

The End of Bias

A Beginning

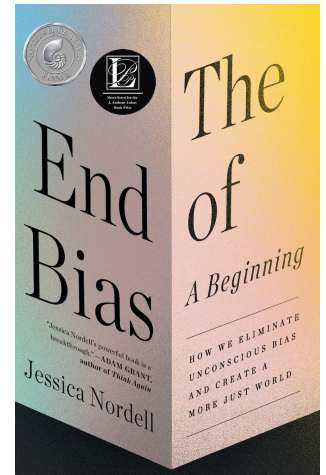
Academic Guide and Teaching Notes

About the book

When it comes to bias and discrimination, what actually changes people and cultures?

Journalist Jessica Nordell is an award-winning author and science writer who has covered bias for the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, and the *New Republic*. With fifteen years' immersion in the topic of unconscious bias, Nordell set out on a global quest for solutions. *The End of Bias: A Beginning* reveals how people, organizations, and communities become **measurably less biased** and more fair, just, and humane.

In *The End of Bias*, Nordell takes you behind the scenes with individuals, organizations, and communities that have transformed for the better. Weaving gripping stories with scientific research, Nordell reveals what changed and how, from the Johns Hopkins doctors whose checklist eliminated gender bias, to the California police unit that rebuilt trust by humanizing both officers and community members, to the Swedish teachers who found ingenious ways to uproot stereotyping.



While bias robs organizations of talent, communities of justice, science of breakthroughs, and individuals of their futures, biased behavior can change. This capacious, hope-giving book of solutions journalism lays out a path to greater fairness, justice, and healing.

The End of Bias: A Beginning was shortlisted for the Columbia Journalism/Lukas Prize for Excellence in Nonfiction, the NYPL Bernstein Book Award for Excellence in Journalism, and the Royal Society Science Book Prize. It won the Nautilus Award and was a finalist for the American Association of Science Writers Book Prize and the American Association of Journalists and Authors Book Prize. *The End of Bias* was named a Best Book of the Year by the World Economic Forum, Greater Good, AARP, and Inc and is currently being used by organizations from newsrooms and universities to NBA teams and healthcare organizations to solve some of their biggest cultural challenges.

In these pages, you'll learn:

- How organizations have reduced bias and increased fairness and trust
- How unconscious, unexamined bias operates—on cognitive, psychological, and social levels
- What enables individuals, from doctors to teachers to police officers, to behave in more fair and just ways
- Which strategies bolster interpersonal understanding and empathy
- How to restructure business and organizational practices for greater inclusion
- How we eliminate the idea of a monolithic “other”
- What we *all* gain from creating less biased, more humane cultures

About the author:

Jessica Nordell is a journalist, author, and speaker known for blending rigorous science with compassionate humanity. Deeply engaged with connecting across differences, Nordell has covered the subject of bias and discrimination and how to solve it for publications including the *New York Times*, the *Atlantic*, the *Guardian*, and the *New Republic*. Named a Best New Poet by Tracy K. Smith, her multidisciplinary background (with degrees in physics from Harvard and poetry from the University of Wisconsin) has led to cross-disciplinary collaborations such as a computer simulation of workplace bias, which became a viral NYT story. She has been a visiting scholar at MIT and featured speaker at SXSW, and is the recipient of a Gracie Award from American Women in Radio and Television.

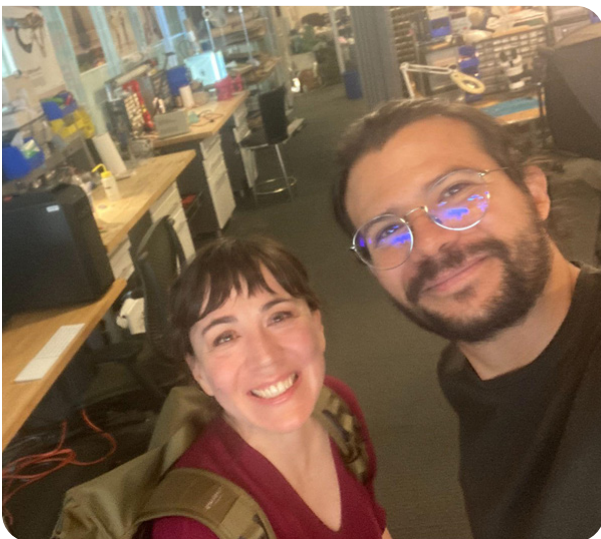
The End of Bias

on campus



“It was a great pleasure and - honestly - an exciting, galvanizing experience to have you with us at the Media Lab last week. Your talk was both brilliant and passionate, your interactions with everyone you met - and particularly with students - were authentic and probing, and your impact on our community was immediately electric. I can’t thank you enough for all that you did for and with our community, and we all look forward to welcoming you back.”

