

How To Be Black Summary

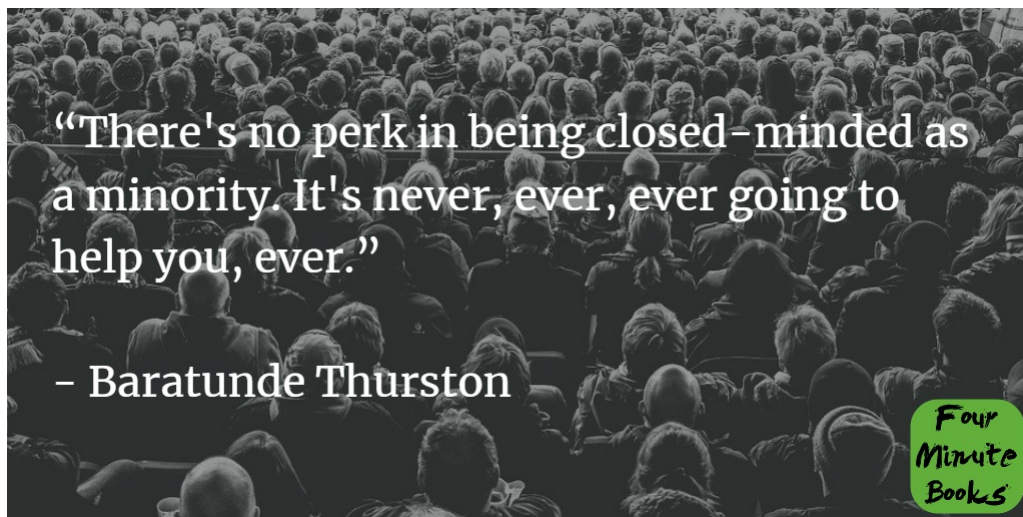


fourminutebooks.com

1-Sentence-Summary: *How To Be Black* is a personal story illustrating what it means to be black in a reality largely determined by the white culture.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



In theory, black and white people have been granted equal rights around the world. However, most people are aware that there are still race-induced issues present in our culture. What may be at the root of these problems is the lack of understanding between the black and white communities.

For whites, who often can't see their own privilege, some of the black people's problems may seem abstract. In many black communities, however, there are also a good deal of misconceptions about white people.

Baratunde Thurston was fortunate enough to have grown up on the intersection of the black and white cultures. Born an African American, he received education in traditionally white-dominated private schools, the most prestigious one being Harvard.

His unique experience gave him deep insight into the interaction of what often seems like two different worlds. The result? A humorous, but at the same time eye-opening, book: How To Be Black.

Here are 3 lessons about the reality of a black person's immersion in a world designed by the white:

1. As an African American, it can be difficult to get accepted by the native Africans.
2. Friendships between black and white people are valuable to both communities, as well as society as a whole.
3. Just because two people are black doesn't mean that they are allies.

Ready to hear the real story of a black man in America – and enjoy some laughs on the way? Let's go!

Lesson 1: Being an African American doesn't necessarily help you connect with native Africans.

For a white person who can't imagine being black, it may seem that the blackness of the skin is enough of a bonding factor. A lot of people don't realize that within what they call the "black culture," divisions are also present.

In his childhood, Thurston often found it hard to feel a sense of belonging to groups. At school, he stood out around his white peers. His African name, Baratunde, didn't help.

A lot of white teachers would mispronounce it, calling him everything from Barry Tune to "Bartender." This was as embarrassing for the teacher, as it was for the author himself. His name could virtually never go unnoticed.

But the issues connected to carrying around this originally Nigerian, uncommon name, weren't limited to white people mispronouncing it. **In fact, Thurston realized that the native Nigerians sometimes had more trouble accepting it than white people.**

As an example, he once had to endure a difficult phone call with his Nigerian friend's dad, who thought it was outrageous that an African American could be named Baratunde. He gave Thurston a tirade and lectured him on the meaning of his name – even though Thurston knew it.

His friend's dad simply treated him from a position of superiority – exactly what white people are often accused of when it comes to their ways of "dealing with blacks." The difference was that, in this case, Thurston seemed to not have been "black enough."

Lesson 2: One of the best ways to bridge the gap between black and white people is to encourage mixed-race friendships.

When he went to school, Thurston initially struggled to make friends. There were only a handful of other black kids around – and even the visual impression this created felt, at the very least, awkward.

As him and the few other Afro-american children naturally gravitated towards each other, white kids saw this as something like an “exclusive club” for blacks only. It was hard for them to understand that, as a minority, black kids often clung to each other by default.

But that wasn’t always the case. One day at school, Thurston’s friend introduced him to the concept of “Oreo.” He explained that an “Oreo” was a someone black on the outside, but white inside. This meant a black person who, by hanging out with the white kids, were making themselves feel better.

Such barriers often made it difficult for black and white kids to become friends. But, as Thurston illustrates with ample examples, it was never impossible. **He argues that cross-racial friendships are actually a very valuable way to transform society as a whole.**

When black and white people hang out together and trust each other, miracles can happen for both communities. Through the channel of genuine friendship, members of the white and black community can obtain insights that wouldn’t be available in their own cultural bubble.

This, Thurston says, can enable mitigating the problems of racism and grow mutual understanding between the formerly antagonistic groups.

Lesson 3: Skin color and cultural identity aren’t good predictors of people’s worldview and solidarity.

There is a common misconception that the black hold shared opinions on affairs such as politics or social justice. Just because of the color of their skin, people assume that they “think the same thing,” Thurston points out.

Of course, no one says this explicitly. But this type of ignorance can easily be seen in certain behaviors or questions people ask. Thurston frequently ran into an example of that in his office, when colleagues would corner him to ask about his views about President Obama. It was obvious from the way they asked that they expected him to deliver some sort of a “black community stance” on the topic.

So here is an important bias to watch out for. **Just because people share the same skin color or culture, it doesn’t mean that they are allies in the political, or any other, matter.**

Thurston observed this to be true also when meeting black colleagues at his new job. Some of them, in fact, showed him the opposite of solidarity.

One reason for this was what Thurston refers to as “black denial.” These were simply the people refusing to acknowledge their blackness and, hence, denying to have anything in common with Thurston.

So, as it shows – racial labels are still present in both white and black people’s minds. The best we can all do together is to gradually work on diminishing their importance in the way we interact with each other.

Would you like some audio with that?

Try Blinkist. It's Four Minute Books on steroids. They have over 3,500 summaries and audios.

[Try it free for 7 days »](#)

How To Be Black Review

How To Be Black is a perfect example of how well one person’s story can capture society as a whole. Thurston’s book brings the much-needed humor and distance into the fragile topics of racism, equality and inclusiveness. At the same time, he treats those problems with an appropriate dose of seriousness – which makes his book as eye-opening, as it is entertaining.

[Read full summary on Blinkist >>](#)

[Free Preview >>](#)

[Learn more about the author >>](#)

Who would I recommend the How To Be Black summary to?

The 21-year-old cultural studies student who wants to get a deeper understanding of racial conflicts, the 32-year-old parent of a mixed-race child who wants to teach them how to bridge the gaps between the black and white communities, and to anyone passionate about equality and social justice.