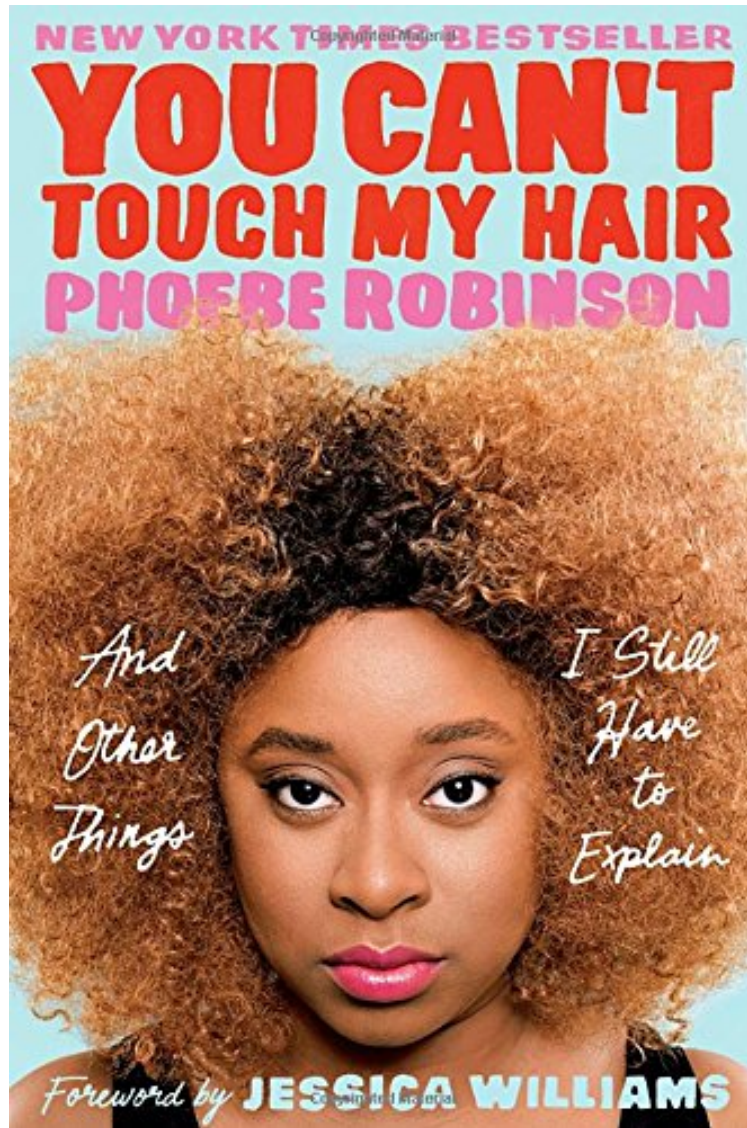


You Can't Touch My Hair: And Other Things I Still Have to Explain

Phoebe Robinson

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Phoebe Robinson : You Can't Touch My Hair: And Other Things I Still Have to Explain before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised You Can't Touch My Hair: And Other Things I Still Have to Explain:

195 of 201 people found the following review helpful. NO, you can't touch her hair. But you SHOULD read her

