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# White Like Me: Reflections On Race From A Privileged Son



## Synopsis

With a new preface and updated chapters, *White Like Me* is one-part memoir, one-part polemical essay collection. It is a personal examination of the way in which racial privilege shapes the daily lives of white Americans in every realm: employment, education, housing, criminal justice, and elsewhere. Using stories from his own life, Tim Wise demonstrates the ways in which racism not only burdens people of color, but also benefits, in relative terms, those who are "white like him." He discusses how racial privilege can harm whites in the long run and make progressive social change less likely. He explores the ways in which whites can challenge their unjust privileges, and explains in clear and convincing language why it is in the best interest of whites themselves to do so. Using anecdotes instead of stale statistics, Wise weaves a narrative that is at once readable and yet scholarly, analytical and yet accessible.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although I agree with the vast majority of the posts regarding the quality and insight of Wise's *White Like Me*, I think that, as a community of readers, teachers, activists and concerned citizens who loathe racial injustice, we must take care not to exalt Wise as THE authority on race and privilege in this country (basing this on another post that used similar language). Many African American scholars and writers - W.E.B. DuBoise, David Walker, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Sonia Sanchez, Gwendolyn Brooks and Amiri Baraka - have been saying the same thing (from the black perspective) that Wise does in his book, and decades BEFORE Wise did. While I applaud Wise's

courage, I think that we shouldn't fall into another white privilege trap, which is to exalt a white person for a revolutionary work on race, when this same type of revolutionary writing was done by people without privilege years ago. I would hate to think that we can only accept admissions of white privilege from whites, when people of color - who have suffered from it - took risks and challenged racism when the topic was far from vogue (dangerous, actually). There are many great thinkers and writers of color out there; read *Wise*, but supplement your knowledge from those who are survivors, too. Peace to my fellow activists of EVERY hue.

I'm a white man married to black woman. I'm a white father of two children society classifies as black. I'm a white pastor of a congregation that is 60% black. In other words, I have to think about race a lot -- for a white man. But even with as much as I think about race I am still oblivious to some of the ways my race has privileged me in every context since my conception. And some of the ways it still privileges me every day in ways that harm the wife, children, and church that I love. And, as *Wise* discusses in *White Like Me*, ways that harm me and other whites. In "White Like Me" Tim Wise tells his own story of living as a white man in a country that privileges whiteness. Beginning with his conception and continuing to Obama's presidency, *Wise* writes of his life experiences and what each one reveals about the advantages whiteness affords. His storytelling is at times moving, usually humorous, and always relatable for white readers. *Wise* is not interested in making white people feel guilty. He is interested in helping white people see what our black neighbors see and feel every day. As such, the book is illuminating whether you have explored the subject of white privilege before or not.

Tim Wise's book, *White Like Me*, takes a look at racism from the perspective of the whites in the United States. Through his writings, *Wise* hopes to be able to open the eyes of white people to the privilege that has been bestowed upon them as the dominant racial group in our society. "Being a member of the majority, the dominant group, allows one to ignore how race shapes one's life" (*Wise* 2). Beginning from this premise, by using examples and stories from his own life, he attempts to show just how privilege has shaped his life and what he has done for the fight against racism. Privilege, according to *Wise*, amounts to almost every experience that a white person has within their life. Simple things like whether or not your presence in a certain area will be questioned or larger things such as access to college educations are all related to the color of our skin at birth. People don't automatically assume you are poor or going to steal when you are in a store, they don't cross the street to avoid walking past you, and they don't assume you are selling drugs to buy

