

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

me and white supremacy

"Buy this book for yourself, your family, your students. Don't put it off and don't look away. It's time."

—ELIZABETH GILBERT,
New York Times
bestselling author

Combat Racism,
Change the World, and
Become a Good Ancestor

FOREWORD BY ROBIN DIANGELO

LAYLA F. SAAD

Praise for
me and white supremacy

“America needed this book yesterday. In fact, America has always needed this book. Layla Saad is one of the most important and valuable teachers we have right now on the subject of white supremacy and racial injustice. With keen intelligence and tireless patience, she is working to remove our collective cultural blind spots and to help—at last—change minds and transform society. I have the deepest respect for her. Buy this book for yourself, your family, your students. Don’t put it off and don’t look away. It’s time.”

ELIZABETH GILBERT, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Layla F. Saad’s *Me and White Supremacy* teaches readers exactly how to get past the paralysis of white fragility so that they can build bridges, not walls.”

SOPHIA BUSH, award-winning actress and activist

“The book of a lifetime that will transform lives.”

REEMA ZAMAN, award-winning actress, speaker, activist, and author of *I Am Yours*

“I suspect that as a result of *Me and White Supremacy*, we will never be the same.”

EBONYJANICE MOORE, author, activist, scholar,
and founder of Black Girl Mixtape Institute

“This book is a revolution that will create ripples and waves for an entire generation of truth-seekers.”

REBEKAH BORUCKI, bestselling author of *Managing the Motherload*

“Layla Saad is an unapologetic force against white supremacy.”

JASMIN KAUR, author of *When You Ask Me Where I'm Going*

“*Me and White Supremacy* summons forth a new type of leadership and accountability that this time so desperately calls for and is the pathway to a greater healing that generations of people and communities so desperately need.”

LATHAM THOMAS, author of *Own Your Glow* and founder of Mama Glow

This excerpt is made available with the express permission of the author.

me and white supremacy

Combat Racism,
Change the World, and
Become a Good Ancestor

LAYLA F. SAAD

 sourcebooks

Copyright © 2020 by Layla F. Saad
Cover and internal design © 2020 by Sourcebooks
Cover design by Sourcebooks
Internal artwork by Laurie Jacobsen
Cover images © Marjeta Sustarsic/Getty Images

Sourcebooks and the colophon are registered trademarks of Sourcebooks.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems—except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews—without permission in writing from its publisher, Sourcebooks.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional service. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought. —*From a Declaration of Principles Jointly Adopted by a Committee of the American Bar Association and a Committee of Publishers and Associations*

All brand names and product names used in this book are trademarks, registered trademarks, or trade names of their respective holders. Sourcebooks is not associated with any product or vendor in this book.

Excerpt(s) from *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* by Robin DiAngelo copyright © 2018 by Robin DiAngelo. Reprinted with permission from Beacon Press, Boston, Massachusetts. Excerpt(s) from *Sister Outsider* by Audre Lorde copyright © 1984, 2007 by Audre Lorde, used with permission from Ten Speed Press, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Excerpt(s) from *Americanah* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, copyright © 2013 by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Used by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, an imprint of the Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Excerpt(s) from *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates, copyright © 2015 by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Used by permission of Spiegel & Grau, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Excerpt(s) from *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown, copyright © 2018 by Austin Channing Brown. Used by permission of Crown Books, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. *Parable of the Sower* copyright © 1993 by Octavia E. Butler. Reprinted by permission of Writers House LLC acting as agent for the Estate. *Parable of the Talents* copyright © 1998 by Octavia E. Butler. Reprinted by permission of Writers House LLC acting as agent for the Estate. Excerpt(s) from *White Like Me* by Tim Wise, copyright © 2008, 2011 by Tim Wise. Reprinted by permission of Counterpoint Press. Excerpt(s) from *The Salt Eaters* by Toni Cade Bambara, copyright © 1980 by Toni Cade Bambara. Used by permission of Random House, an imprint and division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved. Excerpt(s) from *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, copyright © 2017 by Angie Thomas. Excerpt(s) from "Barbarian" by Mona Haydar, copyright © 2018 by Mona Haydar. Used by permission of Mona Haydar.

I appreciate The Circle Way's spirit of generosity allowing people access to their information and practice. Its inclusion in this book does not indicate endorsement. Readers are encouraged to explore thecircleway.net, to find other open materials and to read the book, *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010).

