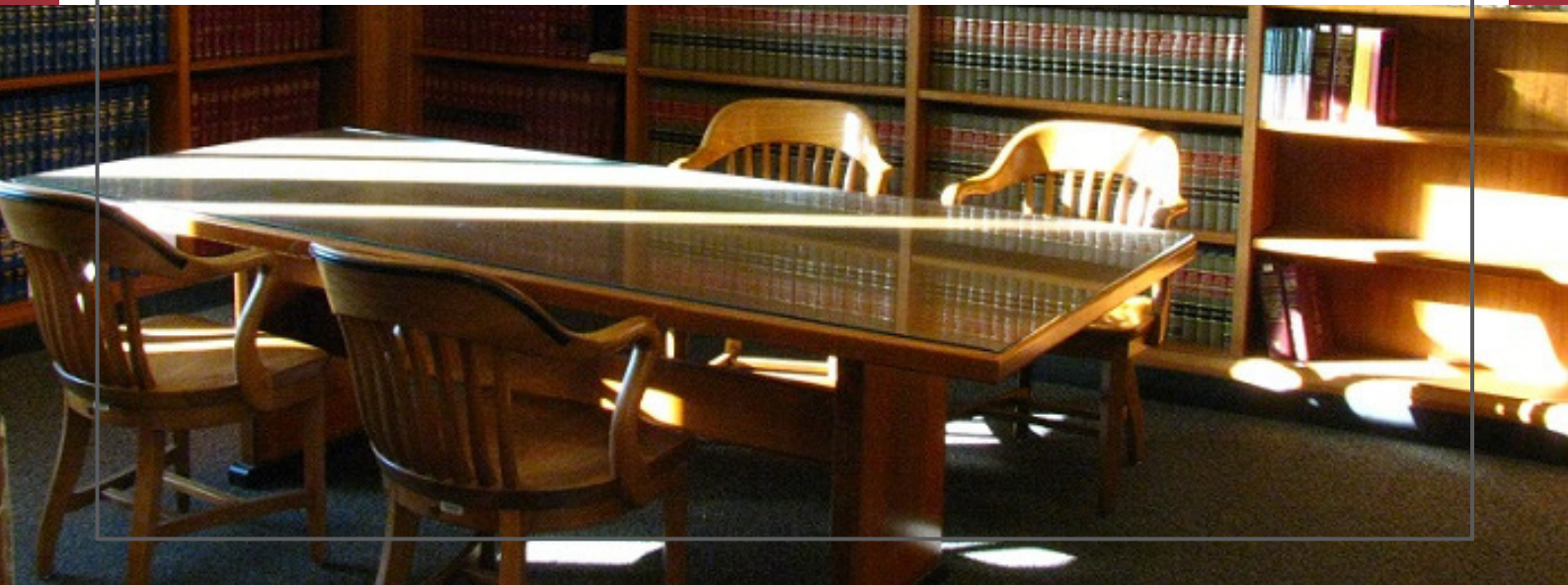


# Ramsey County Law Library

S U M M E R 2 0 2 0



## Reading is a place to start

During July and August 2020, the Ramsey County Law Library promoted titles on racial equality in response to critical events occurring in Minnesota and around the country following the death of George Floyd. The books are described in this publication.

The provocative and informative books listed here reflect the challenges we all face regarding racial bias and equality. They offer perspectives and opportunities for change—and not necessarily through the court system.

Library users may check the books out by visiting the law library on the 18th floor of the court house.