your new shoes. This is not exactly the kind of thing that there is a lot of expert research on. All the evidence and claims that Wise make concerning the subject are all related to his personal experiences and his work relating to activism. However, this being the case I feel that he does make a very strong argument; I have been able to relate to what he is saying in many of his stories. During one such story he recounts that in his youth he would go to underage keg parties and when the cops would come by they would do little except tell them to keep the noise down. There was no doubt as to the fact that kids were drinking and smoking pot, but no one was arrested and no fines were given. During this same time Wise was running a fake ID business for which he never got in trouble when he or anyone else was caught with one. Wise chalks all of this up to the fact that these homes were in white neighborhoods and that the cops weren't out to make trouble for white kids (35-7). In all the keg parties I have been to, I can say that this definitely rang true for me. I have never seen any one get arrested or even fined at a party in Milwaukee when the cops have shown up. They merely kick everyone out and even that seems like a joke most of the time, people usually just come back within an hour or so. Considering the state of the country with terrorism and national security, you'd think that law enforcement would take possession of a fake ID very seriously. If a person of Middle Eastern decent was caught with a fake ID, I'm sure they would have had a much harder time than a white person. I have known several white kids to have had their IDs taken away with not so much as even a slap on the wrist. On another note, if you go to almost any of the bars near campus, many of them knowingly let in people with fake IDs, yet nothing is done to stop it. These bars of course are packed to capacity with white kids. Resistance is where Wise is trying to lead the readers of his book. To resist racism is to act in what he calls an antiracist way. According to Wise, we all have the choice to stand up and confront racism or to back down and say nothing at all (73). This can be hard for some of us who have family and friends whose feelings are really ingrained with a racist way of thinking. Again, Wise uses an example from his life where he stood up to a person he had just met who told a black joke to a room full of white people. Instead of saying nothing to the man, which he feels is worse than saying nothing at all, Wise chose to engage the man into a reflective discussion about just why the joke was wrong. Wise goes about this subject of resistance in a way that has never been offered as an option to me or anyone I have ever talked to. To stand up and combat racism as opposed to simply ignoring it, telling yourself that you aren't a racist, or even trying not to think racist thoughts is a huge step to take. In effect you are shedding your layer of privilege and opening yourself up to the possibility of rejection or even ridicule. The most I learned from parents and school, as well intentioned as they were, was only that everyone is equal and deserves to be treated fairly. Had this combative attitude been implanted I may have

been challenging the system as a younger person. We all might have, it's hard to say how many minds could have been steered away from prejudice. One of the finer points Wise tries to make in his argument is that as white antiracists, we do not fight racism for black people. We have to fight it because it is evil and we hate it, we do it for ourselves and our community (98). We must however fight to keep resistance in our lives. No matter how hard you fight against racism, it can always rear its head in your life. Since we have been learning it from such an early stage and see it all around us, it's almost impossible to completely change your mode of thought. According to Wise, we don't always act in an intellectual way, sometimes we just operate on conditioning. All it takes is a situation to bring to mind a stereotype and you are working against this antiracist mentality (134). Despite the challenges that come with being an antiracist, the work is absolutely necessary. Destroying racism as a goal might never be able to be accomplished, but nothing worth having has ever been easy.

I have to agree with a lot of the harsher critics of this book. I am liberal and Wise has some valuable insights for to an audience that hasn't thought much about race. For that, fine. I'm glad he wrote the book. But the book could have been half this length (and it's not that long). Wise is so self absorbed, he is tedious. Beyond that, he has no insight into the fact that a lot of his privilege derives from being male, as well as white. He'll give examples of "white" privilege that are as much about his gender as his skin color, not to mention matters of class, as others have mentioned. The way he talks about his wife dutifully raising their two children almost by herself while he keeps writing and writing and writing was really hard for me to read. Better he should have taken over the kids for a month and let her finish the book, or, better yet, write her own. I bet she'd have a lot to say. I actually finished the book, just to see where he was going with his ideas, but I was sorry I wasted the time.

this is a great book to have on my kindle. It was for a class I was taking but I have suggested it to other people and they love it. If you are using it for a class I would be careful because the page numbers are not the same from a kindle to a paper copy. That cause some confusion with my professor. But the price was just so much better for ebook compared to paper back.

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