Published by Sourcebooks
P.O. Box 4410, Naperville, Illinois 60567-4410
(630) 961-3900
sourcebooks.com

Originally published as *The Me and White Supremacy Workbook* in 2019 by Layla F. Saad.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file with the publisher.

Printed and bound in the United States of America.

LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For Sam, Maya, and Mohamed.
Thank you for loving me, believing in me,
and inspiring me to be a good ancestor.*

*I love you.
This is for you.*

*To shape God
With wisdom and forethought
To benefit your world,
Your people,
Your life,
Consider consequences
Minimize harm
Ask questions,
Seek answers,
Learn,
Teach.*

*Earthseed: The Books of the Living I,
Verse 43; Octavia Butler, Parable of the Talents*

contents

FOREWORD	xi
PART I: Welcome to the Work	1
A Little about Me	7
What Is White Supremacy?	12
Who Is This Work For?	15
What You Will Need to Do This Work	17
How to Use This Book	21
Self-Care, Support, and Sustainability	24
PART II: The Work	29
Week 1: The Basics	31
Week 2: Anti-Blackness, Racial Stereotypes, and Cultural Appropriation	75
Week 3: Allyship	125
Week 4: Power, Relationships, and Commitments	171

Now What? Continuing the Work after Day 28	207
APPENDIX: Working in Groups: <i>Me and White Supremacy</i>	
Book Circles	211
RESOURCES	226
Glossary	226
Further Learning	231
NOTES	235
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	239
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	241

PART I

**welcome to
the work**

Dear Reader,

How did you feel the first time you saw the title of this book? Were you surprised? Confused? Intrigued? Uncomfortable? Maybe all of the above? I want to begin by reassuring you that all those feelings and more are completely normal. This is a simple and straightforward book, but it is not an easy one. Welcome to the work.

I'm Layla, and for (at least!) the next twenty-eight days, I'm going to be guiding you on a journey to help you explore and unpack your relationship with white supremacy. This book is a one-of-a-kind personal antiracism tool structured to help people with white privilege understand and take ownership of their participation in the oppressive system of white supremacy. It is designed to help them take responsibility for dismantling the way that this system manifests, both within themselves and within their communities.

The primary force that drives my work is a passionate desire to become a good ancestor. My purpose is to help create change, facilitate healing, and seed new possibilities for those who will come after I am gone. This book is a contribution to that purpose. It is a resource that I hope will help you do the internal and external work needed to become a good ancestor too. To leave this world in a better place than you have found it. The system of white supremacy was not created by anyone who is alive today. But it is

maintained and upheld by everyone who holds white privilege—whether or not you want it or agree with it. It is my desire that this book will help you to question, challenge, and dismantle this system that has hurt and killed so many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

This book began as a free twenty-eight-day Instagram challenge, which then became a free digital PDF workbook downloaded by more than one hundred thousand people around the world. And now it sits in your hands as a published book, which I hope will serve as a trusty companion that you will carry in your metaphorical antiracism backpack.

This book is part education, part activation. You will find yourself expanding your intellectual and emotional understanding of racism and white supremacy, but more importantly, you will find yourself doing the work as an individual to help dismantle it. This book will help you take a clear look at different multifaceted aspects of white supremacy and how they operate in both subtle and direct ways within you and within others. It acts as a mirror being held up to you so that you can deeply examine how you have been complicit in a system that has been purposely designed to benefit you through unearned privileges at the expense of BIPOC. This book is for people who are ready to do the work, people who want to create change in the world by activating change within themselves first.

We are at a very important time in history. Many white liberal progressives like to believe that we are in a postracial time in history. But the truth is, racism and anti-Blackness are still alive and well today. BIPOC are suffering daily from the effects of historic and modern colonialism. Right-wing, anti-Muslim nationalism is gaining popularity across the Western world. And anti-Blackness continues to be a form of racism that can be found all around the

world. It may seem like we are at a time in history when racism and white supremacy are resurfacing, but the truth is, they never went away. So while it is true that events in recent history, such as the 2016 U.S. presidential election, have brought these issues to the forefront, the reality is that these issues have always been there. And BIPOC in white-dominated societies and spaces have been at the receiving end of constant discrimination, inequities, injustices, and aggressions.

More people with white privilege are learning about racial dynamics and social justice terminologies than ever before. They are awakening to the fact that their white privilege has protected them from having to understand what it means to navigate the world as a BIPOC and to the ways in which they have unintentionally caused harm to BIPOC through racial aggressions. This book is here to change that. It is here to wake you up by getting you to tell the truth. This work is not about those white people “out there.”