RAMSEY COUNTY  
LAW LIBRARY

15 KELLOGG BLVD W  
1815 COURT HOUSE  
ST. PAUL, MN 55102

LIBRARY HOURS  
M-F 8:00-4:30

Closed on County  
Holidays

P: 651-266-8391

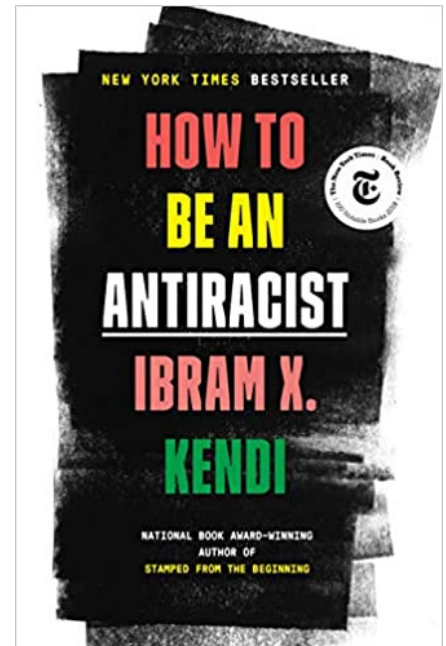
# Two views on racism

When we say that racism is systemic, it is to say that it is so embedded into our culture that we aren't aware that it is there. That is how Ibram X. Kendi starts off his book, *How to be an Antiracist*. In the forward, he describes how his self-doubt and confidence was so low that he had only applied to two colleges so he'd only have to deal with two rejection letters. (He was accepted by both.) Later, as he looked back at his life, he wondered if he should have taken more history classes and paid more attention when he was growing up. One moment stands out: He recalls with chagrin that he was a young, Black, high school student presenting at a Martin Luther King, Jr. speech contest. The irony of the moment was that he was representing his high school that was named after General Stonewall Jackson, legendary Confederate General.

Kendi combines personal stories, historic events, and snippets from well-known authors to illustrate the point that it isn't enough to not be a racist: One must strive to be an anti-racist. He explains:

**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."**

As Kendi goes through different chapters of the book, he shows how racism is embedded into all facets of our culture. Assumptions and judgments about people who are not like ourselves are part of everyone's identity, he writes, even his own. In a chapter on sexuality, he confronts his own .



assumptions he had about gay men when he discovered his best friend's behavior didn't match the stereotypical gay male behaviors he had learned and expected. To save his friendship, he vowed to change

*The opposite of "racist" isn't "not racist." It is "antiracist."  
--Ibram X. Kendi*

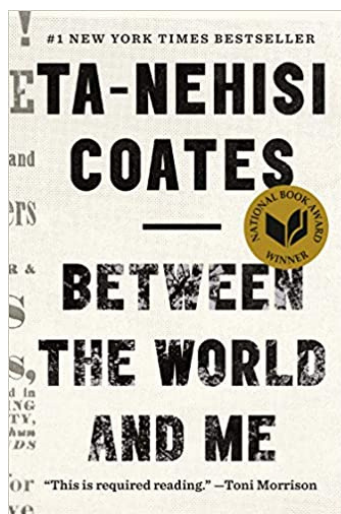
This book is compelling because of the deft way Kendi weaves his personal stories and revelations with historical references and current events. Yet, in spite of all the ways racism is discussed in the book, it ends optimistically.

In discovering that he had stage 4 colon cancer, he quickly sees the parallel to systemic racism today:

**I have cancer. The most serious stage. Cancer is likely to kill me. I can survive cancer against all odds.**

**My society has racism. The most serious stage. Racism is likely to kill my society. My society can survive cancer against all odds.**

Aggressive treatment, surgery, chemotherapy, all were used and yes, he did survive. He had the help and support of surgeons, pathologists, and his family. He asks, "What if we treated racism like we do cancer?" The lesson is that there isn't one method to combat racism. Ending racism isn't just one person's fight; everyone must contribute to the effort. And if you are going to fight racism, you can't just not be a racist. Don't be neutral, be an antiracist.



In contrast, Ta-Nehisi Coates' work, *Between the World and Me*, is a deeply personal letter to his teen-aged son. In this narrative, Coates addresses the reality of being a Black man in the United States. This book is grim, as he describes his fear and anger growing up in Baltimore and then going to college at Howard. Much of the book shares his personal history and experiences, while it also reveals his anger and frustration of current events.

He is particularly angry at the persistent murders of so many Black men at the hands of white police officers and other white men for no reason other than they were wearing a hoodie or playing loud music.

The fear and suspicion that he internalized stayed with him and popped up unexpectedly years later during a trip to Paris. He was walking down the streets after dinner because a new friend wanted to "show him an old building," and in the back of his mind, he wasn't sure if this really was an innocuous walk or if he was being led to an ambush in a quiet alley. But this friend just showed him the historic building, shook his hand, and said good night.

Coates' letter to his son has a similar theme to Kendi's book – racism is embedded into American culture. But in contrast, Coates' message is for his son, and for other Black readers: You might not be able to eliminate the racism of others. It is their struggle, and ultimately others will have to make the change within themselves. He tells his son that he needs to remember his history, culture, and experiences:

**You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable. ... I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world.**

Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, New York: One World, 2019.