- Tod Machover, Academic Director, MIT Media Lab



“Jessica Nordell brings a scholarly magic and moving humanity to discussions of race, gender, and inclusivity. Her talk brings dazzling clarity to issues and dynamics that have been obscured and historically unaddressed. Even with her incredible wealth of knowledge, research and unforgettable anecdotes, the talk was truly a conversation and was powerfully open and genuine in its concern for all people involved. Jessica Nordell is one of those rare speakers whose keynote and their Q&A are equally impressive, mindful yet urgent.”

-Vejea Jennings, Professor of English, Umoja Faculty Lead and AAMEND Advisor, Antelope Valley College

“What’s most impressive was Ms. Nordell’s sincere engagement with our student community, both in the bespoke keynote she delivered and in the robust student-led Q&A. Our students found Ms. Nordell not only an accomplished writer and thinker, but also an approachable, funny, and relatable human being who just so happened to challenge our collective beliefs.”

- Kyle Abbott, George School

Talks of Note

- MIT Media Lab
- Northeastern University
- Rotman School, Univ of Toronto
- University of Buffalo
- Carleton College
- Johnson County Community College
- Antelope Valley College
- University of Southern California
- University of Minnesota
- Conference on the First Year Experience
- George School
- Rabbinical Assembly
- World Economic Forum podcast
- SXSW
- Microsoft
- PBS NewsHour
- Keysight Technologies
- McKinsey
- The Royal Society (UK)
- Indeed
- The Good Life Project
- American Library in Paris
- Jewish Book Council
- Leading Equity
- Eyeo Festival
- 10% Happier
- Design Matters

This book is suitable for the following types of undergraduate and graduate courses:

- Inclusive Business and Leadership
- Health, Health Equity and Public Health
- Educational Leadership and Educational Equity
- Ethics
- Women's Studies
- Communications and Media Studies
- Psychology of Prejudice, Sociology, Political Science
- Digital Technology, AI, and Data Science
- Criminal Justice
- Writing
- Public Policy
- Social Work

Ways Your University Can Use The Book

- Add the book to your syllabus as required or recommended reading (see the next page for accompanying discussion guides)
- Make the book required reading for incoming freshman or select the book for your First Year Experience program
- Give the book to faculty, staff, and graduating classes
- Invite Jessica to give a keynote to your students (contact hello@jessicanordell.com or ciao@thelavinagency.com for more info)
- Invite Jessica to Zoom into classes reading the book (contact hello@jessicanordell.com for more info)

Ways Educators Are Using The End of Bias: A Beginning

- The University of Texas at Austin Moody College of Communication is assigning the book in a stereotyping and prejudice course
- The MIT Media Lab distributed the book to faculty and students as part of Jessica's Visiting Scholar residency
- Columbia University is using the book in a social theory course
- Portland State University is using the book in the course "Ethical Leadership in Criminal Justice"
- Rutgers University's MBA program is teaching Nordell's work in a labor studies course
- Carnegie Mellon University is using Nordell's simulation of workplace gender bias in the course "Statistics of Inequality and Discrimination"
- Faculty from Queens College, Baruch College, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and Queensboro CC taught the book as part of a Mellon fellowship at CUNY
- Johnson County Community College used the book's core ideas to anchor its Healthcare Simulation Conference, with Jessica providing the keynote talk
- The Summer Health Professions Education Program (SHPEP) at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, in collaboration with McGovern Medical School, School of Dentistry, School of Nursing, and School of Public Health, discussed Jessica's work on healthcare interventions

Discussion Questions

General Discussion Questions

1. The author argues that we can interrupt our unexamined biases. Did you find this argument persuasive? Did your position shift as you read the book?
2. The author suggests that creating more mental categories for others, rather than fewer, can help limit our biases. What do you think of this idea? Does this seem counterintuitive?
3. Nordell struggles with the tension between recognizing differences (which can lead to essentializing) and downplaying differences (which can lead to feelings of invisibility and disrespect). How do you think this tension is best handled?
4. Do you believe unconsciously biased behavior is the responsibility of individuals, organizations, or the larger society to address? What role should laws and policies play in reducing this form of discrimination?
5. Which parts of *The End of Bias: A Beginning* resonated most strongly with you? Were there parts you disagreed with, and if so, why?
6. Which approaches to reducing bias described here do you see as most viable? Why?

