

## Sample student responses to Essay 1

Educ 309, Fall 2019

Imagine a room with all of the people above who are defining and discussing race and/or social class. What kinds of conversations might they have? How would you imagine some of them agreeing or disagreeing with one another?

### Sample body paragraph comparing Omi & Winant and Kendi:

In this sense, Omi and Winant and Kendi are in agreement when they acknowledge the significance of race in our society, despite it being a social construct. Omi and Winant state "...the attempt to banish the concept [race] as an archaism is at best counterintuitive." (p.55). While Kendi states "The language of colorblindness – like the language of 'not racist' – is a mask to hide racism." (p.10). In this way, both Kendi and Omi and Winant are in agreement to the idea that race is something that cannot be done away with or ignored.

### Sample body paragraphs comparing Omi & Winant and Kendi:

Authors Omi and Winant argue that race is a social construct. They talk about "racial formation", which is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (p. 55). They explain that race was invented by humans, and therefore, can be destroyed by them. Similarly, Ibram Kendi writes about how one can try to be "anti-racist." Kendi argues, "Denial is the heartbeat of racism... One either allows racial inequalities... as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist," (p. 9). Basically, Kendi believes that anyone who allows racist things to happen is racist. Kendi later explains that "'Racist' and 'antiracist' are like peelable name tags that are placed and replaced based on what someone is doing or not doing... in each moment" (p. 23). This puts the power in each person's hand; in essence, each person can choose whether or not they are racist. Each moment, everyone has the power to be a racist or an antiracist, simply by choosing whether or not to stand up against racist acts.

While neither Kendi nor Omi and Winant give any concrete evidence that proves that one would support the other, both of them talk about fluidity and permanence. Kendi does this when he talks about the "racist" and "antiracist" name tags. Omi and Winant do the same when they state that "race" is a "nebulous", unclear concept (p. 55). Both of these concepts and labels are human-made; both of them were made *by* and *for* people, and therefore each person has it within themselves to eliminate them. Both of these authors put the agency in every person's hands, and that leads me to believe that they would both agree with one another on these two points.

### Sample body paragraph contrasting Sanneh and Kendi:

Kendi centers his argument in his definition of a racist and an antiracist in order to demonstrate that the best one can do is actively dismantle racist power structures. In defining a racist, he says that a racist is one that supports racist policies and actions while an antiracist actively supports antiracist policies and acts in support of antiracist institutions. Through this lens, Kendi further asserts that it is most important to dismantle power structures that are racist instead of racist people, "...the only way to undo racism is to completely identify and describe it- and then dismantle it" (p 9). He assesses that to eradicate racism, it is vital to eradicate the structures that uphold racism. Then, it will be possible for antiracism to exist.

### **Sample student paragraph comparing Lareau and Kendi:**

Annette Lareau, a scholar whose research is well-known for coining the term “concerted cultivation” (and other key terms for identifying parenting styles) in order to explain the link between social class mobility and parenting in the U.S., poses a very striking question in her book, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. In the section, *Enduring Dilemmas*, Lareau speaks about the contention that researchers must be of the same racial group as their study sample. That there is a lack of understanding or perspective when there is a cross in the divide between racial groups. She says, “I question whether something called ‘a white perspective’ exists.” (Lareau. p.10) I think Kendi would be pleased with her response to this debate. Lareau states, “This book takes the position that it is possible for outsiders of a group to study across boundaries. In addition, the research teams were racially and ethnically diverse (as well as diverse by social class background), which, as I show in Appendix A, influences what we learned in our visits.” (Lareau. p.10) Kendi would agree that there are racial perspectives, but not all perspectives in one racial group are necessarily identical. And because he believes this is to be true, black researchers who study black issues will be able to see the complexities of their own group and debunk the idea that they are all the same. *Visa versa*, Kendi would agree that there is significant benefit in crossing boundaries because he urges us to focus on power instead of people

### **Sample student excerpt of comparison in dialogue format:**

*Kelefa Sennah, Michael Omi, and Ibram Kendi, enter from stage left to the set of a coffee shop. Trinity student motions the group over and they sit down at a table with her.*

Student: I asked you all here so we can discuss a lingering question I had after reading your pieces. I want to know if you think that the white perspective is an inherently racist one. Or if the white perspective even exists. So please, discuss amongst yourselves.

Michael: Well, before we are able to answer those questions, I think we need to have some common vocabulary about race. I know this might not be as profound as when Howard and I originally proposed it, but I define race as a “concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests” (55).

Student: Yes. I think we can all agree that race is socially constructed, but nevertheless holds significant social, cultural, and political weight, especially in America.

Michael: Absolutely, and we must understand that the way that racial categories are “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” is essential to understanding the “evolution of hegemony” and the governing structures in place today (55).

Ibram: And those structures and policies need to be identified and described so we can work to dismantle the racist ones and support the antiracist aspects. White people can be a part of the dismantling or not. It is a choice that is made over and over again. Racist and antiracist are not fixed labels, so I don’t believe the white perspective can be inherently anything.

Kelefa: Ibram, I know you think that “there is nothing right or wrong with any racial groups,” but I think it’s more complicated than that.

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