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*, New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015.

# Let's talk about truth

*A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota* (2016) is edited by Sun Yung Shin. The book was the summer 2020 selection of the Minnesota Center for the Book's Statewide One Book One Minnesota book club. The book contains 16 essays that give perspectives on Native persons as well as persons of color in Minnesota.

In the essay "Fear of a Black Mother," author Shannon Gibney describes her struggles trying to explain American societal challenges to both her young son and her Liberian husband—and her fears about an increasingly dangerous path for people of color. In the essay "Disparate Impacts," by Taiyon J. Coleman, the author, who was raised in Chicago, offers her perceptions about microaggressions and microabrasions in Minnesota academia.

*White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk About Racism* (2018) is written by Robin DiAngelo, a white woman described in the foreword as "the new racial sheriff in town." DiAngelo explains that the way racism is taught makes it virtually impossible for white people to understand it. The white worldview is simplistic and fails to perceive how racism evolves individually and in the community.



Fragility, according to DiAngelo, arises when white people are challenged about racism—generating feelings of discomfort and defensiveness. The result is a person's lack of insight or advancement. Fragility also stems from an unconscious protection of white solidarity. The result is a position that exempts a person from any responsibility for or participation in the problem. DiAngelo advocates exploring alternate racial experiences to challenge racism and to loosen white protection. On a hopeful note, she states that the effect of white responses can be powerful if they interrupt racism through courage and intentionality.

*A Good Time for the Truth: race in Minnesota*, edited by Sun Yung Shin. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016.

Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: why it's so hard for White people to talk about racism*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.



# Critical race theory

Critical Race Theory (or CRT) is defined by Britannica as “the view that the law and legal institutions are inherently racist and that race itself, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is a socially constructed concept that is used by white people to further their economic and political interests at the expense of people of colour.”

Two books about CRT are reviewed here. They are scholarly works that offer a deep dive into the topic. These rigorous studies of CRT provide a “radical and challenging perspective that reveals how racism shapes the everyday reality of the world; from law courts and prisons, to the economy, schools, media, and health care.” (David Gillborn, Professor, University of Birmingham, UK)

*Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, (New York University Press, 2017), describes CRT as comprising activists and scholars who question the foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory and neutral principles of constitutional law. Seen as fostering a movement, CRT builds on previous movements (critical legal studies and radical feminism). The book gives an introductory overview that includes criticism from both the left and the right.

Another book that the law library has on CRT is called *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*. The second edition of this title was published in 2018 and is a collection of scholarly essays describing race and how racial tensions intersect with gender, economic status, ethnicity, and sexuality. The essays are not limited to views from the United States, and in fact, many of the pieces describe these issues occurring in Canada and other countries to show that difficulties with racism are not unique to the United States.

The book is organized by sections, each dealing with a different perspective on racism: colonialism, institutional racism, ethnocentrism, privilege, marginalization, and resistance.



The first essay in the book, which proposes that racism is not biologically inherent in people but is a learned behavior, was written in 1931. The essays at the end of the book are much more current as the last essay examines the origins of the Black Lives Matter movement in Toronto.

Another scholarly work examines the philosophy of race and race as phenomena. *Race as Phenomena: Between phenomenology and philosophy of race* is edited by Emily S. Lee (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). The book is a collection of intellectual, well-researched essays that are written by important contributors to the field. The essays “examine persistent questions within philosophy of race, from how to conceptualize race to the lived experience of blackness and whiteness.” (Introduction) The work includes essays that describe race consciousness as phenomenologically understood, the black body and the phenomenology of being stopped, and seeing like a cop.

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory (Third Edition): An introduction*, New York: NYU Press, 2017.

*Race and Racialization: Essential readings, 2nd Edition*, Tania Das Gupta, Carl E James, Chris Andersen eds., Toronto: Canadian Scholars, 2018.

*Race as Phenomena: Between phenomenology and philosophy of race*, Emily S. Lee, ed., Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

# It takes moral courage to do the work



*So You Want to Talk about Race*, by Ijeoma Oluo  
(Seal Press, 2019)

Ijeoma Oluo directly challenges white people in this commendable book about racism. She offers a clear discussion of race from a Black perspective. She also looks beyond race and the factors that contribute to inequality—what race looks like in the context of dominant white society and how we are all products of a racialized society. This, states Oluo, “affects everything we bring to our interactions.” She describes how ineffectively white people perceive how Black people are impacted personally, economically, and politically by a racist society.

