

Brave Church/Hard Topics, 4/12/2023: Antiracism, Part 1

This is the chat log of the discussion. Names and identifiable information have been removed for privacy. References to slides for this session can be found in the ***Antiracism Part I – 04-12-23.pdf*** document linked [Brave Church-Hard Topics web page](#).

Additional information added after the discussion are identified with “NOTE:”

Discussion Q1 (Slide 8, covering slides 5-7):

If we believe in the message of ‘Imago Dei,’ how does it play out in our daily living?

It should play out but we forget it most of the time. We're so busy that it is difficult to bear in mind.

The image of God is one of the things I try to remember when I'm frustrated with somebody.

I find it hardest to keep in mind when dealing with people with whom I strongly disagree—like white supremacists.

Thinking about how different everyone looks - God must be very creative.

If we believe that we are all created in God's image, then we have to believe that racism is an affront to God.

God did not create race - humans created race.

Book: *Who's Black and Why*. Talks about what happened in 1739 - a group of people talked about how to define race. It's incredible all the trouble we went through to create a race.

NOTE: Read about the book here: <https://www.whoisblackandwhy.com/>

There's a natural suspicion of someone who does not look like you - a tribal thing. Growing up, I had no exposure to anyone who wasn't white. First exposure to someone who wasn't white - recoil because they looked different.

Reading about St. Claire of Assisi - using cross as a mirror. If your reaction is anger, that's a reflection of you.

On one hand, I have had amazing opportunity growing up being exposed to broad spectrum of people from broad spectrum of backgrounds. Bused into a predominantly African-American high school. In the science-technology program in that school had different dynamics. Interacted with the whole school. Used to being around a lot of people who weren't like me. The same thing happened in the Navy. There was a spectrum of people from all races, religions, backgrounds, socio-economic conditions. Learned so much. During time in Navy, developed some racism against certain groups who were violent against us. I recognized that was not appropriate/fair, but that was my experience. Grandfather had similar experience with different groups in WWII. Imago Dei helps me pull myself around.

Anthropology major in college - professor discussed race, attempts to define it. Always some group that fell between the cracks, did not fit into any one category.

Our tendency is to overgeneralize. A lot of racism comes from overgeneralization.

Discussion Qs2 on Video (Slide 15, covering slides 9-14):

What is your response to the message we heard in the video?

You're either racist or antiracist; there's no such thing as 'not racist.' Author and historian Dr. Ibram X. Kendi claims there's no such thing as being 'not racist.' He explains that even inaction (simply being 'not racist') in the face of racism is, in fact, a form of racism. The idea of an innocent bystander is wishful thinking for Kendi; instead, there's only racism and antiracism.

I am getting the impression that this racism discussion is in the context of racism within the US. Not more generally outside of the context of the US.

Replying to "I am getting the imp...": Correct. I believe Linda wants the discussion to be focused on the US.

Goes back to the old saying "you're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem."

Growing up in 50s and 60s, I was attuned to civil rights protests. Felt we had gotten past it. Now we're right back to it.

I realized that it's not enough to identify/learn about racism personally. I need to respond.

He [Dr. Kendi] seems to make no allowance for honest ignorance.

It strikes me that when people say 'I'm not racist' they're being defensive.

Kendi says that defining the terms racist and anti-racist needs to happen before a meaningful conversation can be had on the topic.

I'm trying to understand: Comment on what happened in TN. I saw 3 members of TN House were removed because they violated decorum of house. 2 were African-American. They were standing up for group that was religiously-affiliated. Made me proud they stood up. The 3rd rep, a white female, was not removed. Would like to know more behind that. I don't have enough info to judge on it, but I believe the 3 got in "good trouble". We need more discussion on gun control and they did the right thing.

Like banning books, banning the TN representatives only served to rocket these men into prominence and to amplify their voices.

I watched the TN thing. Yes, they may not have followed decorum, but it was not expellable offense (given rules and precedents for other misbehaviors in the history of the TN house). When the white delegate woman was asked why she wasn't expelled, she replied, "I'm a 62 year old white woman while the other two were young black men." Both of the men were chosen by their districts to go back to the house. Still an issue of whether the majority will reseate them.