For Courses in Leadership and Business

1. After reading this book, how do you think leaders can best reduce bias in organizations?
2. How might the NormCorp. workplace simulation from Chapter 3 apply to other types of bias and other organizations?
3. Chapter 7 outlines an approach to reducing bias that involves changing processes rather than people. What are the strengths and limitations of this approach?
4. Chapter 8 outlines a creative way one organization increased diversity. How might this approach apply to other organizations? What are the strengths and limitations of this approach?
5. The CEO Gianmarco Monsellato claims that leaders benefit most from people who are not like them, because they'll provide the most challenge, and better decisions come from ideas being scrutinized. Do you agree with this statement? Do you see any limitations to this view?
6. Defensiveness can interrupt the potential for change. Have you ever responded with defensiveness around the topic of unconscious bias, and if so, what might limit defensiveness in yourself or others?

For Courses in Education

1. In her “yellow shirt” studies, psychologist Rebecca Bigler found that emphasizing categories can increase discrimination. Does this affect your view of educational practices such as single-sex education or tracking? Why or why not?
2. One of the researchers profiled, Jason Okonofua, focuses on increasing empathy and perspective-taking in teachers, rather than on reducing bias. What are the strengths and limitations of this approach?
3. The Swedish schools outlined in Chapter 10 try to limit gender stereotyping by changing the way they speak to and about children. What are the strengths and limitations of this approach?
4. Psychiatrists Chester Pierce and Gail Allen have argued that prejudice against children underlies all other forms of oppression, as it “teaches everyone how to be an oppressor.” What do you think of this argument?

For Courses in Health, Health Equity, Public Health, and Social Work

1. How might the NormCorp. simulation in Chapter 3 help explain other complex phenomena, such as the chronic, stress-fueled aging known as weathering?
2. Chapter 7 outlines an approach to reducing bias that involves changing processes rather than people. What are the strengths and limitations of this approach?
3. Some research suggests that subtle bias can have more detrimental consequences than overt bias because its ambiguity demands more mental and emotional resources. What impact do you see subtle bias having on patient-provider or client-provider relationships?
4. Psychologist Nicole Shelton has called for bias to be researched as a dynamic that happens between people, because both parties respond to each other’s actions. Why might this perspective be so important in healthcare and social services in particular?
5. How has reading this book made you think differently about tackling bias in healthcare or social work?
6. Which parts of *The End of Bias: A Beginning* resonated most strongly with you? Were there parts you disagreed with, and if so, why?

For Courses in Social Science

1. Psychologist Nicole Shelton has called for bias to be researched as a dynamic that happens between people, because both parties respond to each other's actions. Why do you think this perspective has been overlooked?
2. One of the psychologists profiled in Chapter 4, Jason Okonofua, focuses on increasing empathy and perspective-taking in teachers, rather than on reducing bias. What are the strengths and limitations of this approach?
3. Psychologist Patricia Devine's perspective is that our biases are unconscious associations which are entirely separate from our beliefs. Other research suggests our biased behavior is an expression of our deep beliefs. Which perspective do you believe is correct and why? Does your answer influence how you think bias should be addressed?
4. How might the NormCorp. workplace simulation from Chapter 3 apply to other types of bias?
5. How are the research questions pursued in social science influenced by the makeup of the researchers in these fields?

For Courses in Ethics

1. The NormCorp. simulation in Chapter 3 finds that large effects can emerge from seemingly minor interactions. How might these findings apply to other organizations or communities?
2. One approach Nordell outlines involves changing social norms. How important do you believe social norms are to the development of ethical behavior?
3. Psychiatrists Chester Pierce and Gail Allen have argued that prejudice against children underlies all other forms of oppression, as it "teaches everyone how to be an oppressor." What do you think of this argument?
4. Psychologist Patricia Devine's perspective is that our biases are unconscious associations which are entirely separate from our beliefs. Other research suggests our biased behavior is an expression of our deep beliefs. Which perspective do you believe is correct and why? Does your answer inform how you think bias should be addressed?
5. The idea of "blind auditions" seems to conflict with the importance of acknowledging and respecting differences. What do you make of this tension?