Oluo personalizes her experience with examples that offer clear understanding of racist behavior. With a specific chapter for white people entitled “I Just Got Called a Racist, What Do I Do Now?” Oluo’s simple response is “do the work.” At the same time, she offers concise explanations that foster change and understanding.

*The Myth of Race: The Reality of Racism: Critical Essays*, by Mahmoud El-Kati (Papyrus Publishing, 2014)

In his short book of essays, author Mahmoud El-Kati, a former history professor at Macalester College, states that “racism is prejudice plus power.” This definition offers a platform for action, dialog and the ability to change power relationships. El-Kati embellishes the definition with historical context (including the origins of white supremacy), theories that explain the deconstruction of “race,” and the idea that “race” is actually a false concept that is legitimized by power. The power of “race,” under this scenario, sanctions the right of exploitation of one group over another. El-Kati states that to get rid of “race,” the myth of racism should be a critical part of our educational curricula and a part of teacher training. He also emphasizes that the myth of race cannot be solved “unless there is a healthy dose of the scarcest commodity in America — moral courage.”

Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk about Race*,  
New York: Seal Press, 2019.

Mahmoud El-Kati, *The Myth of Race: The Reality of Racism: Critical Essays*, Brooklyn Park, MN:  
Papyrus Publishing, 2014.

# Where there is racial indifference, racism thrives

*Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* by James Forman, Jr. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017)

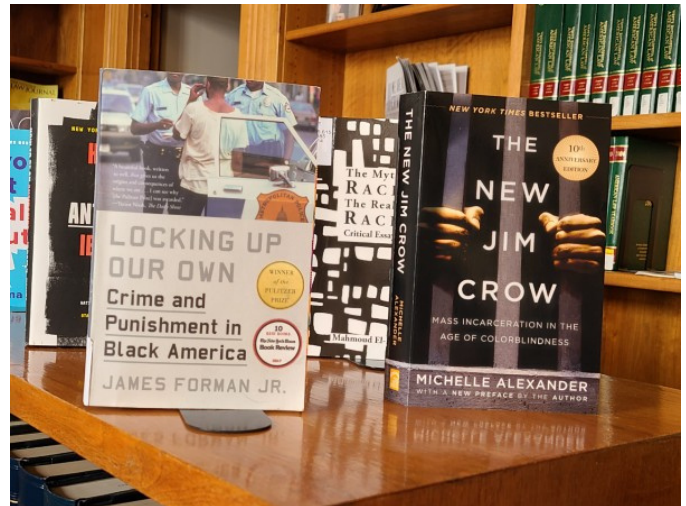
This Pulitzer Prize winning book closely examines race relations in Washington, D.C. from the sixties through the nineties and describes parallel stories from locations outside of D.C. The stories explain how Black America supported schemes that resulted in high incarceration among Black people. The reasons include early Black opposition to the decriminalization of marijuana and surging gun possession due to Black views that guns were needed for collective self-defense. These, and other factors described by the author, laid the foundation for how drug addiction and crime have assailed Black America.

In the second half of the book author Forman describes the consequences of decades-old systems that result in mass incarceration of Black people. Drug sentences and mandatory minimums, the crack epidemic, the War on Drugs, aggressive police strategies (and pretext policing), and the disparate social and economic impacts of incarceration all factor into the disparagement of Black men.

In his epilogue, Forman describes a decline in crime after 2014 in Washington, D.C., but it leaves in its stead a devastating impact on the Black community. He concludes that mass incarceration is a system that was “constructed incrementally, and it may have to be dismantled the same way.” (p. 238)

James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and punishment in Black America*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*, New York: The New Press, 2020.



