segregation that ignores cruelty because of self-interest (Jefferson), to well-intentioned assimilationism (Garrison), to struggling against assimilation and toward antiracism (Du Bois), and finally to unwavering antiracism (Davis). Kendi interweaves each period's politics, popular culture, and scholarly debates in various fields (e.g., anthropology, genetics, and education) and shows how these developments reinforced or resisted racist ideas. He urges Americans to understand how these ideas haunt the country's present, rather than to settle for the racist half-truth of racial advancement that overlooks the historical progression of racism.

For the education field, the chapters on Du Bois and Davis offer the most germane commentary on contemporary issues such as school desegregation, standardized testing, and affirmative action in higher education. However, the most important lessons come from the author's evaluation of *uplift suasion*, *educational persuasion*, and *self-sacrifice* (all used in the education field) as ineffective strategies toward antiracism. Education practitioners and scholars would benefit from reading the book with an eye toward Kendi's critique of these three strategies. Kendi substantiates his appraisal of *uplift suasion* and *educational persuasion*, but lacks an equivalent treatment to the third strategy of *self-sacrifice*. He simply

asserts that when White Americans have *self-sacrificed*, the results have been unfruitful in the quest for justice.

His analysis of the strategies of *uplift suasion* and *educational persuasion* may contribute to rethinking the practices and reforms of some educational leaders who base their tactics on these strategies. Of particular note is his conclusion that *educational persuasion* is a futile strategy toward justice. One could consider whether multicultural teacher education engages in *educational persuasion* when teaching about racial oppression, assuming this practice influences the actions of teacher candidates. Indeed, education research has found mixed results in attempts to change teacher attitudes and practice (e.g., Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Flores, Lewis, & Phuong, 2018; Kumar & Lauerma, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1999; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998; Wiedeman, 2002), especially when engaging with White preservice teachers (e.g., Garmon, 2004; Picower, 2009). According to Kendi, history teaches that to eradicate racist ideas, we first must excise racist policies and practices. His analysis would prompt teacher educators to examine and eliminate racist policies and practices in their teacher education program, instead of focusing on changing an individual teacher candidate's racist beliefs.

In terms of how to achieve antiracism reforms, Kendi also posits that people with the "power to undermine racial discrimination" have done so when they realized that "eliminating some form of racial discrimination was in their self-interest" (p. 509). His conclusion adds to a critical race theory (CRT) debate in education about the utility of interest convergence as a tool toward antiracism (Alemán & Alemán, 2010; Burns, 2017; Donnor, 2005; Harper, 2009; Milner, 2008; Sung, 2017). Interest convergence, as coined and conceptualized by legal scholar and one of CRT founders Derrick Bell (1980), refers to instances where racial progress for

Black people was accomplished because the changes benefited White interests. Bell suggested that the reforms achieved through interest convergence ultimately do not lead to advancing a new and more just racial paradigm for Black folks. Notwithstanding Bell's theory, some CRT scholars have proposed using CRT's interest convergence as a tool toward antiracism (e.g., Donnor, 2005; Harper, 2009; Milner, 2008). If Kendi's argument that antiracist reformers should find places where interests converge with other (at times) racist interests is convincing, social justice teacher education and other education areas could consider interest convergence as promising for passing antiracist policies.

In the epilogue, Kendi reasserts that the subject of the book is *anti-Black racist* ideas – a necessary reminder to any reader left wanting to learn a history of racist ideas in America. This spotlights one limitation of the book. At times, this hefty tome reads as if Kendi framed anti-Black racist ideas as *the* quintessential racism. For example, when mentioning antiracist ideas toward other groups of color, Kendi explains, “the histories of anti-Asian, anti-Native, and anti-Latina/o racist ideas [...] all sound eerily similar to this history of racist ideas” (p. 504), that is, anti-Black racism. Though he acknowledges that other groups of color suffer from legacies of racial oppression, this statement and other parts of the book implicitly communicate a Black-White binary. Additionally, this Black-White analysis may have facilitated Kendi's reference of CRT's *critical whiteness studies* as “one of [its] greatest offshoots” (p. 444). The education sub-field of Whiteness Studies has produced commendable research (e.g., Castagno, 2014; Leonardo, 2016); however, scholars also have utilized CRT to uncover Chicana, Latinx, Asian American, and Native American experiences with racial oppression and to showcase their resilience (e.g., Brayboy, 2005; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado

Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001). While the book has many strengths, for race specialists, Kendi's undertheorization of how racism affects non-Black people of color undermines the subtitle's claim that the book presents “the definitive history of racist ideas in America.”

This critique does not imply that Kendi's already ambitious and well-researched book should have included the histories of racist ideas against groups of color who are not Black. Scholarship on the specificity of Black experience is needed and valuable (Dumas, 2016). Rather, I suggest that readers remember Kendi's early statement that *Stamped from the Beginning* is a history of “anti-Black racist ideas” (p. 5). Further, I would recommend to scholars, students, and future authors to specify *anti-Black* racism in the title if that is the focus of analysis.

Overall, *Stamped from the Beginning* is an important work of public scholarship that succeeds in teaching a general education or non-academic audience about the continuing significance of race and racism. For secondary history and social studies teachers wanting a firmer grasp of the topic, Kendi exposes important ideas about racism that, although dominant in our society and lived experience, are omitted from many history lessons. Teacher educators and CRT scholars would benefit from reading the book with the intent to evaluate Kendi's analysis of the three strategies and his conclusion of their failure. To education scholars of race studies, *Stamped from the Beginning* provides a comprehensive story with easily missed historical details about American anti-Black racism, but fails to provide a new paradigm for understanding racism. As a Chicana scholar, I recommend Kendi's history to anyone with an interest in American racism as a readable page-turner of how anti-Black racist ideas have influenced the past and continue to impact our lives.

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