book! By the book and I You Cant Touch My Hair and Other Things I Still Have to Explain By: Phoebe Robinson I am a 52-year-old white woman and I have never asked a POC (person of color) if I could touch their hair. Its just never occurred to me to do so. I mean, how weird is that? Imagine my surprise when my granddaughter a 10-year-old biracial beauty came home from (a predominately white) school recently and told me that her friends all love touching my hair. I asked, why. She said, I dont know. They think its cool I guess. Still it made me feel weird. That was about three weeks ago. One week ago, I opened the People Magazine, to their book recommendations page, and saw Phoebe Robinsons book, YOU CANT TOUCH MY HAIR AND OTHER THINGS I STILL HAVE TO EXPLAIN. I bought it without blinking. As a woman, Ive always assumed that ALL women shared for the most part the same kinds of experiences. I mean, we have all experienced the same physical experiences, right? And, as a group, weve all experienced the same kind of gender bias experiences. You know what I mean; the whole, stand back and let the men handle this, little lady thing. Weve all been undervalued, underestimated and mis-understood. Right? Yes. However, what I guess I didnt realize was that African-American women have had a whole other set of experiences That makes me either ignorant, self-involved or just unaware. Maybe a little bit of each? I want to understand as much as I can what my granddaughter may have to face as she gets older. Phoebe Robinsons book, YOU CANT TOUCH MY HAIR AND OTHER THINGS I STILL HAVE TO EXPLAIN, opened my eyes to quite a few issues I never realized existed for women of color. I now know that my Lizzie might always have to have an answer ready for the question, can I touch your hair. She might always have to be the token black friend. She might always be subjected to stupidity, ignorance and oblivious obtuseness from silly white folks who just dont get it. That sucks. But, I also now know that shell live through it, no matter how awful it might be and be stronger for it. Im glad I read Ms. Robinsons book. I appreciate the new insight into my granddaughters possible future. As far as the book and the writing within goes This book is made up of a series of essays on the different issues a woman of color has or may face. As an older woman (translated not-hip, cool or with it), I didnt appreciate the vulgarity in these essays especially toward the end of the book where the last chapter was written as a series of letters to the authors toddler niece, Olivia this seemed not only unnecessary but also VERY inappropriate. I, too, am an aunt and would never talk to any of my nieces like that and theyre all adults. Nor did I get many of the pop-culture references and/or all the abbreviations (POC, BPS, OBL, etc.). Again Im an old, white lady. However, I understand that the author was just being herself. This is an enlightening and titillating (if somewhat filthy) commentary on our world and the way it treats African American women and African Americans in general. Its not flattering to white people. But, its real. I would recommend it to anyone who needs to see life from someone elses eyes. 147 of 158 people found the following review helpful. OMG Did I Just Become A Better Person? By ADS As a white woman trying to do better in the world, this is the book I needed to read. I think its important to listen to the stories of people who are different than you, who have lived through challenges youll never have to face, and who have to fight a fight every day youll never have to endure. Phoebe Robinsons book provides this worldview in real, honest, approachable stories about growing up as a young black woman to this white woman who has never in her life had to deal with these issues. But Robinsons realness also reaches past race speaks to the complexities of being female in a bros world, to the concerns of equality of all people, and to the hope we all have of giving to our children a better world, but manages to do all this while making you laugh. The book is very funny, and I lol'd many a time while reading it, but Robinson is always quick to balance a self-deprecating joke with an insight about how she has to maneuver through this world a little differently than others. Robinson lays down truths that cut deep, but always follows them up with humor to balm the wounds, leaving you with perfect little emotional scars as reminders of how to go about being a better person, asking you to respect those different from you -- people who might not look like you, or who have been raised on the same planet but in different worlds. My struggles are not her struggles; her glass ceilings are probably thicker than mine. Robinson doesnt leave you lost, however, and proactively informs instead of lectures, leaving you with a sense that if we maybe listen and absorb the words of others, no matter how different or outside our own experiences, we can use our understanding to grow compassion. Robinson approaches all these deep topics with a conversational and true-to-life voice that feels like you're having a chat with her instead of reading words on a page. Her approachability in writing is part of what makes her so incredibly special. Robinsons writing style is at once clever and ridiculous, her mastery of the simile deserves a Pulitzer. Especially poignant is the hopeful chapter dedicated to her young niece Olivia, where Robinson gives advice to a girl growing up in a world that might not always appreciate her, but with Robinsons steady tone of cautious optimism and humor. It is possible for social change to come through laughter. Thank you, Phoebe Robinson, for the #DeepThoughts. Thank you for the conversations your book has helped me have. Thank you for standing in your truth and offering me the opportunity to stand with you. 83 of 89 people found the following review helpful. At the Top of My Memoirs List By Dr. J You know how you read Bossypants and then were like, I need more funny and inspiring memoirs RIGHT NOW? So you read Amy Poehler and hers is solid, thoughtful - but not nearly funny enough; and then you read Rob Lowe's first memoir and you're so happy and surprised that the most perfect male specimen ever to walk the planet earth also writes well and is funny and insightful? So you breathe a sigh of release and then Amy Schumer's memoir comes along and you pre-order it and whip that baby open the moment it hits your kindle and you laugh at some of it but then the book takes a weird and not at all funny turn and you realize that it's actually a protracted therapy session

in which Amy comes to realize that she kinda hates her mom and is pretty dysfunctional and you sort of want to start a GoFundMe.com site for her so she can get the help she needs or at least hire a better editor next time? Well, Phoebe Robinson is right up there with Tina Fey. I don't say that lightly because I adore Tina Fey and she is a kickass writer and comedian and woman and owns her own life experiences and she can rock a red carpet dress like nobody's business even though she probably prefers jeans and a tee. So, this is serious business. I picked up Robinson's book through some convoluted means - it was on a list or in the recommended reads after a book on some list somewhere or just ran across it randomly...I really don't know. I'd never heard of Phoebe Robinson before (sorry, Phebes) but that, of course, would never stop me from trying out a book. I'm so glad I'm open minded like that because Robinson made me laugh a LOT (even woke my husband up once due to shaking with laughter in bed), but it also made me cry from time to time. AND...it left me a more educated, thoughtful person than I had been before I began. Robinson writes about the black experience and the female experience - one of which I know a lot about, and one about which I know jack, because I am white; even with a tan I just look like Wonder Bread left in the toaster for about 25 seconds. Nada. I grew up in the suburbs of Illinois, Indiana, and Long Island, New York. You can't get much whiter than that. So Phoebe Robinson shared some BPS (Black People Secrets) and, more importantly, she shared her own life experiences, which hit me like a ton of bricks and opened my eyes to perspectives to which I was so blind, I didn't even consider to consider them. Her discussion, for example, of the guilt and responsibility to white people that she felt as a young adult about every word she uttered really forced me to reconsider and reframe the experience of middle class black people (Robinson makes it very clear that she is not speaking for all black people, and as a woman and especially as a cancer patient, I totally get that... so I don't want to make sweeping generalizations). I feel stupid even saying this and I'm sure any POC (person of color) reading this is rolling their eyes and thinking, wow, "Dr." J, you are a moron. Which is true. But at least I'm trying my best to look beyond my own sheltered existence. Anyway. This book is very well written, extremely funny, and offers some really extraordinary insights. I'm so glad it tumbled into my hands, because Phoebe Robinson, you have yourself a new fan for life. Thank you for going all in and sharing so much of yourself with the world. Now quit reading my review and get to the bookstore or Kindle or the library right away!

A NEW YORK TIMES BEST SELLER "A must-read Phoebe Robinson discusses race and feminism in such a funny, real, and specific way, it penetrates your brain and stays with you." Ilana Glazer, co-creator and co-star of *Broad City* A hilarious and timely essay collection about race, gender, and pop culture from upcoming comedy superstar and *2 Dope Queens* podcaster Phoebe Robinson Being a black woman in America means contending with old prejudices and fresh absurdities every day. Comedian Phoebe Robinson has experienced her fair share over the years: she's been unceremoniously relegated to the role of "the black friend," as if she is somehow the authority on all things racial; she's been questioned about her love of U2 and Billy Joel ("isnt that . . . white people music?"); she's been called "uppity" for having an opinion in the workplace; she's been followed around stores by security guards; and yes, people do ask her whether they can touch her hair all the time. Now, she's ready to take these topics to the page and she's going to make you laugh as she's doing it. Using her trademark wit alongside pop-culture references galore, Robinson explores everything from why Lisa Bonet is "Queen. Bae. Jesus," to breaking down the terrible nature of casting calls, to giving her less-than-traditional advice to the future female president, and demanding that the NFL clean up its act, all told in the same conversational voice that launched her podcast, *2 Dope Queens*, to the top spot on iTunes. As personal as it is political, *You Can't Touch My Hair* examines our cultural climate and skewers our biases with humor and heart, announcing Robinson as a writer on the rise. One of *Glamour's* "Top 10 Books of 2016"

Featured in NPR Weekend Edition, *New York Magazine*, *Refinery 29*, *Book Riot's* "Best Books of 2016," and *Cosmo*. "A must-read Phoebe Robinson discusses race and feminism in such a funny, real, and specific way, it penetrates your brain and stays with you." Ilana Glazer, co-creator and co-star of *Broad City* "Phoebe Robinson has a way of casually, candidly rough-housing with tough topics like race and sex and gender that makes you feel a little safer and a lot less alone. If something as wise and funny as *You Can't Touch My Hair* exists in the world, we can't all be doomed. Phoebe is my hero and this book is my wife." Lindy West, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Shrill* "You Can't Touch My Hair is the book we need right now. Robinson makes us think about race and feminism in new ways, thanks to her whip-smart comedy and expert use of a pop culture reference. The future is very bright because Robinson and her book are in it." Jill Soloway, creator of *Transparent* "Smart, funny, and insightful." *Carrie Brownstein*, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Hunger Makes Me a Modern Girl* "Honest, touching, laugh-out-loud funny." Kevin Bacon, actor and musician "A must read! So funny!" Danielle Brooks, *Orange is the New Black* actress "You Can't Touch My Hair is one of the funniest books about race, dating, and Michael Fassbender. The world is burning, and Phoebe Robinson is the literary feminist savior we've been looking for." Hasan Minhaj, senior correspondent on *The Daily Show* "Trenchant and hilarious." St. Vincent, musician "Phoebe Robinson says the things that need to be said, and does so eloquently and hilariously." Mara Wilson, author of *Where Am I Now?* "[Robinson's] essays range from the political to the personal to the pop-cultural sometimes encompassing all three at the same time [with a] highly distinct, personable voice that makes you feel like she's your high-school

BFF. "ELLE"[A] hilarious yet thought-provoking collection of essays [Robinsons] writing covers both serious (i.e. race, gender, etc.) and lighthearted (e.g. pop culture) issues, all with her unique flair. In a nutshell, her book is a grab bag of entertainment and insight. "Bustle"Insightfulone of the most promising nonfiction voices to emerge this year. "Essence[B]y sharing her less sublime experiences with her signature blend of honesty and humor we're used to from 2 Dope Queensshe offers amusing insights that don't come off as heavy-handed.Mother Jones"Moving, poignant, witty, and funnya promising debut by a talented, genuinely funny writer."Publishers Weekly UproariousRobinson reflects on the annoying parts of black life in America with humor and soul. RedBook You Cant Touch My Hair achieves the impressive feat of being an accessible, fun read covering some serious issues; half of it is hilarious and the other half (see: the title) makes you think, 'It sucks this needs saying at all.'The Portland Mercury[a] biting and hilarious debut. Refinery29, "The Best Books Of 2016 So Far"[M]ore like a conversation than a set of essays one that [Robinson] and many other people of color are sick of having. [Robinson] confronts critical subjects like the historical representations of black hair in media, problematic casting calls for people of color, and which member of U2 shed like to sleep with in descending order of hotness. In other words, this is not a definitive tome on race and hair politics, nor is it trying to be. It is clear that Robinsons comedy background is at the forefront of the collection. If she is going to have to have this conversation, she is going to do it on her own terms. Los Angeles of BooksRaw, authentic, and seriously funny...Robinson clearly is one of the most influential voices of her generation. Bitch MediaAbout the AuthorPHOEBE ROBINSON is a stand-up comedian, writer, and actress whom Vulture.com, Essence, and Esquire have named one of the top comedians to watch. She has appeared on NBCs Late Night with Seth Meyers and Last Call with Carson Daly; Comedy Centrals Broad City, The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore, and @midnight with Chris Hardwick; as well as the new Jill Soloway pilot for I Love Dick. Robinsons writing has been featured in The Village Voice and on Glamour.com, TheDailyBeast.com, VanityFair.com, Vulture.com, and NYTimes.com. She was also a staff writer on MTVs hit talking head show, Girl Code, as well as a consultant on season three of Broad City. Most recently, she created and starred in Refinery29s web series Woke Bae and, alongside Jessica Williams of The Daily Show, she is the creator and costar of the hit WNYC podcast 2 Dope Queens as well as the host of the new WNYC podcast Sooo Many White Guys. Robinson lives and performs stand-up in Brooklyn, NY, and you can read her weekly musings about race, gender, and pop culture on her blog, Blaria.com (aka Black Daria).Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.***This excerpt is from an advance uncorrected copy proof***Copyright 2016 Phoebe RobinsonFOREWORD Work wife (n): That person at your job (same or opposite sex) that takes the place of your at home spouse while you are at work (this is not a sexual relationship). You talk with, connect to, and relate to this person as good as or better than you do your at home spouse with regards to all things work-related. (Source: www.UrbanDictionary.com) Phoebe Robinson is my work wife. Weve been official for about two years now, ever since we met on a field piece I was shooting for The Daily Show, which led to us starting our live show and podcast, 2 Dope Queens. Even though our careers keep us busy, I am happy to report that our relationship is still going strong. Phoebe still texts me pictures of Bono about once a week and asks me if I would smash him. (My answer is still, Fuck no, never in a million years.) She still refers to me as either her Oprah or her Gayle depending on what kind of day we are having. She still tells terrible dudes at bars that insist on having shitty conversations with us to Please buzz off. Im in my thirties. She always says, My eggs are dying. I dont have time to hang out with anybody that I dont want to. Fair enough. And even though Phoebe is only thirty-one, and I am twenty-six, she still insists on giving me the most weathered advice possible, as if she has seen some shit. Advice like: Doggy style is a great position to have sex in, that way you can have a little bit of you time. You can get some work done, you can think about your taxes or about what groceries you need to get tomorrow. . . . She somehow manages to say this with all of the wisdom and strength of Cicely Tyson. Thats Phoebe, though. When I first met Phoebe, she introduced herself to me, but she didnt even have toI had already known about her because she was a black lady involved with Upright Citizens Brigade, who also mostly dated white dudes. I could blame my previous knowledge of her on the fact that UCB is a small community, but I aint gotta lie to kick it. I had low-key stalked her before meeting her that day. Anyway, she didnt pick up any red flags from me, so she invited me to cohost her monthly live show, Blaria, at UCB. Our first show together was like a great first date. I found out onstage that night that Phoebe was able to vocalize things that were deeply important to me. That being a black woman and a feminist is a full-time job. Like, #fuckthepatriarchy even though we both usually date white dudes who look vitamin D deficient and probably burn in the sun too easily. That black lives do matter. And that we You Cant Touch My Hair both think that Carrie Bradshaw was a fucking stupid idiot for breaking up with Aiden for Mr. Big. Like, really? The man is a carpenter; he could literally make her furniture. And he even bought the apartment next door to hers so he could combine the two. The man wanted to MacGyver her living space! I think I can speak on behalf of all straight women everywhere when I say, Hi, hello! Sign me up for that, please! Clearly, Phoebe and I were bonding at a rapid pace and, after the show, I knew that being friends with and performing with Phoebe Robinson was good for my soul and I wanted to continue to do that as much as I could. This is how our podcast 2 Dope Queens was born. Phoebes ability to talk about the importance of bell hooks as well as her dreams of hooking up with Colin Firth are a part of what makes her so wonderful. She is a badass black feminist and somehow manages to stay #woke while not taking herself too seriously. She is delightfully petty in that way that leaves us

giggling and talking shit about everyone around us when we go out for drinks. And she is brilliant onstage. Even with all of the comedy shows that we have done together, Phoebe still manages to surprise me and make me laugh until I pee on myself a little bit by accident. She is one of my best friends, and I am so excited that you bought this book and are about to spend time with one of my favorite people on this frequently shitty little miserable planet that we call Earth. Last New Years Eve, my boyfriend and I did shrooms and talked about the lovely texture of the couch while we watched the ball drop in Times Square on TV. After the countdown, I asked my boyfriend what his New Years resolution was. He said, I think its to be more like Phoebe. So I thought about all of Phoebes qualities for a secondher brilliance, her strong values, her beauty, her humor, and her strength. All of those things are what makes Phoebe wonderful. Not only is she my work wife, shes my shero. Hell yeah, I said. I want to be more like Phoebe, too. Jessica Williams

INTRODUCTION

The other day, I was thinking about the first time someone of a different race gave me a lady boner. It was more than seventeen years agoFebruary 24th, 1999, to be exactand I was watching the GRAMMYs. Let me give you a little bit of background about myself during this time. I was a fourteen- year-old movie nerd and an everything school-related slacker. Id often refer to myself as a tomboy, until I learned that liking and watching sports but not actually being good at them does not make you a tomboy, it makes you a human. So, yes, I was a fourteen-year-old sports and movie lovin person/nerd, who thought that watching award shows was the bomb.tumblr.com, probably because Id never won anything myself. So seeing people at the height of their artistic achievements was the ultimate fantasyland for me: I cried along with Hilary Swank as she graciously accepted a best actress Oscar for her performance in Boys Dont Cry. I pretended I was up there with Lauryn Hill when she did a touching and intimate rendition of To Zion right before snagging a GRAMMY for Album of the Year. And I laughed when Italian actor Roberto Benigni (memba him?), who was so overjoyed at winning the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, that he walked on the backs of peoples seats to get to the stage. Award shows gave me hope that maybe I would also do something equally as impressive with my life, that I could have a future outside of Cleveland, Ohio. Nothing against the Cleve, but I just had a feeling something cool outside those city limits awaited me. Watching these awards shows was my way of preparing for my future successes, I told myself, and was way more inter- esting than, say, studying for chemistry class. And in my eyes, there was truly no greater award show than the 1999 GRAMMYs. During this golden age of pop culture achieve- ments, Hill was the belle of the ball, Madonna was killing it in her Ray of Light, earth mother phase, and Will Smith won Best Rap Solo Performance for Gettin Jiggy wit It.I know. Looking back on it now, its kind of ridic.edu that out of all the songs nominated, including Hills Lost Ones and Jay Zs Hard Knock Life (Ghetto Anthem), that Smith won Best Rap Solo Performance. But the 90s were full of bad choices, OK? Like guys in boy bands wearing golf visors when they werent golfing, the movie Battlefield Earth, Lou Bega and his Mambo No. 5 bullshit, pizza bagels, the Gulf War, Utah Jazz point guard John Stockton wearing short shorts on the basketball court, and me spending three weeks trying to memorize the lyrics to Barenaked Ladiess One Weekafter those twenty-one days, all I got down was: Chickity China, the Chinese chicken. Three weeks, guys! Thats all I got! The point is, in the 90s, mistakes were made. Lessons were learned. And thanks to Ricky Martins The Cup of Life performance at the 1999 GRAMMYs, I learned that my vajeen is capable of quaking over nonblack dudes the way the glass of water did in Jurassic Park when dinosaurs were nearby.Martin may now be considered a slightly cheesy performer whose music is only played as a throwback jam at a wedding or bar mitzvah, but think back to 99. Martin was gorgeous, he sang with passion and swag, and he commanded the stage like he knew this set was going to be his breakout moment into the English-speaking music market. He was so dreamy. And it didnt hurt that he could work those hips. Simply put, I was stunned. I was in love, but I was also surprisedI was never really drawn to a nonblack guy like this before. Not that I was ever anti- nonblack dudes; they just never really were on my radar because they didnt look like me. And I think that most folks would agree with me when I say that its human nature to be drawn to people who look like us, especially when were younger and not very exposed to the world. So that first time I felt attracted to someone outside of my race, it felt, for a moment . . . transcendental. As in, I, Phoebe Robinson, had transcended past race! That I was capable of seeing people and not their skin color. In other words: I was (drumroll, please) postracial. Look, dude and lady boners can do a lot. They help create babies, embarrass their owners for appearing at inopportune times, and make people overlook flaws in otherssuch as having a boring personality or being a DJbecause the boner is too busy giving a thumbs up to an attractive person the way the Terminator does at the end of T2 when he is drowning in hot lava. But existing as a signal of postracial living? Nice try, but no. Sexually desiring someone who does not share your skin tone is not some grand sign that society is becoming postracial, no matter what anyone tells you. The truth is, people love throwing the term postracial around. Americans are so anxious to move on from the sins of our forefathers that were on the lookout for any and every symbol that our national nightmare of racism is over. And finding someone who is a different complexion than us hot is a quick way of saying, See? We did it! Racism solved! But sexual attraction is just the tip (heh) of the iceberg. It seems like weve been looking for our get out of jail free, were postracial pass for quite some time. Even though the term postracial is everywhere these days, its actually been part of our lexicon for some time. It was first used in a 1971 New York Times article titled Compact Set Up for Post-Racial South, which claimed that the topic of race was going to be usurped by concerns of population increase, industrial development, and economic fluctuations. Ever since then, postracial has been marched out fairly regularly any time

something positive happens for POCs (aka people of color). Taiwanese-American basketball player Jeremy Lin being an NBA star? Postracial! Mexican cooks at a Jamaican jerk-chicken restaurant? Postracial! My bestie Jess (who you met in the foreword) and I being up-graded to the front row at a Billy Joel concert just because? [1] Postracial! A white makeup artist rubbing my legs down with lotion to prevent me from getting ashy./She knows what ashy is?!?![2] Postracial! You get the picture. And to many, there is no greater symbol that the postracial era is upon us as when Barack Obama was elected President of the United States. No matter where you stand politically, theres no denying that in 2008, we were coming off the heels of a presidency that left the country disillusioned thanks to 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, and Hurricane Katrina. So when Obama appeared on the national scene with a message of hope, change, and yes, we can! much of the country happily got sucked into this tornado of positivity, and it seemed like anythinglike a postracial societywas possible. I totally understand the reasoning behind this line of thinking. His election is certainly historical, and along with it, came a sense of hope and change. But as a nation, we are far from the everyone holding hands in racial harmony that we assumed would happen once Obama was ushered into of- fice. In fact, throughout the Obama years, there has been, at the very best, resistance to change, and at the very worst, a palpable regression in the way the country views and handlesor more accurately, refuses to handlerace. We only have to turn on the nightly news to witness the significant uptick in police brutality toward black men and women. Eric Garner. Trayvon Martin. Sandra Bland. Laquan McDonald. Rekia Boyd. Yvette Smith. Shereese Francis. Timo- thy Russell. Malissa Williams. Sean Bell. Oscar Grant. Miriam Carey. And thats just the tip of the iceberg. MappingPoliceVio lence.org states 37 percent of unarmed people killed by police last year were black, even though blacks only make up 13 percent of the US population. These types of deaths are happening with such frequency that its almost impossible to keep track of each individual case and mourn the loss of life before another victim appears. Oof. Unfortunately, this is not just an American problem. This sort of police brutality is a worldwide phenome- non. Additionally, the UKs the Guardian newspaper published research from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) which stated that police forces are up to 28 times more likely to use stop-and-search powers against black people than white people and may be breaking the law to do so. While these incidents are devastating, the average per- son experiences racism in lesser life-threatening ways. Micro-aggressions, or slights/snubs/insults, that reinforce marginalization of a particular group, are the more common way that racism manifests on a daily basis. Normally, my run-ins with racism come in the form of jokes that I talk white or that Im not like other black people, as if that is some sort of compliment. Other times, I may find out that I have lost out on a job in entertainment because they wanted a white woman instead. All of those are, unfortunately, standard issue, and while they are upsetting in the moment, I tend to use that mixture of anger and sadness to propel me forward. I would have run out of tears a looong time ago if I let every time someone was racist toward me devastate me. Still, even though Im fairly used to micro-aggressions, there are those occasional situations that manage to surprise me, and not the I found a \$20 dollar bill in a winter-coat pocket good type of surprise. Im talking like the Aunt Flo decided to visit when I just put on a brand-new pair of my Victoria Secret 5-for-\$25 type of bad surprise, as was the case with my recent Uber ride. To properly set the scene, you must know two things: One, I had just finished working out at the gym and decided to treat myself to a cab ride home. Yes, this is trifling, but when youre so single that your Apple TV remote has its own side of the bed, you really try to do anything to make your- self feel special, hence the Uber; and two, my driver looked like Villain #4 from the Taken movies, you know, just real Slavic AF, so for the purposes of this story, he will be known as Taken Face. OK, now to the story. During the drive home, Taken Face got into a fight with a belligerent white driver and yelled, Fuck you, nigga, while Bill Witherss Lovely Day played in the background, which, as a friend later told me, if this were a romantic comedy directed by Spike Lee, this would be your meet-cute.[3] Unfortunately, this wasnt a movie, but real life. And in real life, theres always that awkward moment when a white per- son realizes they just said the N-word in the presence of a black person, so the white person makes the same face that Dustin Hoffman made in Rain Man when he was assessing how many toothpicks were on the ground. Taken Face quickly came to the conclusion that literally anything would have been better than saying a racial slur to the other driver. So next comes the apology, right? Wrong. Instead, Taken Face tried to make amends with me by showing me pictures of his barely brown daughter. L to the O to the L. Clearly, Taken Face was doing this as if to say, Were cool about what I just said because shes brown . . . and youre brown. Nope.com. Let me just say this right now, in case theres any confusion in 2016: if youre a white person and you have references on standby to verify that youre allowed to say the N-word, you are probably the last person on planet Earth who should be saying nigga. Your over-preparedness is very suspicious, and makes you the Tracy Flick of racism. How about instead you use those type-A powers for good and teach the world something useful, like how to fold a fitted sheet properly? In all seriousness, incidents like these happen so regularly that its impossible to believe that the racism of the past simply disappeared the moment Obama was elected. So what do we do? Perhaps the first logical step is to retire the term postracial America. Because much like the 90s New York Knicks basketball team that was never quite good enough to win the big kahuna, but had a lot of heart, the concept of postracial America is an also- ran that tried its damndest to succeed. Obama is not a deus ex machina type figure, whose mere presence righted all our nations wrongs. The truth is, evolution is slow, glacial even, and it cannot occur without people doing difficult and painful work. That doesnt sound like a whole heck of a lot of fun, which is precisely why it hasnt happened yet. But