*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander (Tenth Anniversary Edition, The New Press, 2020)

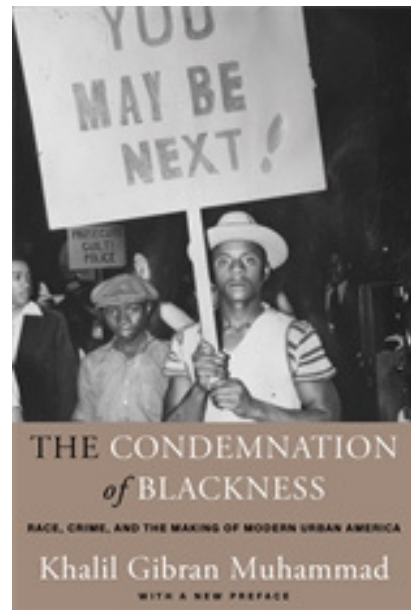
If Forman’s book describes the history of mass incarceration, Michelle Alexander’s book provides an incisive and rigorous study of the criminal justice system’s impact on current Black America. In fact, in *Locking Up Our Own*, Forman references Alexander’s book and states it “played a crucial role in providing advocates with a framework for understanding, and a rhetoric for criticizing, the War on Drugs.” (p. 220) Alexander explains how and why a disproportionate number of Black men versus White men are incarcerated.

In her introduction to the tenth anniversary edition, she states that the 2010 work (the original edition) is even more relevant today due to the passage of time and predictability of patterns that she identified earlier including: the establishment of a caste system derived from mass incarceration; its collateral consequences; and economic and social exclusion. Alexander states that this system is “invisible to the naked eye but functions nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did.” (page xxvii) For change to occur, society must address mass incarceration. Alexander also notes Martin Luther King, Jr.’s warning that racial indifference fosters a culture in which racism thrives.

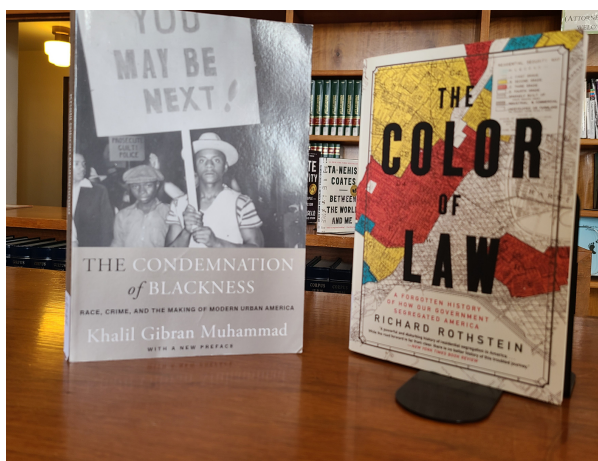


# Systemic racism: It isn't just one system

*The Condemnation of Blackness* by Khalil Gibran Muhammad is a scrupulously researched book that documents statistics, "scholarly papers", and discourse through American history to try and answer the question: How did we come to think of race, and specifically African Americans, as synonymous with crime? His book examines decades of effort by researchers and social scientists who influenced popular thinking to conclude that the troubles associated with African Americans – poverty, crime, reduced lifespan, were the result of the inherent inferiority of Blacks to their White counterparts. This research became widely accepted because it appeared to be based on neutral and unbiased statistics. However, while the statistics themselves might have been neutral, the specific selection, interpretation, and subsequent conclusions certainly were not. Fredrick Hoffman, one of the first researchers to publish such a biased report linking excessive criminal behavior to Blacks, expressed this idea by stating that crime would increase "until the negro learns to respect life, property, and chastity, until he learns to believe in the value of personal morality in his daily life..."



Hoffman's book and those by other social scientists pushed the narrative that increased policing was necessary to deal with the "criminal activity" of Blacks. And while these original reports were written more than a century ago, the attitudes and inherent biases that were fostered are still evident today. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice investigated the Ferguson Police Department for the killing of Michael Brown. In defending itself, the department claimed that the community problems were not the fault of the police department, but rather "reflect a pervasive lack of 'personal responsibility' among 'certain segments' of the community."



Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, crime, and the making of modern urban America*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019.

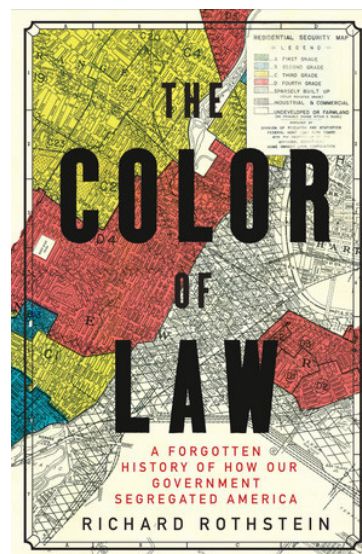
Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America*, New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.



