

DO NOT CROSS THIS LINE WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION

CAUTION

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If the persistence of white supremacy in twenty-first century America surprises you, this book will give you a startlingly different understanding of why. You will discover the vital force behind white supremacy is in our blood—literally—and in our nervous systems. However light or dark our skins, we Americans must all contend with these elemental forces.

If you are not surprised that widespread white supremacy continues to injure America, but have no ideas or little hope for overcoming it, keep reading. This book offers a profoundly different view of what we can do, individually and together, to grow beyond our entrenched racialized divide. This process has little to do with ideology, politics, or public policy and everything to do with neuroscience and the body.

If you see white supremacy as a belief system or ideology, in this book you will discover only a fraction of it exists in our cognitive brains. For the most part, white supremacy lives in our bodies. In fact, white supremacy would be better termed *white-body supremacy*, because every white-skinned body, no matter who inhabits it—and no matter what they think, believe, do, or say—automatically benefits from it. (Beginning with Chapter 1, *white-body supremacy* is the term I'll use.)

If you are convinced that ending white supremacy begins with social and political action, do not read this book unless you are *willing to be challenged*. We need to begin with the healing of trauma—in dark-skinned bodies, light-skinned bodies, our neighborhoods and communities, and the law enforcement profession. Social and political actions are essential, but they need to be part of a larger strategy of healing, justice, and creating room for growth in traumatized flesh-and-blood bodies.

If you believe America's racial tensions lie not in white supremacy but in its dark-skinned people and the power they wield, do not read further. The pages ahead will trigger your trauma reflexes and make your life more painful than it already is.

*“But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm,
racial justice, racial profiling, white privilege, even white
supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral
experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips
muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. . . .
You must always remember that the sociology, the history,
the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all
land, with great violence, upon the body.”*

TA-NEHISI COATES,
BETWEEN THE WORLD AND ME

*“The reality is that we are bodies born of other bodies,
bodies feeding other bodies, bodies having sex with other
bodies, bodies seeking a shoulder to lean or cry on
Bodies matter, which is why anything
related to them arouses emotions.”*

FRANS DE WAAL,
OUR INNER APE



WATCH YOUR BODY

As you experience this book, you'll learn to pay attention to your body.

If you have a white body, there will be times when it will reflexively constrict in order to protect you from some of the truths you'll encounter. This constriction will be followed by a thought such as "I'm not like that; I'm a good person," or "White-body supremacy has nothing to do with me," or "This isn't about me because I don't belong to a racist organization."

When this occurs, just notice what you're experiencing without doing anything about it. Don't try to undo the constriction. Don't try to hold onto it, either. Just watch your body closely and notice what sensations, impulses, and emotions arise.

Don't take the reflexive thoughts seriously; either. Don't try to support them. Don't debate them. Don't act on them at all. Just observe them as they arise, and note any images or other thoughts that may follow.

If you have a Black or other dark body, there will be times when your body will experience a sudden shock of recognition or understanding. Things you hadn't fully grasped before may suddenly become clear. This might be followed by a rush of energy in the form of joy, or anger, or outrage, or a felt sense of clarity and rightness. Let yourself experience these sensations fully, but don't hang onto them. Let them move into and through your body like a wave; then let them go.

If you're a public safety professional, you may experience *both* sets of sensations and thoughts. When one appears, allow it to flow fully into your body and mind, without doing anything about it. Then let it go, like a steadily shrinking image in your rear-view mirror.

Whatever your profession or skin color, as you read this book, at times you may sense profound hope, relief, or both. Let yourself fully experience these as they arise. Then let them go as well.



ACKNOWLEDGING OUR ANCESTORS

Our bodies exist in the present. To your thinking brain, there is past, present, and future, but to a traumatized body there is only *now*. That *now* is the home of intense survival energy.

Most of this book is set in the present, but small parts of it will trace two bloodlines of trauma from the past to the present.

First, we'll trace trauma as it was passed from one European body to another during the Middle Ages, then imported to the New World by colonists, and then passed down by many generations of their descendants.

Second, we'll trace trauma as European colonists instilled it in the bodies of many Africans who were forcibly imported as indentured servants, and later as property, to the New World. They, in turn, passed down this trauma through many generations of their descendants.

On this same soil, trauma also followed another earlier path: one that spread from the bodies of European colonists to the bodies of Native people and then through many generations of their descendants.

An estimated eighteen million Native people were custodians of the North American continent when European colonists arrived. They and their ancestors had lived here for an estimated 14,000 years.

Today this same land contains over 204 million white Americans, over forty-six million Black Americans, and just over five million Native Americans. The story of the unique arc of trauma in the Native American body is only now beginning to be told. I don't describe this arc (except tangentially) in this book. I hope a wise and compassionate Native writer soon will.

In the meantime, I offer my respect and acknowledgment to the people who were stewards of this land long before folks from Africa and Europe made it their home.



OUR BODIES, OUR COUNTRY

As I write these words in early 2017, America is tearing itself apart. On the surface, this war looks like the natural outcome of many recent social and political clashes. But it's not. These conflicts are anything but recent. One hundred and fifty-six years ago, they spawned the American Civil War. But even in the 1860s, these conflicts were already centuries old. They began in Europe during the Middle Ages, where they tore apart close to two million white bodies. The resulting tension came to America embedded in the bodies of Europeans, and it has remained in the bodies of many of their descendants. Over the past three centuries, that tension has been both soothed and deepened by the invention of whiteness and the resulting racialization of American culture.

