

Kendi was born in 1982 in the Jamaica neighborhood of the New York City borough of Queens. His mom worked as a business analyst for a healthcare organization and his dad was a tax accountant. Both of his parents were deeply influenced by liberation theology and the Black Power movement. They are now retired and work as Methodist ministers. In 2005, Kendi received dual B.S. degrees in African American studies and magazine production from Florida A&M University and went on to earn M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in African American Studies from Temple University in 2010. Since receiving his doctorate, Kendi has taught at State University of New York at Oneota, at University of Albany, SUNY, at University of Florida and at American University in Washington, D.C. In June 2020, it was announced that Kendi had accepted a position at Boston University as a professor of history. As part of his contract, he agreed to move the Antiracist Research and Policy Center which he had founded at American University to Boston where he now serves as the founding director.

Kendi's most popular work to date is How to be an Antiracist which was published in 2019. The book was described by The New York Times as being "the most courageous book to date on the problem of race in the Western mind." Part memoir, part social analysis, part polemic, the book has been on the New York Times best seller list for non-fiction for the past 41 weeks. The book's arrival seemed to be perfectly timed, as President Trump's verbal attacks on lawmakers of color and on the city of Baltimore spurred both intense outrage and debate over how to respond.

Many people have questioned Kendi's drawing a distinction between being "anti-racist" versus being "non-racist." In a recent interview, he explained the difference by saying, "What's the problem with being not racist? It is a claim that signifies neutrality. I am not a racist, but neither am I aggressively against racism. But there is no neutrality in the racism struggle. The opposite of racist isn't not racist. It is anti-racist." He went on to say that there is no middle ground, "There is no in-between safe space of not racist. The claim of not racist neutrality is a mask for racism."

Kendi also has cautioned that "racist" isn't a fixed category. "It isn't who a person is, it's what a person is being." He encourages people to admit those times that they are being racist and to overcome their own individual denial in the way that will allow us to overcome our national denial. Because the first step in becoming anti-racist is to admit those times we have been racist."

Kendi's newest book titled Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America 1619-2019 was published this month. It is a joint effort between Kendi and Keisha Blain, another well-known African-American author, who approached other prominent Black writers to collaborate on a group history of the African American experience. Two years later, the two editors have produced a volume of 80 short essays that has been described by The New York Times as being "highly readable" and "far more compelling than a mere historical digest would have been." The book's title refers to the 400 years since the first African slave ship arrived in the colony of Virginia in 1619. The book is both chronological and thematic with each author covering a different topic over a five-year period, usually in 2000 words or less.

Suggested resources to learn more Ibram Kendi and his work include:

BOOKS

Stamped from the Beginning: the Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America written by Ibram Kendi and published in 2016

How to be an Anti-Racist: A Guided Journal for Awareness, Reflection, and Action written by Ibram Kendi and published in 2019

Anti-Racist Baby written by Ibram Kendi and published in 2020. Addresses the many challenges of raising children to be anti-racist.

Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America 1619-2019 edited by Ibram Kendi and Keisha Blain and published in 2021.

VIDEOS

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCUOX3NMd4U&ab_channel=TheLateShowwithStephenColbert

https://www.ted.com/talks/ibram_x_kendi_the_difference_between_being_not_racist_and_anti-racist/transcript?language=en