Similarly, Richard Rothstein explains in *The Color of Law*, that local governments, as well as state and federal government agencies used flimsy excuses (that Black families wanted to live in Black neighborhoods, that they couldn't afford to live in pricier areas, segregation was a way to limit criminal behavior) to create segregated neighborhoods in cities. These methods to create segregated neighborhoods varied. In cities where new construction created new neighborhoods, contractors received subsidies and tax relief for building White-only neighborhoods. Public housing was built to intentionally segregate mixed neighborhoods. Real estate agents worked with cities to redline neighborhoods that restricted who could purchase houses. Banks refused to fund loans to African Americans. And so on. Unfortunately, the result perpetuated a system that actively promoted separation of the races supported at all levels of government.

An area that may be of particular interest to readers is in the very last section of the book. Here, the author answers frequently asked questions about his research and conclusions. Many questions were about his research and the historical context ("Why did leaders whom we consider liberal promote segregationist policies?" and "How can I remove a restrictive covenant from my deed?"), but other questions are more provocative, and unfortunately, very familiar: "Don't Black people have to take responsibilities for their own lives? Isn't the real reason why [they] can't escape the ghetto is that so many are single mothers who can't or don't raise their children properly?" His answers to these questions are thoughtful and well-reasoned, and one of the many reasons why you should read this book.

If you are interested in seeing how these restrictive covenants have been applied closer to home, the University of Minnesota project, Mapping Prejudice is an interactive map of



***Unfortunately, the result perpetuated a system that actively promoted separation of the races supported at all levels of government.***

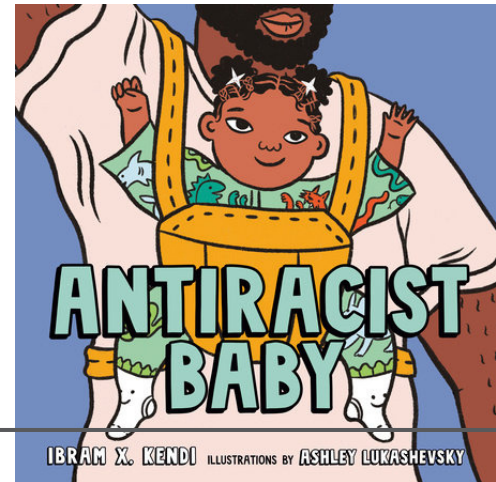
Minneapolis that displays properties with racially restrictive language in the property deeds. The time-lapse map shows the gradual increase of properties with restrictive covenants from 1910-1955, and an interactive map allows the user to zoom in on specific lots and see the actual language included on the deed. The project is the first-ever comprehensive visualization of racial covenants for an American city.

Mapping Prejudice is located at <https://mappingprejudice.umn.edu/>

# For the next generation

The last book that we'll review  
Is called *Antiracist Baby*  
This book, like the others in our series  
Is available at the Law Library.

Although this is a children's book  
The lessons also apply to adults  
Kendi has written nine suggestions  
For readers to review and consult.



*Antiracist Baby doesn't see certain groups as "better" or "worse."  
Antiracist Baby loves a world that's truly diverse.  
--Ibram X. Kendi*

The illustrations are colorful  
Reflective of our universe  
The lessons within gently explain how  
To appreciate cultures that are diverse.

We pass these lessons on to our children  
So that they can help transform  
Our society to one where antiracism  
Is not unexpected or rare, but the norm.

Kendi explains that we all make choices  
Some are bad, while some are good  
We learn from our mistakes, and make  
better choices in adulthood.

The final pages pose questions for parents  
To start the conversation  
To teach their children to be antiracist  
And to practice antiracism.

Ibram X. Kendi has some excellent advice  
For raising the next generation  
Let's help build a world that is antiracist  
With this book as our inspiration.

Ibram X. Kendi, *Antiracist Baby*,  
New York: Penguin Random House,  
2020. Illustrations by Ashley Lukashevsky.

**The reviews for the summer reading program were written by Ramsey County Law Librarians, Sara Galligan and Pauline Afuso. Many of the books we chose to review came to the library through recommendations from law library users and colleagues, and we encourage you to send us your suggestions for future reviews.**

**These reviews were originally posted on the Ramsey County Law Library Blog which is linked on the law library website: <http://ramseycounty.us/lawlibrary>**