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“HOW TO BE AN ANTI-RACIST”

BOOK PRESENTATION WITH THE AUTHOR (IBRAM X. KENDI)

AMERICAN ACADEMY AND BERLIN-BRANDENBURG ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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Welcome Address

How to become an anti-racist? This is how I would have to describe the title of Ibram X. Kendi, in whose honour we have gathered this evening, if I wanted to relate the theme of this iconic book from 2019 to this place, our year 2022 and the institution I lead. For it is, dear Ibram Kendi, sad but true: we have had all kinds of debates about racism in the neighbourhood, but hardly ever in this house of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, the former Prussian Academy. For example, there has been a heated public debate about the name of Mohrenstraße and the underground station of the same name, just two streets away, although it is still not clear which groups of people of colour gave the street its name, perhaps black people from today's Ghana, the then Prussian colony of Groß-Friedrichsburg. And of course – this is another example – we are witnessing a heated debate about how the ethnological museum in the Humboldt Forum, where Central European curators exhibit art from Africa according to European taxonomies, can become a self-presentation of corresponding indigenous populations. Today's event is taking place in the building of the former Prussian state bank. Its official denomination – *Seehandlung* – shows that it had its origins in the trade with overseas, with the so-called colonies. It is evident that manifold problems, from othering to oppression, are intertwined with this legacy; the reappraisal of this dimension of the colonial history of Berlin's economy and sciences has only just begun and the Academy sees itself as initiator and stimulator of such research into the colonial past of this building, of Berlin's institutions and of the former Prussian state. The same applies, of course, to the Academy itself and its projects associated with the colonial past, such as research into the Silk Road, the Middle East or Egypt. Of course, I know that postcolonial studies and education about the colonial past do not yet ensure that we here in Berlin have become anti-racists or, in any case, are in the process of unlearning our everyday racism. Yet both steps are connected – and the Academy wants to take these steps and wants to take them together.

I am very pleased that Daniel Benjamin of the American Academy has suggested that we join forces with Ibram X. Kendi's publisher, btb-Verlag, to welcome you all here for this joint invitation. For the city of Berlin – at least for people who, like me, come from the former West Berlin – the word *America* is primarily associated with freedom and only secondarily with slavery, first of all with democracy and only then with Trump and his attempt to overthrow democracy. And that is why I am so particularly pleased that today an American institution is shining a light on us, as it were, to use that old metaphor from the Enlightenment. I think that by now, we are all in the same boat, perhaps some further ahead and others further behind, and we need to row together in Europe to become even more and even more successful

anti-racists. You will forgive a historian, if he will always also make the connection between the indispensable educational work on such matters and historical research in this field: it is a specific task of the Academy to carry out such research as well as to inform the public about it. In this respect, I feel that today's event is a prelude to a longer series of events and research tasks, and I would like to once again thank my highly esteemed colleague Daniel Benjamin for all his initiatives and solidarity. Fighting for freedom in the sense that without anti-racism, there is no freedom for everyone, and thus no freedom at all – such a fight, it seems to me, has become an even more important concern in recent times, now that it has become clear to everybody, just how quickly freedom may be lost, regardless of whether it is at the Capitol in Washington, on Maidan Square in Kiev, or here at the Gendarmenmarkt on our doorstep. Welcome to all of you at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy!