

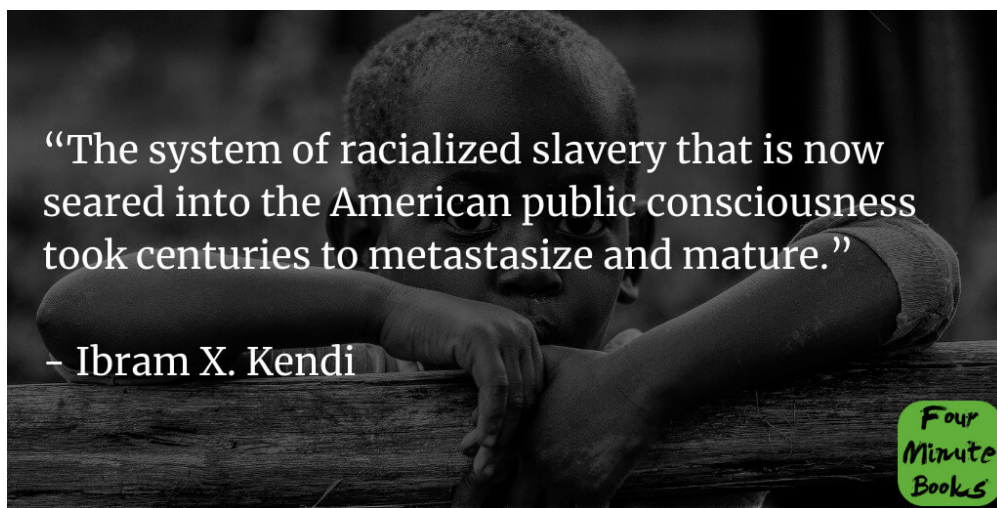
# Four Hundred Souls Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Four Hundred Souls* tells the history of African Americans from the perspective of 90 authors who share insights on 400 years of conflict, oppression, and faith that with all the hard work of those fighting for equality, things would get better someday.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Most American students can tell you the story of how the Pilgrims, some of the first non-native American settlers, arrived in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620. These Pilgrim passengers' names went down in history, and we still acknowledge their important role in shaping American history today.

But did you know there was another English ship that docked in Virginia just before that equally shaped the course of American History? It was the White Lion. Onboard was an English crew transporting around 24 Angola captives.

These captive people were sold as enslaved workers to Virginia's colonists. Unlike the Pilgrims we learned about in school, these people don't have names or stories. Even though they made history as the first Black residents of what would one day be the United States of America.

This is just one example of African Americans' complex and contested history, a history spanning 400 years. In *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019*, authors Ibram X. Kendi and Keisha N. Blain give a fresh, insightful retelling of

the history of Blacks in America. Drawing on the reflections of ninety authors, they bring an inspiring story of struggle, courage, and hope among the oppressed.

Here are just 3 of the many eye-opening lessons I got from this book:

1. The onslaught of slavery began as a slow process in which governments instituted a series of anti-Black laws.
2. Slavery took off after the American Revolution.
3. Today, the Black Lives Matter movement continues the struggle for equality.

Let's see just how much *Four Hundred Souls* can teach us!

## **Lesson 1: Anti-Black laws slowly entrenched slavery into society.**

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In the seventeenth century, ships leaving Liverpool transported an estimated 1.5 million enslaved African people to the Americas. Their motive? Money.

The elite in England was running a very profitable business with their American colonies. They were able to bring back valuable natural resources and abundant exports to sell in foreign markets. Production of these goods was mostly from indentured servants and slaves, meaning it was cheap but ferocious and exploitative.

In 1676, tensions between the colonial working class and the upper class began to grow worse. The workers included enslaved Blacks and white servants, and together they led a rebellion against their colonial governor. The elite began to be alarm at the potential of a multiracial rebellion while the insurrection is crush.

So the Virginia Assembly created laws to make sure this couldn't happen. They put restrictions on Black residents, such as restricting their freedom to move or carry anything that could be considered a weapon. Meanwhile, the white insurrectionists did not have such restrictions, making them feel empowered against their former allies.

**Laws like these fixed Black people in the spot of lowest class on society's hierarchy.** Another law in 1667 said that Christian baptism didn't mean an enslaved person had freedoms. This meant the church couldn't protect Black people, though it did give them community and hope.

## **Lesson 2: After the American Revolution, slavery exploded.**

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Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of Black oppression in America. In 1789, America elected its first president, George Washington. But in reality, only a small fraction of the population elected him—only white males over age 21. Naturally, their choice was a wealthy white war hero who was also a slave owner.

Slave ownership was all too common among presidents before the Civil War. In fact, twelve of them held enslaved people, which is pretty crazy if you think about it since they were leaders of the “free” world.

**But if the truth is told, even the documents that America was built around enshrined the institution of slavery.** While the word slavery isn’t said, it basically allowed slave owners to keep enslaved people under the guise of upholding citizens’ property rights.

From there, subsequent laws only strengthened the institution of slavery. In 1793, the Fugitive Slave Act was passed. This meant that if an enslaved individual could escape their bondage and move to a “free” state, they could be recaptured and brought back into slavery. In addition, it also made it illegal to help an escapee.

So as America grew, slavery grew too. People from the South became extremely wealthy as a result of their slave labor on cotton plantations. Many places across America were funded and built by the work of the enslaved.

As terrible as all of this was for Blacks, their culture still thrived. Those who are living enslaved still live their lives with meaning and love. Communities are strong and diverse and had a rich history. This only shows that even cruel oppression couldn’t take away their humanity.

### **Lesson 3: The struggle for equality has been going on for a long time and continues today through Black Lives Matter.**

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Jumping forward in time, we know that Black people finally got the rights they always should have had. But it doesn’t mean that they aren’t still dealing with institutional racism and oppression regularly.

Do you remember Hurricane Katrina? In 2005 a devastating hurricane hit New Orleans, a mostly Black city in Louisiana. The most devastating about it was that the US government fails to aid those who so desperately needed it.

The city lost half of its population in the disaster. The poorest people were forced to scatter around the region, and they were left to live in terrible conditions. **It was a humanitarian disaster that exposed the systemic disregard of the government for Blacks in America.**

Racial equality still hasn’t come yet for Blacks living in America. The racist War on Drugs was especially cruel to Black people, and America’s prison system has taken huge portions of Black communities. Black people still face violence and fear in their own neighborhoods because of police brutality.

But there may be some hope. The huge injustice that followed young Trayvon Martin's tragic murder prompted the beginning of Black Lives Matter, which we all know now as a global movement that demands protection and respect for Black lives.

Black Lives Matter serves to bring attention to the many Black people who are needlessly victims in racist policing. Millions now know the names of Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, and Renisha McBride. Thanks to BLM supporter's work. They continue to bring attention to racial injustice in America, allowing Blacks to have a voice in politics finally.

## **Four Hundred Souls Review**

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I hate racism. It makes no sense to me that you'd treat anybody, no matter how different they are, as if they had less value. *Four Hundred Souls* helped me understand just how deep this problem goes, and it's the kind of book that everybody should read to understand how America got here and what we can do to finally help Blacks achieve equality.

## **Who would I recommend the Four Hundred Souls summary to?**

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The 37-year-old American who wonders if what they were taught about their country in school was correct. The 65-year-old white supremacists and anyone who has any inkling of racism in their mind.