

10 Keys to Everyday Anti-Racism



The founders of a new organization, the AntiRacist Table, suggest tools you can use to work against prejudice and inequality.

BY KIRSTEN IVEY-COLSON, LYNN TURNER | SEPTEMBER 8, 2020

We are sisters—and the great-great-granddaughters of Caroline and Allen, who were born enslaved in the state of Alabama. As African Americans and moms to Black sons, we are heartbroken and sick about the level of anti-Blackness that permeates every aspect of American life. We feel the urgency of the moment and want to help convert this moment into a movement for meaningful change. We believe our voices matter and that we have something to share with the world as a way to offer healing to this crisis.

Between us, we have careers in law and education, and a background in African-American Studies, nonviolent communication, meditation, right speech, and conflict resolution. With those skills, we launched the AntiRacist Table on June 20, 2020. Metaphorically and physically speaking, at the table you learn, celebrate, grieve, fight, and live in community.



Learn more about the AntiRacist Table's 30-Day Challenge.

We offer a 30-Day Challenge that has been intentionally curated to help you be educated; face and get past shame, anger, and blame; and develop empathy—all key elements of creating an anti-racist America. Each day participants receive a daily lesson consisting of reading, videos, podcasts, journal/reflection prompts, and mindfulness practices. Each week participants work through a subset of our core principles, which we feel are essential aspects of bringing mindful anti-racist practice into daily life.

We provide the tools to help tackle emotionality—shame, guilt, and anger—and translate the seminal works of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi and Dr. Robin DiAngelo, among other academic experts, into 10 core principles: education, intention, courage, individuality, humanity, anti-racist work, equality, empathy, allies, and love. These are the focus of the AntiRacist Table's 30-Day Challenge—an invitation to do the hard work to be anti-racist.

1. Education

Kendi, a leading scholar on anti-racism, argues that the heart of racism is denial. You cannot acknowledge or change that which you deny or choose not to see. Thus, the first step toward dismantling racism is breaking through that denial, by educating oneself about the history of African Americans and the Black experience.

Seeing systemic racism is foundational work. Historical context provides an understanding of the original dehumanization of African Americans that is the foundation upon which American racism is built. It reveals the laws and policies implemented to support white supremacy, and the cultural rules and norms that created anti-Blackness.

Learning about the unconscious and automatic ways racism presents itself will help one recognize it and take steps to stop it. Challenge participants credit “learning lesser-known facts” as helping them not only see and understand, but launch them into action to fight against racism and anti-Blackness.

2. Intention

Anti-racism is a way of life. Like starting any new habit, anti-racism requires a conscious decision to pursue it as a goal and way of being. Intention brings mindful presence and awareness to what we say and what we do.

Setting the intention to have an open heart and open mind in order to be anti-racist affects how one shows up. Present-moment awareness links with our intention to pull us out of autopilot and into conscious pursuit of our goals.



Anti-Racist Resources

A collection of *Greater Good* pieces that explore our potential to reduce prejudice in society and in ourselves.

This opens the door to growth. As psychologist Rick Hanson explains, whatever you hold in attention has a special power to change your brain. Attention is like a combination spotlight and vacuum cleaner: It illuminates what it rests upon and then sucks it into your brain—and your self. Setting the intention to pursue anti-racism will help adjust one's life lens, and it will deactivate the trance of autopilot. This will help you tap into your internal motivation to be anti-racist.

And according to studies, being motivated internally is what will most help you to make lasting change. Affirming why you want to be anti-racist as part of your intention will remind you of your goal and help you stick to it. This is why we offer the 30-Day Challenge: It provides participants with a clarity of purpose and helps them commit to action.

3. Courage

Facing facts about racism, white privilege, and white supremacy is hard.

Robin DiAngelo, a sociologist and author, coined the term “white fragility” to describe “the defensive reactions so many white people have when our racial worldviews, positions, or advantages are questioned or challenged.” She continues:

For a lot of white people, just suggesting that being white has meaning will trigger a deep, defensive response. And that defensiveness serves to maintain both our comfort and our positions in a racially inequitable society from which we benefit.

Reckoning with shame, blame, guilt, and anger takes courage and vulnerability. As researcher Brené Brown says, vulnerability is when we feel uncertainty, risk, or emotional exposure. Vulnerability takes courage; it takes learning how to be brave and afraid at the exact same time. Courage allows us to be an everyday hero and to inspire collective heroism.

To be anti-racist, you have to sit with the discomfort and put courage, compassion, and vulnerability over comfort. Cultivating an anti-racist mindfulness practice is essential to doing and sustaining this work. Challenge participants say The AntiRacist Table Mindfulness Practices incorporated in the Challenge provided a space for them to face hard emotions and to find compassion.

4. Individuality

Seeing another person’s individuality means noticing the details and qualities, both positive and negative, that set them apart from the group. But mental shortcuts that psychologists call heuristics “can lead us to make potentially damaging assumptions about other people,” as Zaid Jilani writes in *Greater Good*. “Racial stereotyping, for instance, comes from the belief that membership in a racial group defines someone on a range of characteristics, including their behavior.”

To be anti-racist, it's critical to understand and recognize that Black people have historically been assigned a negative group identity, being labeled lazy, irresponsible, dangerous, and angry. Realizing that these stereotypes can prevent us from seeing Black people as individuals is an important awareness because, according to research, when we view people who are "not like us" in terms of their own individual tastes and preferences, we feel less threatened by them.