It is about you. Just you.

It is important to understand that this is deep, raw, challenging, personal, heartbreaking, *and* heart-expanding work. This book will challenge you in ways that you have not been challenged before. But we are living in challenging times. There is much work to be done. And it begins with getting honest with yourself, getting educated, becoming more conscious about what is really going on (and how you are complicit in it), and getting uncomfortable as you question your core paradigms about race. If you are willing to do that, and if we are all committed to doing the work that is ours to do, we have a chance of creating a world and way of living that are closer to what we all desire for ourselves and one another.

This work sounds overwhelming, intimidating, and unrewarding. I won't lie to you: it is. You will become overwhelmed when

you begin to discover the depths of your internalized white supremacy. You will become intimidated when you begin to realize how this work will necessitate seismic change in your life. You will feel unrewarded because there will be nobody rushing to thank you for doing this work. But if you are a person who believes in love, justice, integrity, and equity for all people, then you know that this work is nonnegotiable. If you are a person who wants to become a good ancestor, then you know that this work is some of the most important work that you will be called to do in your lifetime.

Here's to doing what is right and not what is easy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Layla', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

a little about me

As we are going to be spending quite an extended time together doing very deep and vulnerable work, I think it is important for you to know a little about me—your guide—before we begin.

The first thing to know about me is that I sit at a number of different intersections of identities and experiences at the same time. I am a Black woman. More specifically, I am an East African and Middle Eastern Black woman. I am a Muslim woman. I am a British citizen. I live in Qatar. And I speak, write, and teach to a global audience.

My parents immigrated to the United Kingdom from Zanzibar and Kenya in the 1970s, and that is where they met and married. My two younger brothers and I were born and spent the early years of our childhood in Cardiff, Wales, later moving to Swindon, England, and then onward to Doha, Qatar, where I still live today. My father, who is now coming close to retirement, spent his entire career sailing around the world as a mariner. He would travel to far-off places and bring us back gifts and stories from other countries. Importantly, he

instilled in my brothers and me a philosophy of being citizens of the world. This idea that there is nowhere in the world where we do not belong and that we do not have to be confined to anyone's attempts to label or define us has been one that has stayed with me to this day. My incredible mother took on the Herculean task of being two parents to my siblings and me during the long months when my father was working at sea. She was dedicated to creating an environment in our home where our cultural identities and our religious beliefs were nurtured and practiced. The loving foundation she laid in those years of our childhood still stands strong today.

And yet, every time we left the house, every time we went to school, every time we watched TV, every time we connected with the rest of the world, we were interacting with white supremacy. Every day, in little and not-so-little ways, we were reminded that we were "other." That we were less than those who held white privilege. I can count on one hand the number of times I experienced overt racism. But in countless subtle ways, every day, it was felt indirectly. And those indirect messages—from being treated slightly differently by schoolteachers, to hardly ever seeing fictional characters or media representations that looked like me, to understanding that I would have to work a lot harder than my white peers to be treated the same, to understanding that my needs were always an afterthought (why could I never find a foundation shade that matched me exactly while my white friends always could?)—painted an indelible picture in my mind. A picture that taught me this: Black girls like me did not matter in a white world. I will spend the rest of my life tearing down this picture and painting a new one that reflects the truth: Black girls matter. Everywhere.

Across my lifetime, I have lived in three different continents: Europe, Africa, and Asia. I have spent just over half of that time

living outside the Western world, but that does not mean that the effects of white supremacy have not continued to impact me. I want to be very clear that though I am a Black Muslim woman, I also have a lot of privilege. I do not live in a white supremacist society. The religion I practice is the national religion of the country I live in. I have socioeconomic, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, neurotypical, and educational privileges. I have not experienced and cannot speak to the depth of pain that Black people who are descendants of enslaved people across the diaspora experience through racism. Living in the Middle East, I am not exposed to the more direct experience of institutional racism that my younger brothers and my niece and nephew are exposed to living in the United Kingdom. However, the childhood that I had growing up as a Black Muslim girl in a primarily white, Christian society influenced my self-development and self-concept in negative ways. And as an adult, on the worldwide internet, where more than 50 percent of the world's population spends their time and where I do my work, I am exposed to white supremacy every day.

