



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 "antiracist." What's the difference?

One endorses either the idea of a racial hierarchy as a racist, or racial equality as an antiracist. One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of "not racist." The claim of "not racist" neutrality is a mask for racism. This may seem harsh, but it's important at the outset that we apply one of the core principles of antiracism, which is to return the word "racist" itself back to its proper usage. "Racist" is not—as Richard Spencer argues—a pejorative. It is not the worst word in the English language; it is not the equivalent of a slur. It is descriptive, and the only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it—and then dismantle it. The attempt to turn this usefully descriptive term into an almost unusable slur is, of course, designed to do the opposite: to freeze us into inaction.

The good news is that racist and antiracist are not fixed identities. We can be a racist one minute and an antiracist the next. What we say about race, what we do about race, in each moment, determines what—not who—we are.

I used to be racist most of the time. I am changing. I am no longer identifying with racists by claiming to be "not racist." I am no longer speaking through the mask of racial neutrality. I am no longer

manipulated by racist ideas to see racial groups as problems. I no longer believe a Black person cannot be racist. I am no longer policing my every action around an imagined White or Black judge, trying to convince White people of my equal humanity, trying to convince Black people I am representing the race well. I no longer care about how the actions of other Black individuals reflect on me, since none of us are race representatives, nor is any individual responsible for someone else's racist ideas. And I've come to see that the movement from racist to antiracist is always ongoing—it requires understanding and snubbing racism based on biology, ethnicity, body, culture, behavior, color, space, and class. And beyond that, it means standing ready to fight at racism's intersections with other bigotries.

This book is ultimately about the basic struggle we're all in, the struggle to be fully human and to see that others are fully human. I share my own journey of being raised in the dueling racial consciousness of the Reagan-era Black middle class, then right-turning onto the ten-lane highway of anti-Black racism—a highway mysteriously free of police and free on gas—and veering off onto the two-lane highway of anti-White racism, where gas is rare and police are everywhere, before finding and turning down the unlit dirt road of antiracism.

After taking this grueling journey to the dirt road of antiracism, humanity can come upon the clearing of a potential future: an antiracist world in all its imperfect beauty. It can become real if we focus on power instead of people, if we focus on changing policy instead of groups of people. It's possible if we overcome our cynicism about the permanence of racism.

We know how to be racist. We know how to pretend to be not racist.
Now let's know how to be antiracist.

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