theres an even harder truth to accept: The kind of growth required to move past race is nearly impossible to achieve because racism is rooted in the foundation of America. (Ahem, the Three-Fifths Compromise of our Constitution, anyone?) Without awareness or acknowledgement of how these things have left a permanent stain on our country, then no amount of blind hope is going to remedy the erosion that race and racism have done to this country. It is something that, until then, people like bell hooks and Ta-Nehisi Coates, and yes, people like me, will fight to explain. Believe me, its not something I necessarily want to do. I dont wake up every day going, Aaah! Time to break down institutional racism to people before Kathie Lee and Hoda drink their body weight in Franzia and host the fourth hour of the TODAY show. Honestly, I would be just fine spending my time finally perfecting the dance breakdown from Janet Jacksons If music video or finally taking an art history course just for funsies or, you know, enjoying the luxury of being a multilayered person like white dudes are allowed to be, but thats just not how things are. So because I, like many of my friends and family, am on the receiving end of racism, and I, unlike many of my friends and family, have a platformstand-up comedy and writing it only makes sense to use it to effect some positive change when it comes to racism, and eventually, one day be right alongside Kathie Lee and Hoda, day drunk out of my mind and ordering sensible cardigans from Net-a-Porter. But dont worry. Even though I discuss race fairly regu- larly, Im not always operating in after school special mode. Sometimes Im given some hope that we are coming together as a people. Sometimes that hope comes in the form of a friend/ally, who defends me after seeing that Im being bom- barded with racist comments on Facebook. Other times, that hope reveals itself in far less noble instances. Like the time when I was crashing on the couch of a dear friend in LA, who happens to be white, and a piece of my weave fell out and her dog started to eat it, which forced her fianc to chase the dog around the living room and wrestle the weave from its mouth, and they were totally chill about it, like this happens to them all the time. Hmm, maybe thats a sign that were getting closer to living in postracial society. While we wait to see if that the dog-eating-weave moment will end up in history books, Im using this waiting period as my chance to pull a Clarissa and explain it all. Well, not all. Just three thingsmy takes on race, gender, and pop culture because Im all about keeping things nice and tight, like the jeans in The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants. (Seriously, the four actresses in that movie had different body types, yet the jeans still fit Blake Lively like a glove? How is that possible?) Moving on. I think its time we get started, but before we get into my thoughts on interracial dating (two thumbs up), lady pres- idents (two empty Diva cups up; not risking spillage over here, folks), and Spotify posting notifications to my Facebook wall and letting my friends know that Im listening to Spice Girls Greatest Hits album (two middle fingers up like Beyonc in the Formation video), lets start with a fun QA, so you can get to know this book and its author a little bit better. One more thing before I start answering your questions. Thank you for buying this book, even though its not Black History Month Eve! (Thats not a real holiday, but it should be. Get Hallmark on the horn, please.) Im thrilled you recognize that this book is a year-round thing, like deleting your parents long-ass voice mails without listening to them, or white people wearing shorts. OK, you may begin: How do you spell your name? This may seem like a silly question to those who are thinking, Uh, just look at the cover, dummy. Never mind those haters! This is an excellent question because when it comes to my name, things like logic and sensibility dont often come into play. Usually, the person will quickly glance at my license or other official document bearing my name, say Got it, the way I do when a Verizon representative rattles off my 16-digit confirmation number even though all I managed to jot down was the letter Z, and then hand me something like this: I dont know what happened either, yall, but it done happened. What was once the name of a character from the TV show Friends has now morphed into the name of a new medicine for restless-leg syndrome. This is all to say that my name is spelled P-H-O-E-B-E, and youll probably forget that in five minutes, but I love you anyway. And your last name? Kidding! Phoebe, you wrote a book. Why? You know, I could totally take that why as, Hey crazy lady, why did you write something? Theres no way it can measure up to the work of Junot Diaz, Tina Fey, or Shakespeare, but instead Im imagining you meant the why in a Charlie Rose interviewing a celebrity kind of way, which is, Lets talk about all the ways you are amazing. Thanks for that, lovely reader, and to answer your question, I wrote this book because of all that sweet, sweet cash unknown first-time authors who had a three-line speaking part on Broad City get. You got paid a lot for this? If by a lot, you mean, \$50 and a months worth of salads with five toppings MAXIMUM from Hale Hearty, then yes, I got paid all the money. Im kidding about the \$50; it was more than that. Im not kidding about the five toppings maximum rule; Hale Hearty are some strict mofos. But to answer your why question, Im a comedian, so I have tons of opinions and like to tell them to folks whether they asked or not. So after G-chatting my thoughts about race and gender to one person at a time for several years, I figured why not put everything in a book so people can read them/use the book as a coaster. Thanks. I just have to say, your hair looks pretty cool. Thats not a question, but tha Can I touch it? And thereeee it is. Nope. You cant touch my hair. Even if my hair catches on fire, do not come to my rescue; just let me do a Michael Jackson spin move to put the blaze out. Honestly, there is nothing I hate more than people groping and marveling in National Geographicesque hushed tones about how my hair feels different than they expected. Its frustrating how something as simple as a quick trip to the supermarket can turn into an impromptu seminar about the history of black hair, during which Im supposed to clarify where I stand in the #TeamNatural vs. #TeamRelaxer debate, discuss how I think black/white relations are going in America, and admit that if I was less defensive about my hair being touched, racism might be solved in an hour. Uh-oh. Theres that r-word

