

#161 - A Summer Reading Pledge

Hey there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 161 - a summer reading pledge.

Here's what it is. This summer, you guys, is the summer I truly begin my education of being an anti-racist. I want to begin taking steps in how I see my summer stack and even in what I watch and listen to. I also want to do that with my kids. And I invite you to join me. This episode is your invitation. We're going to walk through the why, how, when, where, who, and what if this summer reading pledge. And really it's a summer consumption pledge but that title feels weird and misleading and maybe a little gross. So we will lead with reading, but this counts for all the things.

Alright, first thing. Why. Why are we doing this? Why is this summer reading pledge even necessary? First, our country has been in crisis for - well, since its beginning in many ways - but that crisis is at a certain peak right now, and I'm paying attention. I shared this on Instagram last week, but I've recently been doing a little exercise that has been devastatingly eye-opening. I've started switching skin color for people - imagining a white person to be black and a black person to be white. So when I'm at the store, when someone is walking down the street, when I hear a story about the police being called in response to a domestic altercation... how would my perception of that person and that situation change when their skin color also changes either way? Guys, I've been really convicted by what I'm noticing in myself. I'm a good person. I'm kind. I believe in equality for all. I'm in a biracial marriage. My husband is Japanese, not black, but I've realized a sense of misplaced pride in the fact that my kids aren't white, like it's a pass somehow to not being racist. But the truth is this country has racism in its DNA. One hundred and sixty years before our country became a country, before we were a unified nation with a constitution, slaves were being brought here in ships by the thousands. The continent of Africa was economically devastated by hundreds and thousands of Africans being taken throughout the world to be slaves, to labor and build the infrastructure of countries, of places of progress. The United States and its founding government dehumanized an entire race of people, and the consequences of that are still in effect. I see it in my own life. I catch myself being surprised when a black person is articulate. I would never say or believe intellectually that white people are smarter than black people. That sentence is quite ludicrous to me in many ways, but in my own heart and in my own microresponses to people as I've been paying attention through this exercise of switching skin color, I'm shocked and disappointed and embarrassed in my own thinking. As we've been hearing, well I was going to say over the last couple of weeks but for many it's been a lifetime, but as I've been paying attention in ways I never did before these last couple of weeks, especially since the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery, it is not enough for me to be not be overtly racist. I must be an anti-racist. I must be intentional, not accidental, in the presence of black people in my life, in my reading life, in my podcast life, in my music and TV show and pop culture life. This is important. And this summer is when I pledge for it to be important. Why are we doing this? Because for myself and perhaps for you too which is why I'm inviting you into this with me, if I don't actively seek out black voices

in my life, I might stumble across some, but stumbling across is no longer enough. It's not acceptable for me anymore. This is my pledge to become more educated for sure about the realities of black history in this country but also the realities that there are Instagram accounts of really great home decorators and cooks and moms who happen to be black but who somehow I don't follow. My life is so monochromatic, and I didn't see it. I didn't notice before because we seek out what we know. It's just the easiest way, and I am now passionate about my life looking different than it does, and while there are many places to start, the places you and I do that will vary because of our lives are different. However, we all read, we all watch TV, we all get on Instagram and scroll. This pledge is about recalibrating how we do that. We're going to create a couple of new habits this summer that will make our regular pop culture experiences move us in a kind, impactful, educational, compassionate, redemptive direction of being people who are anti-racist and in turn being part of recrafting and rebuilding a country and world that sees all people as equal under God. This is important work, and we're going to start with our summer reading. So that's the why.

Okay, let's do who really quickly. I have a pledge for myself and for my kids. That's basically the who. So in creating a structure around this pledge, there's one for me personally and one for my family and my kids. If you have kids, you can do this too.

Okay, how. How do we do this pledge? For me, I have one rule and one rule only. Always be reading at least one book from a person of color. That's it. That's my rule. I also want to move that into my podcast-listening space and in my TV/movie space, but that will look a little different than the structure of the reading which I'll explain in a bit.