It was AWFUL!

You could see what they wanted to say.

Racism has a power structure associated with it.

I struggle with definition on racism: I believe racism is when a human being is doing something to create inequality with a human being of another race. There is a window that excludes everyone from being included in that.

Kendi's focus treats racism as a verb rather than a noun. It focuses on action or attitude.

On the racism-antiracism dichotomy: very few things fit easily into batches. I have trouble with that, but get the point. Listened to video - struck by the idea that racism can be very situational. Could have antiracist

views on some issues but racist views on others. Don't think it's useful to call a person racist. Believe policies are racist, actions racist.

He also does not leave a middle ground.

A person who support racist policies would be a racist, according to Kendi's definition of racist...if I understood correctly. And an anti racist is a person who supports policies that dose equality and equity.

Replying to "A person who support...": That is his definition. 😊

Wrestled with issue on bullying in school. There's a differential in power in bullying. In that kind of situation, you either have to be against the bullying or you become complicit in it. People who are aware of it and do nothing are not innocent bystanders. They are enabling the bullying because they don't try to stop it. This dynamic applies to Israel-Palestine, as well to whites-POC in this country. There is a power dynamic. Don't disagree with the idea that you're either on one side or the other. Those in power have too much ability to use/abuse that power dynamic.

Growing up in rural SW VA school system where most of white friends were racist. The only thing I felt I could do was to be quiet. Years later, felt that was the wrong thing. Non-racist vs antiracist: a matter of passive vs active.

It may be helpful to watch the video a couple of times because there is so much to digest in it.

A lot comes down to education to become antiracist. Have learned so much in these conversations over past few weeks, learning about policies that I didn't realize were racist. How many other policies are out there that we aren't aware of? It starts with education. We need to improve on this as a country.

What concerns me when you have 2 categories: who is deciding what's racist vs antiracist? Don't know how it is helpful when dealing with a family member/friend. Going into a purity kind of mentality w/ no middle ground.

I experienced racism in Viet Nam. Racism is in degrees.

Liked the importance of education. One of the sweeping things we're seeing across the country is trying to minimize education on the subject with book banning, controlling what is being taught in the schools. Minimizing this because it will make people feel bad means we won't have the ability to understand, wrestle with, and correct the inequities we have today.

What we're trying to do is to move forward in being aware of what is happening.

I'm struggling with antiracism as double negative. Liked the example of universal health care. More policies like that are needed.

Response: Perhaps a distinction is actively opposing racism vs passively opposing it.

Not racist is negative. Anti is in opposition - suggests activism.

I personally don't mind the idea of anti-racism. I'm just not a fan of pure dichotomy.

Comments made during the discussion on Institutional/Systemic Racism (Slides 16-17):

Love Ben's quote! [Slide 16 – “One does not simply sit by and do nothing.” Rev. Dr. Ben Trawick]

Some reading resources:

- How to argue with a racist by Adam Rutherford.
- Four hundred souls edited by Ibram X. Kendi.
- Dying of whiteness by Jonathan M. Metz
- The sum of us by Heather McGhee
- The color of money: Black banks and the racial wealth gap by Mehrsa Baradaran

NOTE: Links to all of the books that have been mentioned in the discussion can be found at the end of this chat log.

As a society, we seem to be stuck in a zero sum game - an either/or rather than AND. It is not a pie.

Zero sum is the antithesis of the abundance of grace.

Maternity death rate higher for Black women

Good news for the VA benefits - cases that had been previously denied to Black vets are being reviewed and re-opened to give those benefits

During the New Deal, the housing programs were segregated.

Choices made to close schools, pools rather than integrate

Tradition of segregating black/white communities by where you build the railroads and highways. Can keep communities from connecting with each other. Redlining was decision of bank managers on who to fund/not fund. Integrated schools - at the same time, those schools particularly in black communities got the hand-me-down desks, materials.

Discussion Qs3 (Slide 18, covering slides 16-17):

Systemic racism vs individual racism?

Which came first—institutional racism or interpersonal racism?

Is it a system problem or an attitude problem?

Do we want to deny that systematic racism exists because that means we might need to do something it that we would rather not do?

