

SO, YOU WANT TO BE ANTIRACIST. NOW WHAT?

ANNOTATED NOTES FROM LIVE WEBINAR WITH PROFESSOR IBRAM X. KENDI
AND DR. MAURICE SWINNEY

INTRO

“So, You Want to Be Antiracist. Now What?” was a discussion between three practitioners who center antiracism and equity in their work.

Liz Dozier, Founder & CEO of Chicago Beyond, Professor Ibram X. Kendi, Professor and author of *How to Be an Antiracist*, and Dr. Maurice Swinney, Chief Equity Officer of Chicago Public Schools, came together to discuss a wide range of topics at the core of antiracism.

The conversation centered around four themes: questioning common narratives, challenging ourselves to understand historical contexts and take on new perspectives, understanding how inequities within the education system are so closely symbolic of inequities in other systems, and calling out the racism that shows up in our daily lives.

Below is a brief that highlights key points from the conversation.

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“Slaveholders too, claimed they were not racist. Jim Crow segregationists said that their states were separate but equal, and that if anyone was causing problems it was civil rights agitators.” - Professor Ibram X. Kendi

Professor Kendi kicked us off with a reminder that the phrase “I’m not racist,” has perennially served as a shield for slaveholders, segregationists, and even white nationalists. This shield protected them from taking blame for the status quo, even though the convictions they upheld were what preserved that status quo. This scenario encapsulates what Kendi calls the heartbeat of racism itself: denial.

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“The heartbeat of racism itself is denial, and the sound of that heartbeat is [the phrase] ‘I’m not racist.’” - Professor Ibram X. Kendi

According to Professor Kendi, it is not enough to say you are not a racist, because we all still live in a society and belong to institutions that have played and continue to play a role in perpetuating racial inequity. Professor Kendi leaves us with these three keys to being antiracist:

- ➔ We of course need to know that every human being is equal
- ➔ We must acknowledge that any racial inequities that exist today are a direct result of racist policy and practices
- ➔ We must actively fight the institutions and philosophies that created these conditions

In order to be antiracist, we cannot do just one of the steps above, we must embody all of them, and the spirit of antiracism should reflect in our everyday actions.



ON PROTESTS AND CIVIL UNREST

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"When we think of those who have been historically underserved as the ones who are causing the looting, there's a lot to understand about the way they've been locked out of opportunity for many, many years." - Dr. Maurice Swinney

Professor Kendi suggests that we should always look to identify the source of the problems. Oftentimes, we stop short of doing a critical analysis to understand civil unrest because of the way the unrest makes us feel. We must challenge ourselves to understand that we come from positions of privilege, and the way that communities experiencing marginalization react to an unjust system comes from a deeper place than our own logic would initially allow us to perceive.

How to take an antiracist approach:

1. Make the broader historical connections to the issues at hand
2. Seek out bottom-up narratives to get the full view of these events
3. Challenge ourselves to take on the perspectives of those who are on the receiving end of injustice
4. Do not generalize the movement – refrain from conflating the actions of certain individuals with the leaders who are driving positive change forward

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"If you truly are against systemic oppression and racist policies, you cannot simply conflate the current movement with the actions of a few individuals." - Liz Dozier

ON RACISM IN EDUCATION

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"When students fail, whose fault is it? Where does that fault lie? Who has to take responsibility?" - Dr. Maurice Swinney

As Chief Equity Officer of Chicago Public Schools, Dr. Swinney shared his thoughts about how the Equity Office is aiming to change the language and philosophy around how students perform. Instead of using the language of an "achievement gap," his office instead prefers "education debt," or "opportunity gap." This language rebukes the notion that Black and Brown students are somehow at fault for the quality of their education, and instead places the blame where it belongs: racially inequitable policies and funding structures that lead to under-resourced schools in our communities. Dr. Swinney challenges us, just like he challenges the Equity Office and Chicago Public Schools, to reframe the way we attribute responsibility for outcomes.

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"The biggest problem with standardized testing is that it's used to exclude and include not just bodies, but resources." - Professor Ibram X. Kendi



RACISM IN EDUCATION CONTINUED

When we think about the fact that school resources are commonly invested in based on the wealth of the area and the performance of that school, we must also realize that those two factors are inextricably linked to one another. If a school has more resources pouring into it from its localized tax base, the students within that school benefit from better books, better technologies, etc. Consequentially, they have all the resources they need to perform well in school and on standardized tests, which begets even more resources. This is not the reality on the South and West sides of Chicago. Dr. Swinney says that resource distribution is at the core of how these inequities manifest in our education system, and we see that once again these disparities are a product of policy—not our kids.

How to take an antiracist approach:

1. Change the way we measure achievement
2. Change funding structures that reinforce the inequitable distribution of resources in our schools
3. Create new philosophies around learning that nurture a student's desire to learn rather than a desire to meet a mark

ON RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

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"What other people call microaggressions, I call racial abuse." - Professor Ibram X. Kendi

When it comes to how racism can show up in the workplace, there are many overt and covert ways that people of color experience what are typically called microaggressions. However minor these microaggressions may appear though, the persistence of microaggressions and their effects can have significant repercussions on the person experiencing them; effects like stress, anger, worry, depression, pain, fatigue, and even suicide. We must understand the power that experiencing racism can have on an individual and create antiracist work environments that protect workers of all colors. Professor Kendi proposes treating microaggressions with the same seriousness as other forms of harassment - using policies to define what is intolerable so that a standard is set for those in the workplace.

How to take an antiracist approach:

1. When setting policies for the workplace, be explicit in naming and defining these terms
2. Hold perpetrators accountable, enforce these new policies to root out racism
3. Invest in victims so that they know they are not alone, and help them return to being comfortable in their work environment

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FINAL NOTE

Becoming antiracist is a journey. As members of this society, we are fed different narratives that influence the way we think about institutions, communities, and people, but seldom do we get diverse perspectives from the individuals within the demographics most marginalized by society. If we are only using dominant culture perspective exclusively to digest the realities in front of us, we are reinforcing biases and excluding the voices of people who are most affected by racism. We must exit our filter bubbles and create space for the voices and the organizations who are at the forefront of antiracism and allow ourselves to be influenced. If we want to become antiracist, we must question the constructs most pertinent in our lives, investigate the ways in which they are racially inequitable, and then actively call out those constructs in pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

RESOURCES AND LINKS

ALTERNATIVE NEWS SOURCES

Read:

[The TRiiBE](#)

A Chicago Black-led news media

Read:

[The Southside Weekly](#)

A Chicago nonprofit newspaper dedicated to supporting cultural and civic engagement on the South Side, and to developing emerging journalists, writers, and artists.

Read:

[City Bureau](#)

Founded in 2015, City Bureau is a nonprofit civic journalism lab based on the South Side of Chicago. We bring journalists and communities together in a collaborative spirit to produce media that is impactful, equitable and responsive to the public.

RESOURCES MENTIONED DURING THE CONVERSATION

Watch:

[Kimberly Jones's video on the social contract](#)

You can also visit her [official website](#) for more information.

Listen:

[Nice White Parents](#)

Podcast by *The New York Times*

Go Deeper:

[How to Be an Antiracist](#)

by Professor Ibram X. Kendi

[Stamped From The Beginning](#)

by Professor Ibram X. Kendi

[Why Am I Always Being Researched?](#)

by Chicago Beyond

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