For Courses in Communications and Marketing

1. Drawing on ideas from the book, how do you think media should approach the problem of stereotyping and discrimination?
2. What role do social norms play in perpetuating bias? What role does the media have in creating social norms—and how might it harness this power?
3. Psychiatrists Chester Pierce and Gail Allen have argued that prejudice against children underlies all other forms of oppression, as it “teaches everyone how to be an oppressor.” What do you think about this claim?
4. Why do you think the poster experiment in France, outlined in Chapter 10, was effective at reducing discrimination? What might media and communications practices learn from this approach?
5. What role does bias play in communications and in marketing?

For Courses in Women's Studies

1. One study found that people who believed that gender discrimination was no longer a problem in their field rated a male employee as more competent than an identical female employee, and also recommended an 8-percent higher salary. What might explain this?
2. How does the NormCorp. simulation affect your perspective on the challenges of gender equality?
3. How do you think the author's own experiences as a woman affected her approach to the subject of bias?
4. Psychologist Nicole Shelton has called for bias to be researched as a dynamic that happens between people, because both parties respond to each other's actions. How might this perspective help illuminate women's choices at work, at home, and in the world?
5. Contact theory, outlined in Chapter 6, suggests that if one group of people gets to know another group as equals, false beliefs may be replaced with complex, accurate perceptions. Do you think this approach would be successful in reducing gender bias? Why or why not?
6. The author argues that any field that is dominated by a limited range of human experience will find itself hampered by limited access to human ingenuity. How has women's exclusion hampered the progress of a field, discipline, or area of research?
7. Mentoring and role models are considered to be proven ways to boost marginalized groups' success. Have you had experience of either mentoring or being mentored, and what impact did it have on you or on others?

For Courses in Criminal Justice and Public Policy

1. Which approaches outlined in the book lend themselves to public policy recommendations?
2. Did Chapters 5 and 6 change your perspective on police-community relations? Do you feel more hopeful, less hopeful, or did you have another response entirely?
3. Chronic stress, the author writes, “creates a perfect storm for bias.” How does chronic stress exacerbate bias, and how might the approaches outlined in Chapter 5 reduce bias?
4. Do you think the public safety approach described in Chapter 6 is widely applicable? What factors would have to be present to replicate this program? What challenges might a community face in implementing this approach?
5. What does Allport’s idea of contact theory imply for structuring public safety initiatives?
6. The author argues that crime reduction requires neither aggressive policing nor incarceration. Do you agree with this perspective? Why or why not?

For Courses in Writing

1. What role do unconscious biases play in writing and communication?
2. Which approaches outlined here do you think will be most useful in combating bias in writing?
3. What choices did the author make in terms of tone and diction? Do you think they served the purpose of the book, and why or why not?
4. How did the author use rhythm, pacing, and figurative language to communicate her key ideas?
5. The author blends narrative with analysis to explore key case studies throughout the book. Do you think she achieved the right balance? Why or why not?

What Other Educators Are Saying About the Book

“In this highly engaging and well-researched book, Jessica Nordell weaves together a cogent blend of neuroscience and social science to explain the pervasiveness of unconscious bias and, most importantly, what we can do about it. Full of real-life examples and evidence-based interventions, *The End of Bias: A Beginning* demonstrates that change is possible. In need of some hope? Start here!”

– **Beverly Daniel Tatum, Ph.D., President Emerita of Spelman College and author of *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race***



Adam Grant (He/Him) · [in](#) · 1st
Organizational psychologist at Wharton, #1 NYT bestselling author of T...
1yr · Edited · [🗨](#)

My new recommended reads explore time management, motivation and resilience, diversity, inclusion, and belonging, power, and leadership and management. ...see more



The 10 New Leadership Books to Wrap Up Summer and Kick Off Fall

Adam Grant on LinkedIn · 2 min read

As the summer winds to a close and COVID surges again, I can't think of a better distracti...

[👍](#) [❤️](#) [🗨](#) 10,870

325 comments · 777 reposts

“Despite revolutions in our understanding of bias, we’re still much better at documenting the problem than solving it. When it comes to prevention and cure, Jessica Nordell’s powerful book is a breakthrough. With state-of-the-art science and gripping narratives, she reveals what concrete steps individuals, groups, and institutions can take to fight prejudice.”

– **Adam Grant, Ph.D., Wharton Professor and author of *Think Again: The Power of Knowing What You Don't Know***

“A brilliant, provocative and important book”.

– **Tod Machover, Cooper Professor of Music and Media and Academic Head of the Program in Media Arts and Sciences, MIT Media Lab**

“Phenomenal. Such great research and clear writing for a difficult set of concepts. In my course on misinformation I always remind the students that this problem we have with bias and disinformation and the rest of the issues do not fall into any one category or discipline, and that many of the problems we see in the news related to them often start at some deeper level. Your book comes closest to that idea for me and that’s why I think it’s spot-on.”

