

“Finally! Jennifer Harvey provides a long-awaited and much-needed answer to a question often posed by white antiracist allies: How do we raise our children to be allies in the struggle against racism? *Raising White Kids* provides practical advice and examples for parents that are well-grounded in the scholarship on racial identity and racial socialization. It would be a mistake, however, to think that this book is only for parents of white children. It is a critical resource for educators whose efforts to teach about racial oppression are routinely hampered by the wide knowledge gap between white students and students of color. Harvey helps faculty to understand why white students often need intense remediation around issues of race and racism, and provides both faculty and students with language and tools to grapple with the culture shock that comes with learning about racism for the first time.”

—Chanequa Walker-Barnes, PhD, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, McAfee School of Theology

“*Raising White Kids* asks parents to reconsider the conventional yet failed strategies of promoting colorblindness and valuing diversity (without addressing whiteness), which prove inadequate in the face of our racial crisis by ignoring or white-washing racial difference. Instead, Harvey proposes a ‘race-conscious’ approach to raising white children that helps children not only to perceive racism in ways a colorblind approach veils but also to contest racism through directly engaging with children about race and racial injustice—early and often. Combining research on child development with her extensive scholarship on racial formation and practices of antiracism, Harvey has written an easily readable book full of examples and concrete practices that helps parents give their children the tools they need to develop a healthy white racial identity. *Raising White Kids* is urgent, important, and practical reading for anyone involved in the rearing of white children.”

—Dr. Kristopher Norris, Visiting Distinguished Professor of Public Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, DC.

FOREWORD BY TIM WISE

Author of *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*

RAISING WHITE KIDS

BRINGING UP CHILDREN
IN A RACIALLY UNJUST AMERICA

JENNIFER HARVEY

ABINGDON PRESS
NASHVILLE

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

A Just Racial Future

One morning in the fall of 2016, I walked away from a school building that was on “external lockdown.” My children were inside. This was a totally counterintuitive thing to do as a parent. But that day it seemed to me this had become part of a new normal in the United States.

My kids’ school is only ten blocks from where one of two metro-area police officers in Des Moines, Iowa, had been killed in the middle of the night, only hours before the start of the school day. The gunman was still at large. When I had walked into my daughter’s classroom at the start of the day, my daughter, who had gotten to her classroom before I did, ran up to me, saying, “Mama, the school doors are locked because a man with a gun killed two police officers last night!”

As I left the school building, I couldn’t begin to imagine what these officers’ families and loved ones were experiencing in that moment. But I tried to get in touch with what I was feeling.

I was feeling traces of the joy I’d experienced for the first

time eight years ago on that very morning as I had held a newborn in my arms. For that same day I walked away from my kids’ school with a gunman still at large was the day of my daughter’s eighth birthday. And that day began with her talking about guns and killings. So I was also feeling devastation and fear³ infuse that joy.

As news rolled in about the backstory of the alleged gunman (who was arrested shortly after the school day started), I was not the only one struck by the most recent known incident in which he had been involved. Only a few weeks before, this man had waved a Confederate flag in front of a group of Black students at a high school football game during the national anthem. As he was escorted out of the game he had continued in a verbal rampage against the police officers escorting him out, going on about the violation of his rights and wanting his property back.

All I could think was that this horrible day was yet one more symptom of the deep, deadly wound that lies at the heart of this nation. All I could think was that the racial vitriol and violence so publicly on display in this nation with increasing intensity since August 2014 impacts all of us. And all I could think was that our collective lives depended on white people seeing the events of a day like that day in Des Moines in precisely those terms.

The racial vitriol and violence so publicly on display in this nation with increasing intensity since August 2014³ impacts *all of us*.

The violence of white supremacy always comes back to consume its own. We must understand this. It was horrifying to leave my own children in a school building on lockdown that day. I was saddened, scared, sick, and somber. And I know many of us are similarly somber about the direction in which this nation has seemed to be heading in recent years.

We are all impacted by racism and by racist violence. Whatever the many other factors involved—and there are always many complex factors—the white police officers killed in Des Moines that night and the families devastated in the wake of such unspeakable loss were absolutely the victims of the racism that rolls and churns at the soul of this nation. That violence usually targets people of color, African Americans, immigrants, Native peoples and, increasingly, Muslims. But that day it was obvious that such violence doesn't stop there.

We are a nation that is deeply wounded and engaged in continued wounding. And wounds do not heal without being aired, cleaned, honored in their fullness, and treated. Wounding doesn't stop until it is acknowledged and addressed with honesty; interrupted and repaired.

So it may very well be terrifying to recognize that my children's lives and your children's lives depend on more of us understanding that we are all wounded when we remain in the clutch of that which is unhealed. But I truly and utterly believe that inside that frightening recognition lies great strength, connection, and the possibility of a future. If we can see the stakes, we can find the courage to act.

I hope *Raising White Kids* has helped to jump-start or

further support serious conversation, dialogue, and thinking about active ways in day-to-day life we, as parents, can, literally, change the world. This book, of course, does not presume to be the final word on race-conscious parenting. Nor does it presume to have envisioned every scenario a parent might experience in our radically different and diverse parenting contexts.

But naming and trying to address some of the common paradoxes and challenges that parents of white children experience is a labor of love and an attempt to be part of the movement for liberation. The quandaries we face as parents are real because an unjust system has made them real. And our commitment to create a just system must (and can!) untangle and address these quandaries head-on. Ours is a hope- and freedom-driven parental responsibility.

Real urgency indeed exists about getting serious about this task. A simple, but difficult truth exists at the heart of race-conscious parenting and raising white kids. Namely, being white in a system of white racial hierarchy negatively impacts white people's humanity and health every day, even as it harms and negatively impacts people of color every day. We cannot fully enable children who are white to be healthy until we have created a truly just world.

And so our goal as parents is not—and *must not* simply be—to teach our children to be more inclusive, embracing, and curious humans. These dispositions are important, yes.

But our goal must be to bring them along with us (and, just as likely, to let them bring us along) *as we work to change this world*. Activism is absolutely required.

CONCLUSION

We are a nation in crisis. Creating a different future requires that we tell the truth about that. Whole communities of children, teenagers, twentysomethings, and beyond are caught in neighborhoods and systems that are heavily patrolled by police, in which there exist school-to-prison pipelines, who are boxed out from high-quality education. Larger-scale social activism must be part of the mix for all white people.

However the various struggles we engage in and commitments we make look, we can and must push back against the silence that pressures us to raise our white children to be good people and just hope for the best. Going in, challenging taboos, speaking against racial dynamics, being brave not only impacts the world we live in, it teaches and equips our children to do the same. Our children can grow into citizens, neighbors, friends, and family members able to resist, dissent, create, and construct as we equip them through race-conscious nurture toward healthy white identity, today, tomorrow, and throughout their lives.

Another world is possible. May it be so.

Acknowledgments

I love to write. And writing is always a vulnerable act. But writing this book has required me to be vulnerable in ways different from and more risky than what I've experienced in any other project.

I've been able to love writing a difficult book and risk vulnerability because of an incredible community of wise people who grace my life. While diverse in the specific ways they support and challenge me, the kind of presence they collectively provide was captured well by my dear friend Rhonda Calderon not so long ago. I was sharing some of my fears and she responded (to paraphrase), "You just need to be clear about what you are doing. Then let the rest go."

I've held on tightly to those words and to those who urge me to keep trying to tell the truth throughout writing *Raising White Kids*.

Lucy Suros continues to be my biggest cheerleader and most faithful friend. She's read and edited at the drop of a hat for years now. She's done so with brilliance and a far more crit-