5. Humanity

Supporting humanity means rehumanizing African Americans.

As philosopher Michelle Maiese argues, the process of dehumanization demonizes "the enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment." The result is a framing of "good versus evil."

According to Maiese, "dehumanization might be mitigated or reversed through humanization efforts, the development of empathy, the establishment of personal relationships between conflicting parties, and the pursuit of common goals."

Just as denial is the heart of racism, so seeing humanity in others is at the heart of anti-racism. "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny," wrote Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

6. Anti-racist work

In this context, "anti-racist" is a verb, defined by the action one is taking. An anti-racist is "one who is supporting an anti-racist policy through their actions or expressing an anti-racist idea," writes Ibram X. Kendi.

To be anti-racist, one must actively work to create anti-racist policies. One must engage the world seeing all racial groups as equals and intentionally promote equity. Anti-racists support policies that reduce racial inequity, such as:

- Reparations to address the wealth gap between Black families and white created by slavery, Jim Crow segregation, anti-Black practices such as redlining, and other

discriminatory public policies in criminal justice and education that have withheld opportunities to build wealth from Black people that have been afforded to whites.

- Educating Americans about systemic racism and racist policies and the need to dismantle them.
- Holding police with records of excessive force accountable.

7. Equality



“Racial inequity is when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing,” writes Kendi. One must hold all groups of people—a color, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, ability, age, and any combination of those—as equal. To champion equality is to fight for equity. It is to understand that corrective action is needed to create equity.

8. Empathy

Cultivating empathy is key to rehumanizing the dehumanized. “Empathy is . . . an umbrella term that describes multiple ways people respond to one another, including sharing, thinking about, and caring about others’ feelings,” writes Jamil Zaki, director of the Stanford Social Neuroscience Laboratory and author of *The War for Kindness*. The best way to foster empathy, suggests Zaki, is to share experiences, because that’s the “closest we come to dissolving the boundary between self and other.” It’s this empathic concern that motivates us to “improve someone else’s well-being.”

We know from studies that empathy creates connection and it breaks down the “us and them” divide so that we see outsiders as human beings.

But empathy has another benefit to anti-racists: It helps to build the ability to bounce back from shame, a critical tool in this work. Empathy increases shame resilience because it moves us toward connection, compassion, and courage—the opposite of the fear, blame, and disconnection that result from shame. Staying stuck in shame means one is not working to be anti-racist.

9. Allyship



To be an ally is to take on this struggle as if it is your own. It means that you do what is uncomfortable. You are committed to taking a risk, sharing any privilege you have to center marginalized Black and brown people. When you see something, you say something. You imagine and act as if you do not have a choice. You fight to dismantle injustice.

“Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble,” wrote Congressman John Lewis just before his death. Allies get into good trouble. As one Challenge participant said, “Coming to terms with and exploring the deeply rooted systems of white supremacy within my own self and the way in which I have worked in the world are critical for me to become a true ally.”

10. Love

Choosing love and healing over fear and oppression is a path of courageous vulnerability. Gratitude, joy, and an open heart are all components of love that enable one to do the work to be anti-racist and to bring anti-racism into daily life. Accepting love empowers us to do the hard work. As meditation and communication teacher Oren Jay Sofer says:

The more deeply we feel our own life, the more we experience our interconnectedness with others. This kind of love is a force for change. It bestows the courage to face the suffering in the world and the energy to act for its healing.

Barbara Fredrickson, director of Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology Laboratory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, puts it another way: “Love draws you out of your cocoon of self-absorption to attune to others. Love allows you to really see another person, holistically, with care, concern, and compassion.”

America is at a critical moment. This is the call of our time. We must do more than put out a sign or read a book—we must come to understand our shared history and work to support our collective humanity by eradicating anti-Blackness in the many forms that it exists. You can begin right now by starting to educate yourself—and the AntiRacist Table 30-Day Challenge is one place to start.

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About the Authors



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Kirsten Ivey-Colson, JD, has an LLM in Alternative Dispute Resolution and her undergraduate degree is in African American Studies and English. She is an active meditation practitioner and a student of nonviolent communication, conflict resolution, conflict coaching, neuroscience, happiness, and well-being. She has served as a union steward, conflict coach, mediator, and leader in her son's school's parent of Black students affinity group. In response to the racial reckoning in June 2020, Kirsten co-founded the AntiRacist Table, with her sister, Lynn Turner. The AntiRacist Table is a multidimensional platform dedicated to bringing antiracism to daily life through education about African Americans, the Black experience, rehumanizing Black people, and motivating action.



Lynn Turner
The AntiRacist Table

Lynn Turner (she/her) is a native Washingtonian, wife, and mother of two children and the proud descendant of enslaved people. She is a Lead Kindergarten Teacher and an active anti-racism committee member in the school community where she teaches in Bethesda, MD. Lynn is passionate about teaching young children and supporting families, work that she has done for over ten years. Her BA in Fine Arts is from Sweet Briar College, her MAT in Early Childhood Education is from Trinity University and she has an Early Childhood Teaching Certificate from the Sunbridge Institute. In response to the racial reckoning in June 2020, Lynn co-founded the AntiRacist Table, with her sister, Kirsten Ivey-Colson. The AntiRacist Table is a multidimensional platform dedicated to bringing antiracism to daily life through education about African Americans, the Black experience, rehumanizing Black people, and motivating action.