

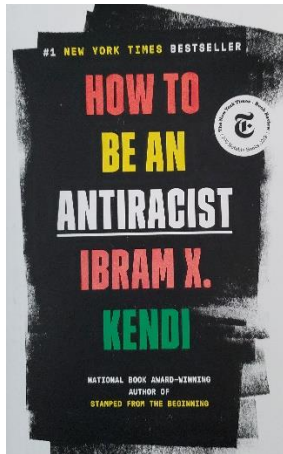
Anti-racism letters in the Benicia Herald

Friday, April 30, 2021, by Vicki Byrum Dennis

SURJ/BBLM Study and Action Course



What can white people do to become true allies with Black, Brown, and all People of Color? The first step is to become educated, to learn the real history of the racial justice struggles, to realize that white privilege exists in ways we whites have never considered, that racial injustice is systemic in ways we never thought of. Most of all, we need to realize how much more we need to learn.



And one of the best ways to start is by taking the most amazing **Study & Action Course**, which has been developed and is presented by SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) Bay Area, part of a national network of groups and individuals organizing white people for racial justice. Though all are welcome, the **Study & Action Course** is designed to educate white people through a series of insightful discussions of readings, videos, films and personal experiences.

My husband and I started out this year by taking part in one of two workshops offered to Benicians from January to March on alternate Saturdays. The course was sponsored by Benicia Black Lives Matter and the Benicia Public Library. Prior to the workshop sessions, we both considered ourselves to be informed, educated on racial matters, followers of current news and racial justice activists.

But we discovered how little we really did know about what it means to be a person of color in America. We also learned what it means to be privileged white people, and how systemically racism is rooted in the American history and white culture, how it continues today. The sessions were eye-opening. We both hold graduate degrees, and yet we agree that the course was probably the most powerful instruction we have ever received. It has pointed us in the direction we need to go to truly begin to be allies and advocates for racial justice.

SURJ, Benicia Black Lives Matter and the Benicia Public Library are offering another **Study & Action Course**, beginning June 12. The course will be online again and is limited for 30 people. There is no charge although donations that support Black and Brown-led social justice organizations are encouraged. I urge you to consider signing up. For me, this was one of the most important classes I've ever taken. It has truly changed my view of the world, our country and our community, and helped me figure out how I can make a difference.

Our group met via Zoom on alternate Saturdays with reading and video assignments during the interim. Our topics of discussion ranged from examining whiteness and white supremacy, the connection between capitalism, slavery and incarceration; Black Liberation movements and state and federal suppression of those movements.

My husband and I watched compelling videos and films as James Baldwin's biographical, *I am not your Negro*; *Deconstructing White Privilege* with author Robin DiAngelo; the determination of the Ohlone tribe to protect sacred burial places in *Beyond Recognition*, and the fascinating *Feminist on Cellblock Y*.

We read critical pieces of writing such as excerpts from James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, Ibram X. Kendi's *How to be an Antiracist*, and DiAngelo's *White Fragility*. In addition, we both read Isabel Wilkerson's recent book, *Caste*. These materials prompted long and excellent conversations with each other and our entire family and network of friends.

The next **SURJ Study & Action Course** begins on Saturday, June 12 and will take place during six online sessions on alternate Saturdays through August 21. Registration is now open until May 29. I encourage you to sign up. It will change your view of life and could change our community for the better. To learn more about the course and SURJ, and to register, go to <https://www.benicialibrary.org/standing-up-racial-justice>.

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Benicia