Do we insist that racism is all about the individual and not the system so that we can point to others as the problem without having to change the system, the laws, and the way that things are done?

I found Dr. Kendi's discussion about fear and hatred leading to racist ideas which lead to racist policies interesting, because I hadn't thought of it like that before. He says that instead racist policies lead to racist ideas. When people resist an existing racist policy, those who support it have to produce racist ideas to defend those racist policies, which led them to become ignorant and hateful.

Institutional comes first. Child brought up in segregated society will learn racism.

On differences in kidney function between whites and blacks - was told that was based on the results of studies. Observational results. Noticed it has shifted over time. Think the reality, the quality of health was different. The observations may have been true, but it may have been because of poor health care.

That may be one more example of what comes first - chicken or egg.

Thinking of racist politicians in 50s and 60s elected by racist individuals, that then led to policies.

If you're going to keep people down to begin with, refuse to educate them - will be uneducated. Then to say they're dirty, uneducated ignores the system that created it.

My understanding of what Dr. Kendi is saying - went back to self-interest. Create policies to preserve the status quo, then come up with arguments to defend it. Argument entrenches your belief. Becomes harder to change opinion.

One of amazing things about us as humans - we have the ability to learn, change, grapple with these issues. What we have to do is make the conscious choice to be willing to be uncomfortable in order to understand the issues, knowing we'll never be completely finished.

Discussion Qs4 (Slide 20, covering slide 19):

What does white privilege mean?

Do you think privilege still exists for whites in this country?

Certainly white privilege exists. I never had to have “the talk” with my two boys about how to act if and when they were pulled over by a cop, while driving.

Equal rights for me does not mean less rights for you, It is not a pie - I have it on a t-shirt I wear to the office.

From the video: People have been misled by how much they benefit from racism. There are different levels of benefit from racist policies. Typically upper income white people benefit more from racism and they try to convince middle and lower income whites that they benefit from racism more than they would in a more egalitarian society. As a result, we have white people “dying of whiteness” without realizing that’s what’s happening. We’ve been so misled and manipulated about the way race and racism operates in this country that so many people think it is in their self-interest when in fact it’s really not.

Wealth gap makes a big difference.

2 things politicians are good at: (1) they're coming to get you; (2) they're coming to get yours.

Most individuals who achieve something (education, success in arts, etc) consider it is because of their own talents, hard work and not due to getting breaks.

Youth Sunday School lesson: had all kids line up for a race. Before starting: anyone raised in 2-parent household take 2 steps forward; parents graduated take another 2 steps; both employed, etc. Soon have a bunch kids way out in front and some kids are at the start line. Then starts the race.

Discussion Qs5 (Slide 22, covering slide 21):

Do these words from our Prayer of Confession remind us of “the things that make for peace” and do they encourage us to seek out new ways to love and live?

Is the church complicit in spectating racial/social justice?

The Color of Compromise by Jemar Tisby

NOTE: We ran out of time (not surprisingly). Tune in next week for a continuation of this discussion.

Links to the books that were mentioned in the slides/chat discussion today or were used by Linda in preparing for the discussion. These links will also be added to the “Resources for a Deeper Dive” section of the Brave Churches/Hard Topics web page.

- [How to Be an Antiracist](#) by Ibram X. Kendi
- [Who's Black and Why?](#) edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & Andrew S. Curran, 2021
- [How To Argue With a Racist](#) by Adam Rutherford.
- [Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America](#), 1619-2019 edited by Ibram X. Kendi
- [Dying of Whiteness](#) by Jonathan M. Metz
- [The Sum of Us](#) by Heather McGhee
- [The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap](#) by Mehrsa Baradaran
- [The Color of Compromise](#) by Jemar Tisby
- [We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates
- [How the Word Is Passed](#) by Clint Smith
- [Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents](#) by Isabel Wilkerson

Articles

- [Calgary Anti-Racism Education \(CARED\) Glossary](#)
- [How to Stop the Racism in You, *How to Stop the Racist in You – Mindful*](#)
- [Peggy McIntosh: *How to recognize your white privilege — and use it to fight inequality* | TED Talk](#)