– **Dan Chibnall, Drake University STEM Librarian & Associate Professor of Librarianship**

“I love this book. The final chapter was a moving tour de force! Your optimism was offered with the nuance and humility such a complex topic requires. There is a natural connection between this work and my work– deep humility and a sharing of epistemic authority among all the parties involved in addressing emotional/cognitive distress is required in my field.”

– **Sandra Steingard, M.D., Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Vermont Larner College of Medicine**

What Other Educators Are Saying About the Book

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“*The End of Bias: A Beginning* is a personal testament not only to the fiery mind of Jessica Nordell but to her heart’s yearning for a world in which equity and justice prevail. It is a reckoning with the tools of our time in confronting the problem of our time.”

- **Kao Kalia Yang, M.F.A., Visiting Faculty at Pacific University and University of Minnesota, and author of *The Latehomecomer***

“

“The simulation in particular was fascinating! I asked my MBA students to read the article for my organizational strategy class to help illustrate the compounding effects of gender bias in career advancement, and they found it very instructional.”

- **Elizabeth Campbell, Assistant Professor of Management at the Rady School of Management at UC San Diego**

“

“Your book is informative, challenging and contributes to making the world a better place. Maybe, together, we can shift the needle.”

- **Richard Goerling, Criminal Justice faculty at Portland State University**

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“Required reading for anyone in charge of or interested in improving the relationship between police and citizens. Urgent reading for those in Colombia who are in charge of or investigating this topic.”

- **Lina Cespedes, Ph.D., Professor, Faculty of Law, Universidad del Rosario, Colombia**

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“I’ve used *End of Bias* in my social theory course -- especially the slow imperceptible accumulation of bias as inbuilt and inertial in an organization’s design and routines.”

- **Kim Hopper, Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health**

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“It was one of the most eye opening books I’ve read in a while, I’ve been recommending it to everybody and at any events I’ve been speaking at.”

- **Steph Wright, Head of Scottish AI Alliance**

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“Your book was one of the most life-changing books I’ve read.”

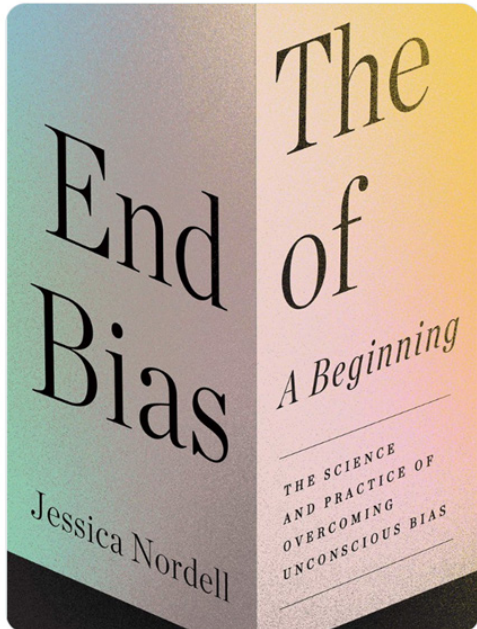
- **University of Kansas nursing professor**

What Other Educators Are Saying About the Book



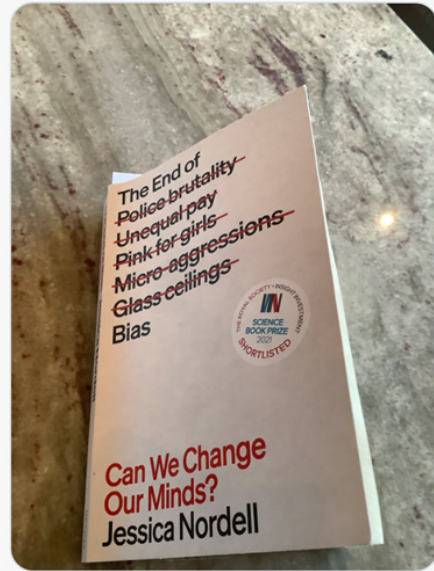
Dan Chibnall @bookowl · Apr 5

This book is extraordinary and refreshing. It's what we need right now. I'll definitely be having students read this in the near future. Excellent work, @jessnordell. [bookshop.org/books/the-end-...](https://bookshop.org/books/the-end-of-bias)



Owen West @PolicingCrowds · Aug 9

This by @jessnordell is **superb on a range of issues** but especially on **police use of force, officer wellbeing, police legitimacy and community relationships.** Recommended



Dan Chibnall @bookowl · Apr 6

Replying to @jessnordell

Seriously, thanks for researching & writing this. I'm recommending it to everyone. It really cuts through some of the traditional/mainstream writing on the issue of biases too.