But in terms of reading, here's my structure and my pledge. I have learned that if I read more than two or three books at a time, I'm out. I just stop. I shared this last week's Latest Lazy Letter and in several before that actually about how I've been in a rut and when I get in a rut, it really means I'm reading too much. For awhile, my remedy for that was one fiction and one nonfiction at a time. It's a house rule. The fiction works, but the nonfiction was throwing me off a little. I usually start my day with nonfiction, but sometimes it's business related or specifically to this conversation, some of the nonfiction I have wanted to read - like *The New Jim Crow*. *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander has been on my bookshelf for well over a year, maybe a longer. But it feels too hard, partly because it is. It's a sobering book. The subtitle is *Mass Incarceration in an age of colorblindness*. What a fun way to start the day! Now is that topic worthy of starting my day with? One hundred percent. But I haven't been setting myself up well to read nonfiction for the purpose of educating me on the black experience in this country. So a few days ago and again I shared this in the newsletter, but I'm taking a beautiful smart tip from Bri McKoy in a new genre structure. For me, instead of one fiction and one nonfiction, I have three categories of books that are read at three distinct times of day. Early morning first thing is nonfiction but some kind of spiritual book. So spiritual memoir or a devotional or what I'm reading right now which is *The Enneagram of Belonging* by Chris Heuertz. That's one genre and the nonfiction I start my day with. The second genre that goes in the middle of my day is educational nonfiction. So business books, history, and specifically for right now, nonfiction that's about anti-racism and the black experience. I have energy - both in my body and in

momentum to read those books in the middle of the day. That's where they belong for me. They might belong in a different time of day for you, but when Bri shared that that was her personal structure, it was such a lightbulb moment for me and made me excited to know where to put that kind of reading. And then the third is fiction and that goes at night. I love to read fiction at night.

So in light of that three genre structure, my pledge is fleshed out with this one rule: one of those books must be a person of color. It's simple. So if I'm reading the enneagram book which is by a white guy and I'm reading *The Green Ember* as my fiction book by S.D. Smith, another white guy, my educational book needs to be written by a person of color. I am in the middle of a business book called *The Infinite Game* by Simon Sinek, but Simon is another white guy. So I'm going to put that one down and pick up *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander.

So again my how is simple, and you can borrow it if you want. Three genres and a pledge that at least one of those three is by a person of color or specifically a black person. Now the thing about this too is not necessarily that that particular title is overtly about racism. I want to read fiction by black authors, just stories of life and other worlds and whatever else that simply has another perspective, a lens that isn't mine as a privileged white woman.

So here's something that can help your own personal summer stack is to have two or three titles in each category, each genre and make sure that you have an option in each one that's by a person of color. That way when you finish the spiritual book by a white woman, you can pick up *Enter Wild* by Carlos Whittaker or *I'm Still Here* by Austin Channing Brown or *Be the Bridge* by Latasha Morrison. Have titles ready, you know? Create your summer reading list with that in mind, with that intention.

So that's my personal how. Three genres set to three specific times of day so I know what to pick up when I have a few minutes to read and then the rule of at least one of them needs to be an author of color.

For my kids, I started following Ro Williams Brann on Instagram, and she's doing a little book club this summer which really is just a couple of suggested titles each month and of course she'll do discussion on Instagram around them, but she suggested a couple of kids books that I've bought and will read to my kids this summer, that we'll have around. I'll put all these links in the show notes by the way so you don't have to scribble down titles really fast, but Ro's chosen books for June are *The Colors of Us* by Karen Katz. It's for preschool to eight years old. And *This Is How We Do It* by Matt Lamothe which is about the same age group. I also ordered *A Kids Book About Racism*. It's backordered, so it'll be a few weeks but I follow this account on Instagram and have for awhile but it's a company called *A Kids Book About*, and they have so many great books. A kids book about racism, about feminism, about creativity, about anxiety, about adventure, about all kinds of things. They tend to have a discount when you buy three books at a time, and this round I bought racism, feminism, and gratitude because I need some help with one of my kids especially in that area. But yeah I'm going to be intentional again about having and presenting books to my kids about how skin color is different but how that shouldn't impact how we see and assess another human. I want my kids to be better than me in that and

grow up with a different mindset. But they have to be intentional too. We have to teach them to be anti-racist because right now our country's policies and systems do not support that. So the pledge for me also involves my kids.

Okay, next up when and where. We're throw both in together. I guess I already said that for my own reading, that my when is early morning for spiritual stuff, the daytime for nonfiction educational stuff, and night is for fiction. For my kids, it's different. The when is more important than the where I guess, but we do family reading time every afternoon in the summer. After lunch during Annie's nap because y'all she still kind of has to nap although I do think that's probably going to fade a bit this summer, but we do family reading time. We all need a bit of quiet solo time, even if my extroverted son disagrees, we still need the break. So we do twenty thirty minutes of reading in the same general space, you know on the couch or the porch, but everybody is reading their own thing. I let my boys choose what they want to read during that time. One thing though that we haven't done before that we will add is family group reading time. I'm still not sure of the when. We might need to play around with it a bit, but I'm thinking during dinner or right after or I'm not sure. Our summer rhythm will be a little strange this year because of COVID-19, because my husband works for the school system and there's a lot up in the air about how things will be and what's required of him this summer, and I'm releasing a book in 64 days. I've got a lot going on, and our days definitely will not all look the same. That's why my first gut for family group reading time is dinner because we're generally together. So maybe it's reading these book club books from Ro Williams Brann together. It can be books specifically about race or by authors of color and just note that when we read.

So we've done why, how, when, where, who, and now let's end with what. I've listed some whats already - some titles to read for you or with your kids. But this last bit is going to include not just books. This list of whats is my personal list of what I am going to consume and learn from this summer for myself.

So for books, I already have and will read *The New Jim Crow* like I mentioned, *I'm Still Here* by Austin Channing Brown, and *The Vanishing Half* by Brit Bennett. That's one book for each of those three genres I mentioned, so that's where I'm going to begin. For watching, I have three movies on my list to watch this summer. *The Black Power Mixtape* which is a documentary about the evolution of the Black Power movement in the late 60s early 70s, *The 13th* which I've had in my queue for - I mean since it came out - but again it was too hard to watch. It was too hard to start, but my intentions have changed. I want and need to see that documentary by Ava DuVerney about the prison system. And the third one is *When They See Us* which is a miniseries also by Ava DuVerney based on a true story about five black teenage boys from Harlem who are falsely accused of an attack on a white woman in Central Park. These are tough watches, but it's the least I can do. Like literally, the very least. And this is a pledge to begin my education of being anti-racist, of moving with intention towards understanding why this country is the way that it is and examining my part in it. So those are my whats for watching.

And then for listening, I for the same reasons have had the podcast 1619 in my feed since it came out and never started listening to it because it was too hard. No more. So I'm going to

listen to that podcast which is five episodes, you guys. Five! Come on! And then I also am going to start listening to Melanated Faith which is a podcast about the intersection of faith and culture hosted by two black women and Throughline. Throughline is a podcast from NPR that explores, as they say, the history behind every headline.

So an important thing to remember here is to do what we Lazy Geniuses need to do which is start small. I have one book in each of my already existing categories of reading. I have just a couple things to watch and listen to over the summer. I can add more when those are done, but that list is small. I'm starting to follow more accounts of people of color, some of whom are active in anti-racism and racial justice and some that are just black women who have food or home accounts. Why is my feed so white and I never realized it? This is our summer pledge. Well, this is my summer pledge, and I really hope you join me in some way, in whatever way that makes sense for what you consume and what your life looks like.

But as we close, I will say this. Anti-racism is now part of the fabric of this space. I am pledging to be more intentional, not just accidental, in highlighting voices of color, sharing episodes and books and such in the newsletter that are from people of color, starting to be more cognizant of how what we talk about here on this podcast is very much affected by what color skin we have. I'm not always going to speak directly to racism in every episode. The content here and on Instagram and in my newsletter and all of it will still be mostly the same, but my eyes have been opened as they should've been much earlier than now. I can no longer see my work in the same light, nor should I. I've always thought that the Lazy Genius Collective is a kind of movement in a very small way. I feel that really strongly about my book, *The Lazy Genius Way*, that comes out like I said in 64 days. You all are a beautiful community, and you desire to be a genius about what matters and lazy about what doesn't. We're together encouraging each other to live fully as who we are, not who other people or our own wonky voices inside our heads tell us who we should be. We're full and whole and not afraid to care, we champion other women and stop comparing ourselves to them as better or worse. That movement matters to me. I'm really passionate about it. And now it just has more color and I mean that both ways. I want my life, including what I read and watch and listen to and who I follow on Instagram to have more color - skin color and creative, experiential human color. And because this space is reflective of who I am and because I'm committed to expanding who I am, this space will expand along with it. And I hope you're here for it. I hope you join me and so many others in becoming better people who have wider - not whiter - wider eyes to see. And I know many of you who are white have been doing this intentionally a lot longer than I have, and I'm grateful for you and your movement and your example as we do this together. So that's the summer reading pledge. Let's do it.

Thanks so much for listening. And until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week.