As someone who shares her work with a global audience (the majority of my readers and podcast listeners are in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand), I face the inevitable white fragility that comes with being a Black Muslim woman with a voice. Not living in a Western country does not protect me from getting abusive emails or social media messages for doing the work that I do.

But still, you may be asking, “Why you?”

As someone who does not live in a white-dominated society and who does not carry a lineage of the horrors of the enslavement of my ancestors, why have *I* chosen to do the work of writing this book and facilitating this work? Why does dismantling white supremacy matter so much to me?

It matters to me because I am a Black woman. My work is born out of both the pain and the pride of being a Black woman. It is painful to me to know how BIPOC like me are seen and treated because of our skin color. At the same time, I feel incredibly proud to stand in the fullness of who I am as a Black woman and to support other BIPOC to do the same for themselves, too, by dismantling the system that has prevented us from doing so.

I do this work because white supremacy has negatively impacted how I see myself and how the world sees and treats me. I do this work because white supremacy will negatively impact my children and my descendants: how they see themselves and how the world will see and treat them. I do this work because I belong to the global family of the African diaspora, and it hurts me that Black people around the world are treated as inferior because of our skin color. I do this work because People of Color everywhere deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, something that white supremacy strips them of. I do this work because I have a voice, and it is my responsibility to use my voice to dismantle a system that has hurt me and that hurts BIPOC every day. I do this work because I was called to it, and I answered that call.

The concepts that I have brought together in this book begin from my own personal lived experiences (both as a child and as an adult, regardless of where I have physically lived in the world). And they are deepened and further illustrated by drawing on examples from experiences I have witnessed, historical contexts, cultural moments, fictional and nonfictional literature, the media, and more. I am just one Black Muslim woman contributing to the mountains of work and labor that have already been contributed to dismantle white supremacy by BIPOC who are far more courageous and have risked far more than I have, all over the world for centuries. It is a

humbling honor to have the privilege to add to this global and collective body of work.

It is my hope that this work—which is a combination of learning and reflective journaling—will create a deep shift in consciousness and action within you to help create a world without white supremacy.

what is white supremacy?

White supremacy is a racist ideology that is based upon the belief that white people are superior in many ways to people of other races and that therefore, white people should be dominant over other races.¹ White supremacy is not just an attitude or a way of thinking. It also extends to how systems and institutions are structured to uphold this white dominance. For the purposes of this book, we are only going to be exploring and unpacking what white supremacy looks like at the personal and individual level. However, since systems and institutions are created and held in place by many individual people, it is my hope that as more people do the personal inner work in here, there will be a ripple effect of actionable change of how white supremacy is upheld out there. This work is therefore not just about changing how things look but how things actually are—from the inside out, one person, one family, one business, and one community at a time.

Perhaps you are wondering why I chose to use the words *white*

supremacy for this book and not something softer or less confrontational like *Me and White Privilege* or *Me and Unconscious Bias*. It would certainly have made picking up this book at the bookstore or sharing it with your family and friends less awkward! People often think that white supremacy is a term that is only used to describe far-right extremists and neo-Nazis. However, this idea that white supremacy only applies to the so-called “bad ones” is both incorrect and dangerous, because it reinforces the idea that white supremacy is an ideology that is only upheld by a fringe group of white people. White supremacy is far from fringe. In white-centered societies and communities, it is the dominant paradigm that forms the foundation from which norms, rules, and laws are created.

Many white people hear the words *white supremacy* and think *That doesn't apply to me*, that they don't hold that belief but rather that they believe that all of us are equal and that they don't modify their treatment of people based on the color of their skin. What this book, which is a deep-diving self-reflection tool, will help you to realize, however, is that that isn't true. White supremacy is an ideology, a paradigm, an institutional system, and a worldview that you have been born into by virtue of your white privilege. I am not talking about the physical color of your skin being inherently bad or something to feel shame about. I am talking about the historic and modern legislating, societal conditioning, and systemic institutionalizing of the construction of whiteness as inherently superior to people of other races. Yes, outwardly racist systems of oppression like chattel slavery, apartheid, and racial discrimination in employment have been made illegal. But the subtle and overt discrimination, marginalization, abuse, and killing of BIPOC in white-dominated communities continues even today because white

supremacy continues to be the dominant paradigm under which white societies operate.

So we must call a thing a thing.

We must look directly at the ways in which this racist ideology of white supremacy, this idea that white equals better, superior, more worthy, more credible, more deserving, and more valuable actively harms anyone who does not own white privilege.