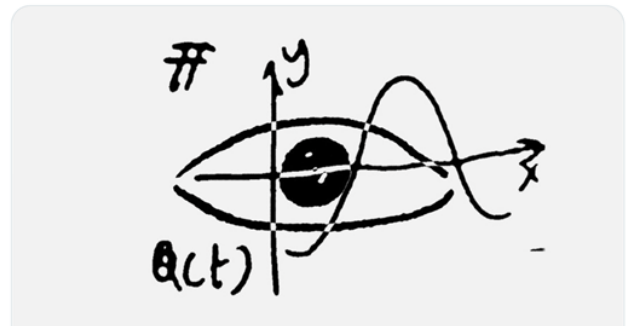
– Dan Chibnall, Drake University
STEM Librarian & Associate Professor of Librarianship

– Owen West, Senior Law Lecturer, European Humanities University



Carnegie Math Pathways @carnegiemath · Sep 28, 2021

This article is just—whew! What a lovely depiction of how fostering inclusion in classrooms can make all the difference in **students'** self-perception as math learners & doers. It's what we strive for with every educator we partner with. ow.ly/tiWk5OGijzD @jessnordell



theatlantic.com

Math Is Personal

How one professor changed the culture of mathematics for his students

–Carnegie Math Pathways

More Reviews of The End of Bias: A Beginning

“Too often people think in terms of discrete moments a degrading meeting here, a fleeting comment there but Nordell points out that bias is often iterative and chronic... This isn't a book that lets anyone off the hook. *The End of Bias* argues for a more profound sense of responsibility.”

– **The New York Times Book Review**

“Presents many convincing accounts of bias being reduced... emphasizes, above all, the urgent need for systemic solutions.”

– **The New Yorker**

“A reflective and capacious thinker.”

–**Jennifer Szalai, NYT**

“I can think of few things more important, more potentially meaningful and actionable to a reader, than what is in *The End of Bias*.”

– **Jenny Odell, Bestselling author of *How To Do Nothing***

“Skilfully and sensitively explores ways to eradicate bias in society and oneself. Interviewing cognitive scientists and social psychologists, [Nordell] covers a huge range of methods, such as doctors' diagnostic checklists for gender equality, and a police unit practising mindfulness to diminish its use of force.”

- **Nature**

“[A] thoughtful case for mounting a lifelong challenge to our own assumptions... rousing... As the author explains, overcoming internalised bias isn't a matter of flipping a mental switch; it is a lifelong process of constantly questioning our deeply held beliefs. None of us is immune.”

– **The Guardian**

“We all have unconscious bias; it underlies our most destructive behavior. But we can change it. Informative, compassionate and necessary.”

– **Ruth Ozeki, author of *A Tale for the Time Being* and *The Book of Form and Emptiness*, AARP Magazine**

More Reviews of The End of Bias: A Beginning

“A virtuoso survey of scientific research on the causes of prejudice and programs [to address it] . . . Throughout, Nordell holds her own biases up to scrutiny . . . and draws vivid character sketches of her profile subjects. The result is a refreshingly optimistic and immersive look at how society can solve one of its thorniest problems.”

– **Publishers Weekly (starred review)**

“My favorite book of the last year.”

– **Eve Rodsky, New York Times bestselling author of *Fair Play* and founder of the Fair Play Policy Institute**

“A shrewd dissection of the implicit bias in the human psyche and how it could be trained to transcend it. Nordell digs deep into the realms of cognitive and social psychology, anthropology and developmental research to identify all the factors that contribute to our implicit and unconscious biases . . . Nordell not only highlights errors in our cognitive processes but also goes into depth about how to rectify them . . . *The End of Bias* is an exhaustively researched, illuminating book on what leads to bias and how to avoid those pitfalls.”

– **Rabecca Saleem, The Irish Times**

“*The End of Bias: A Beginning* opens up a new chapter on the movement to eradicate unconscious bias in some of its more pernicious arenas (education, policing, medicine, and beyond). Using a blend of scientific research and firsthand accounts, Nordell offers a practical approach to how we can move forward.”

– **Sloane Crosley, Departures Magazine**