At first glance, today's manifestation of this conflict appears to be a struggle for political and social power. But as we'll see, the real conflict is more visceral. It is a battle for the souls and bodies of white Americans. While we see anger and violence in the streets of our country, the real battlefield is inside our bodies. If we are to survive as a country, it is inside our bodies where this conflict will need to be resolved.

The conflict has been festering for centuries. Now it must be faced. For America, it is an unavoidable time of reckoning. Our character is being challenged, and the content of that character is being revealed.

One of two things will happen: Ideally, America will grow up and out of white-body supremacy; Americans will begin healing their long-held trauma around race; and whiteness will begin to evolve from race to culture, and then to community.

The other possibility is that white-body supremacy will continue to be reinforced as the dominant structured form of energy in American culture, in much the same way Aryan supremacy dominated German culture in the 1930s and early 1940s.

If Americans choose the latter scenario, the racialized trauma that wounds so many American bodies will continue to mutate into insanity and create even more brutality and genocide.

This book offers the necessary new insights, skills, and tools for creating the first scenario. It is written for every American—of any background or skin color—who sees this scenario as vital to our country's survival and who sees the second scenario as America's death warrant.

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When people hear the words *white supremacy* or *white-body supremacy*, they often think of neo-Nazis and other extremists with hateful and violent agendas. That is certainly one extreme type of white-body supremacy. But mainstream American culture is infused with a more subtle and less overt variety. In her book, *What Does It Mean to Be White?*, Robin DiAngelo¹ describes white supremacy as

. . . the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white, and the practices based on this assumption White supremacy does not refer to individual white people per se and their individual intentions, but to a political-economic social system of domination. This system is based on the historical and current accumulation of structural power that privileges, centralizes, and elevates white people as a group I do not use it to refer to extreme hate groups. I use

the term to capture the pervasiveness, magnitude, and normalcy of white dominance and assumed superiority.

One aspect of this type of white-body supremacy involves seeing “whites as the norm or *standard* for human, and people of color as a *deviation* from that norm . . . an actress becomes a *black* actress, and so on.” In a piece for *Salon* she adds, “Thus, we move through a wholly racialized world with an unracialized identity (e.g., white people can represent all of humanity; people of color can only represent their racial selves).” This everyday form of white-body supremacy is in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the culture we share. We literally cannot avoid it. It is part of the operating system and organizing structure of American culture. It’s always functioning in the background, often invisibly, in our institutions, our relationships, and our interactions.

The cultural operating system of white-body supremacy influences or determines many of the decisions we make, the options we select, the choices open to us, and *how* we make those decisions and choices. This operating system affects all of us, regardless of the hue of our skin.

Here’s a typical example: Two economists responded to 1,300 help-wanted ads in the *Boston Globe* and the *Chicago Tribune* in the fields of customer service, clerical services, sales, and administrative support. In all, they responded with more than 5,000 made-up résumés. The names on those résumés were randomly assigned, but some (e.g., Jamal Jones and Lakisha Washington) sounded African American, while others sounded white (e.g., Emily Walsh and Greg Baker²). The researchers counted the number of employers who asked to set up interviews or get more information. The imaginary white candidates received interest from one in ten employers; the imaginary African American candidates received interest from one in fifteen. (Similar studies have since obtained similar results.)

¹ DiAngelo describes herself this way: “My area of research is in Whiteness Studies . . . I have been a consultant and trainer for over twenty years on issues of racial and social justice . . . I grew up poor and white.”

² As a cross-check, I had my research assistant search the names Emily Walsh and Lakisha Washington on Facebook. He found hundreds of Emily Walshes, of which zero were Black. All but two were white, and one was male. He also found many dozens of Lakisha Washingtons, all but one of whom were Black. I’d like to see a follow-up study using African names (e.g., Kojio Ofiun) instead of African American ones, to learn whether employers respond in the same way to Black job applicants who do not appear to be from America.

Here's another recent example of everyday supremacy: My wife, Maria, purchased some household items at Wal-Mart and was pushing her cart toward the exit. A Wal-Mart employee stopped her, asked to see her sales receipt, and checked the items on the receipt against the items in her cart. Maria was thirsty, so instead of leaving the store, she bought a soft drink and sat down on a bench near the exit. Over the next two to three minutes, she watched as about twenty people left the store. The employee stopped to double-check the receipts of all eight of the Black customers who walked past—and none of the non-Black ones.

Understandably, my wife was not happy about this, and she told the store manager about it. The manager, who was white, was aghast. He immediately called over the employee—who was also white—and confronted her. She was surprised, apologetic, and a bit mortified. She insisted she was not deliberately targeting Black customers, but only checking people randomly. My wife told me, “She seemed completely sincere. I believe that’s what she genuinely thought she was doing.” The employee was not targeting Black customers deliberately; she was targeting them unconsciously and reflexively. But the pain that such actions create for Black Americans is felt quite consciously.

Relatively few white Americans consciously recognize, let alone embrace, this subtle variety of white-body supremacy. In fact, there is often no way to measure or recognize it. Imagine a real Lakisha Washington or Emily Walsh. She would have no way of knowing why any particular employer did not respond positively to her résumé. Nor would my wife have noticed anything odd about the Wal-Mart employee’s actions if she hadn’t stopped to relax and have a cold drink.

For most Americans, including most of us with dark skin, white-body supremacy has become part of our bodies. How could it not? It’s the equivalent of a toxic chemical we ingest on a daily basis. Eventually, it changes our brains and the chemistry of our bodies.

Which is why, in looking at white-body supremacy, we need to begin not with guilt or blame, but with our bodies.

PART I

UNARMED AND DISMEMBERED