If you are willing to dare to look white supremacy right in the eye and see yourself reflected back, you are going to become better equipped to dismantle it within yourself and within your communities.

White supremacy is a system you have been born into. Whether or not you have known it, it is a system that has granted you unearned privileges, protection, and power. It is also a system that has been designed to keep you asleep and unaware of what having that privilege, protection, and power has meant for people who do not look like you. What you receive for your whiteness comes at a steep cost for those who are not white. This may sicken you and cause you to feel guilt, anger, and frustration. But you cannot change your white skin color to stop receiving these privileges, just like BIPOC cannot change their skin color to stop receiving racism. But what you *can* do is wake up to what is really going on. I invite you to challenge your complicity in this system and work to dismantle it within yourself and the world.

who is this work for?

This work is for any person who holds white privilege. By *any person*, I mean persons of any gender identity, including gender-nonconforming persons, and by *who holds white privilege*, I mean persons who are visually identifiable as white or who pass for white. Therefore, this includes persons who are biracial, multiracial, or white-passing People of Color who benefit under systems of white supremacy from having lighter skin color than visibly Brown, Black, or Indigenous people.

Important note for biracial, multiracial, and People of Color who hold white privilege: This work is for you too. However, your experience of doing this work will be very different from the experiences of white people who are not biracial, multiracial, or People of Color. While you receive the benefits of white privilege from being lighter skinned or white passing, that does not mean you have had the same experiences as a white person. You might have white parent(s) or other ancestors. Or perhaps you are not white at all but

are instead a Person of Color who is lighter skinned, white passing, or white adjacent. Your white privilege does not erase or minimize your other identities or experiences. So while it is important for you to do the work to address your internalized white supremacy and white privilege, you will need to adjust the questions to better fit your experiences as a person who holds white privilege but is not white. Depending on your specific white privilege, some journal prompts will take you deeper than others. Some journal prompts will be more directly applicable to you than others.

It is also important to know that this work will bring up some challenging feelings around your internalized oppression against yourself and your marginalized identities and about how you have also been oppressed by a system that only benefits you to the extent that you are able to present or pass as white and be anti-Black.

This work will likely bring up many conflicting emotions including shame, confusion, fear, anger, remorse, grief, and anxiety. This work will bring up dynamics that have caused you or others harm in your family relationships, friendships, romantic relationships, or work relationships. Please prioritize your self-care as you move through this work. Do not use it as an excuse to not do the work in a substantial way, but at the same time, honor yourself and the different feelings that show up around your identities. Do not use this work as a stick to beat yourself with, but rather use it to interrogate your complicity within a system of privilege that is only designed to benefit you to the extent that you can conform to the rules of whiteness.

If you are ready to start the work, you can purchase a copy of *Me and White Supremacy* at...

- Your local indie bookstore
- Bookshop.org
- Barnes & Noble
- Amazon
- BooksAMillion

The ebook is available at...

- Your local indie bookstore
- Apple
- NOOK
- Kobo
- Kindle

Get it in Canada at...

- Indigo (CA)

This excerpt is made available with the express permission of the author.

about the author



LAYLA F. SAAD is a writer, speaker, and podcast host on the topics of race, identity, leadership, personal transformation, and social change. As an East African, Arab, British, Black, Muslim woman who was born and grew up in the West and lives in the Middle East, Layla has always sat at a unique intersection of identi-

ties from which she is able to draw rich and intriguing perspectives. Layla's work is driven by her powerful desire to become a good ancestor, to live and work in ways that leave a legacy of healing and liberation for those who will come after she is gone.

Me and White Supremacy is Layla's first book. Initially offered for free following an Instagram challenge under the same name, the

bestselling digital *Me and White Supremacy Workbook* was downloaded by more than one hundred thousand people around the world before becoming a traditionally published book. Layla's work has been brought into homes, educational institutions, and workplaces around the world that are seeking to create personal and collective change.

Layla earned her bachelor of law degree from Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. She lives in Doha, Qatar, with her husband, Sam, and two children, Maya and Mohamed.

For more information, resources, or tips on working through the book, visit meandwhitesupremacybook.com. To read more of Layla's writing, listen to podcasts, subscribe to her newsletter, or find out about speaking engagements and other media requests, visit laylafsaad.com. You can also support her work through Patreon at patreon.com/laylafssad and follow her on Instagram @laylafsaad.