



*"In every human Beast,
God has implanted a Principle,
which we call Love of Freedom;
it is impatient of Oppression,
and pants for Deliverance."*

—Phillis Wheatley

Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You

By Donna Sievers

Conversations about racism are engaging people throughout the country, and these conversations provide an opportunity for people to share their views and relate personal stories. However, there has not always been a framework or context of how to discuss racism from both a historical perspective and with an eye to the future. *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* provided me with the context to discuss what anti-racism is and where we stand with regard to segregation, assimilation, and antiracism.

Written by Jason Reynolds, *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* was a number-one *The New York Times* bestseller and a *USA Today* best seller. *Stamped* is actually an adaptation (or "remix") of the National Book Award-winning book titled *Stamped From the Beginning* written by Ibram X. Kendi. Jason Reynolds' book, published in 2020, was written with a younger audience in mind, but my 72-year-old mind found it a perfect read. The book provides a clear historical perspective of racism by looking at the various sources of racism and by explaining what an anti-racist subscribes to.

I read this book at the same time my 14-year-old grandson was reading it. His English teacher required her students to read a nonfiction book over the summer, and his mom suggested *Stamped*. As we read the book, I kept wondering how all of this information would be received by a younger audience. As a history major, I was familiar with most of the historical figures discussed in the book, but a young student may not have yet been exposed to this history. As I approached the book, I realized that I actually needed to make myself a graphic organizer to keep track of the many historical figures that the author discusses and then categorize them as either segregationist, assimilationist, or antiracist as the author analyzed their beliefs and behaviors. So, my graphic organizer had those three headings.

I found it fascinating to be a "student" again and complete my graphic organizer. I learned a great deal. For example, while I knew that the first enslaved Africans came to America in 1619, I did not know that the Puritans believed in slavery and that they influenced the entire American educational system by establishing Harvard University. The Puritans justified the institution of slavery by using Aristotle's (debunked) theory that there was a human hierarchy and that climate conditions influenced where people would fall on the hierarchy. I also did not know that the Mennonites in 1688 were against the enslavement of others and

believed that all were equal and should be free. So the Puritans were segregationists and the Mennonites were antiracists. You can see how my graphic organizer worked.

As I read the book, I continued to learn about antiracists such as poet Phillis Wheatley. Phillis was a seven-year-old enslaved child brought over on a slave ship from Senegal/Gambia in West Africa. She was purchased by a White family, the Wheatleys, who had lost a daughter and would raise Phillis as another valued daughter. Phillis was well educated by her adoptive family and by the time she was 11, she wrote her first poem. She soon learned Greek and Latin. In 1772, when Phillis was older, her father brought together 18 of the most well-educated White men to test his adoptive daughter's intelligence. The Wheatley family believed that African children who were given the opportunity of an education could achieve. Phillis passed all of the tests the men could think of but still no one, at that time, would publish her book of poetry. What an example of how racism makes our world smaller.

As I kept reading, I saw familiar names such as Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, William Lloyd Garrison, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. Du Bois, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainy, Langston Hughes, J. Edgar Hoover, Martin Luther King, Richard Nixon, Bull Connor, James Brown, Angela Davis, and many others. How do you think they would have been categorized on my graphic organizer: as a segregationist, assimilationist, or an antiracist?

I was shocked at how reading about the death of 14-year-old Emmet Till could still bring me to my knees. I could not quite imagine what my own grandson would think when he read about Emmet's brutal murder, especially since they were the exact same age. Emmet's mother insisted on an open casket so the world could see what hatred had done to her child in 1955. Next came the Civil Rights Movement, which is still in progress.

There is much to be learned from the past, and I found *Stamped* to be a book that challenged my historical knowledge while bringing forth the antiracist movement that needs to be discussed and understood by all of us. I hope you will join me in celebrating this book.

Donna Sievers was raised in Long Beach and taught at Stanford Junior High, Bolsa Grande High, Pacifica High and CSULB before leaving the classroom for administrator duties in Garden Grove USD. She and her husband live in Bluff Heights, where their retirement activities include volunteering for the Joyful Child Foundation in Memory of Samantha Runnion, gardening at the Bembridge House, bike riding, walking to the ocean and maintaining a 107-year-old house and garden.

"The world is a severe schoolmaster, for its frowns are less dangerous than its smiles and flatteries, and it is a difficult task to keep in the path of wisdom."

—Phillis Wheatley