again. Is this one of those books that's going to make me feel bad about being white? No. However, I'm going to touch on some heavy and complicated race issues that might make things a little awkward between us for a minute, like when a daughter-in-law finally masters her passive-aggressive mother-in-law's signature dish, and the mother-in-law says, "It's good . . . but a little light on the paprika, no?" But I promise we can survive that level of discomfort. Well, what is this book about then? Well, like I wrote earlier, there are tons of things I still have to explain about being a black lady in this day and age. Such as what it's like to be the black friend (hint: it's annoying), what it's like to be black in general (hint: it's very cool and awesome and also annoying), feminism (see: what it's like to be black in general), and working on-camera as a black lady (none of the clothes fit, and I audition for lots of characters named Laura and Abby, but then lose the parts to actual white ladies named Laura and Abby). Basically all the stuff that makes some dude on the Internet call me a See You Next Tuesday is what I'll be discussing here. Back up. Seems like there's a lot of black stuff going on here. But, from some Internet stalking, it seems that your last two boy-friends have been white, you read Nora Ephron books when you're getting your hair done at the salon, and U2 is your favorite band, so . . . Hmm, that wasn't really a question as much as it was an accusation: You can't be talking all this blackity black black, blah-bity blah blah stuff when you go home every night to some CW-looking dude. One, my previous white boyfriends have mostly been AMC cute, thank you very much. Two, reading Nora Ephron while a Jamaican lady braids my hair is pretty much the America Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of, and three, sure, I may enjoy what some call white people stuff, like U2, but that doesn't negate the fact that I'm black, which means that when I go shopping, clerks follow me around their store so much that my family crest motto ought to be Rockwell's "Somebody's Watching Me." So I don't care how much dad-rock I listen to or how many basic Chris Pine looking dudes I date, I'm black and I have the receipts to prove it. Literally, I keep all my receipts in order to prove that I'm not stealing from whatever store I walk out of. I don't know. It seems like this book is going to get deep. Will you judge me for wanting to take a nap instead of dealing with race and feminism? Not at all! I mean, I have taken a nap during a pregnancy scare because I was like, "Eh, it can wait. And? My fallopian tubes got all Gandolf-y and said, 'You shall not pass, and shut it down.' See? If you had taken a nap, you would've missed that completely medically sound and killer pop-culture reference. There are tons of those in this book! You're going to write about pop culture, too? Probably should've opened with that. Fair point. I'll remember that for my next book. As for this book, there will be lots of stuff about the 90s (Hello, Felicity and Moesha!), why my niece should use Lisa Bonet and fictional character Olivia Pope as her life guides, all the amazing moments in black-hair history (I'm looking at you, Angela Davis), and of course, there will definitely be several sentences mentioning actor Michael Fassbender, who's so gorgeous that the mere sight of him will make any straight woman hum "Taps" as she flushes all her birth control down the toilet. OK, this book sounds somewhat more fun. And you seem fun, too! Can I tell people I have a black friend now? Wait, seriously? I'm sorry. You're right. That was inappropriate. To make it up to you, I'm going to postpone my *Bones* marathon until tomorrow, so I can read this book. Postponing a binge-watch session to read this book is probably the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me. And my mom turned her vajayjay into a Six Flags Water Park slide so I could enter the world. Sorry, mom, but you've just been demoted to #2 on my list of awesome people. I feel we've gotten pretty tight over these last few minutes. What if you close your eyes while I touch your hair? And if it still bothers you, I can give you a cookie, too. Hmm, interesting. What kind? Oatmeal raisin? What I'm feeling right now must be what Freddie Prinze Jr. felt when he was saddled with making over Rachael Leigh Cook in *She's All That*. Screw discussing racism and touching my hair! I now know the biggest challenge of my life: Teaching you what a goddamn cookie is. Sorry about snapping at you just then. It's just that oatmeal-raisin cookies aren't cookies! Ugh, I blame health nuts for perpetuating that fantasy! But enough about that. Time to wrap up this QA, which was equal parts fun and informative, like a pap smear! Hey, did you know that if you get a pap smear while *Kings of Leon* plays in the examining room, it's basically like you're having sex. And sex is fun! Anyway, I feel like we covered some of the basics of what this book and I are all about, so why don't you settle in and get to reading my opinions on everything else, while I go talk to my parents about how I know sex is fun. Mom, Dad, come back! I can explain . . . -----[1] Apparently Billyhe and I are on a first name basis, BTdubs doesn't like coming out and seeing a bunch of American Psycho looking mofos chilling in the front row with their arms crossed at his concerts. So he has his staff look for women that he would find beautiful and put them in the front row. Is this very #YesAllWomen? Probably not. Is it pretty much the reparations Sojourner Truth envisioned? I'd like to think so.[2] Actually, this is reparations, and if I were the queen of a country, this would be the salutation white people would have to greet me with.[3] For those not up to speed, a meet-cute is when two characters, who are destined to be together, but don't know it yet, first get acquainted and something romantic/adorably embarrassing/something that pits the lovers against each other happens. Like Matthew McConaughey saving Jennifer Lopez when her high heel gets stuck in a sewer grate in *The Wedding Planner*, or when Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan grow to hate each other, in a charming way of course, as they drive cross country in *When Harry Met Sally*. Or in my case, Taken Face and I would eventually get past this N-bomb hiccup and fall in love because he'd buy me a Russian winter hat and I'd teach him how to make potato salad for the family cookout.