

motherhood so white

READING GROUP GUIDE

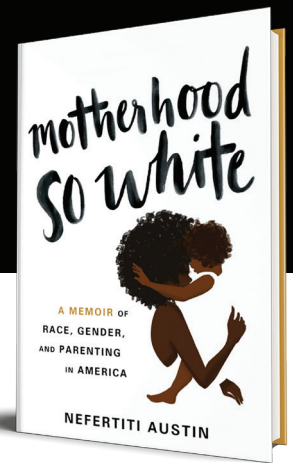


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1. Describe Nefertiti's relationship with her parents, Diane and Harold, and her grandparents, Ann and Henry. How do you think these relationships formed Nefertiti's first views of parenthood and what it means to be a parent?
2. How did your own upbringing influence your take on what it means to be a parent? What are some of the lessons you've learned through your childhood experiences that influenced how you do/would parent today?
3. What was Nefertiti's experience with "Black adoption," and how did it impact her choices later in life?
4. Nefertiti describes how, suddenly, the stirrings of motherhood turned into an overwhelming desire to pursue becoming a parent. If you are a parent, what moved you to make that decision? Which path to parenthood did you choose?
5. Put yourself in Nefertiti's shoes. If you were telling your family and friends that you've decided to adopt a Black son from the foster care system, how do you think they would react? Were you surprised by the stereotypes and prejudices Nefertiti faced from both within and outside her own community? Speak on what you imagine that experience was like for her.
6. Describe the different hurdles Nefertiti had to jump to formally adopt her son, August, and later her daughter, Cherish. What are some of the challenges she faced during the foster/adoption process?
7. What were some of the stereotypes and fears Nefertiti had to confront while raising August in today's racially charged America? What about with Cherish? What were some of the biases Nefertiti personally faced as a single Black mother?
8. As a single-parent household, how did Nefertiti provide male role models and positive examples of masculinity for August, and later Cherish? How did she confront the assertion that being raised without a father figure would affect August's masculinity or "make him soft"? What do those questions say about the way Black men are perceived in America, from both within the Black community and by society at large?
9. *Motherhood So White* showcases many of the conversations and experiences that parents of Black children face, from teaching their children about unconscious bias to explaining the traps embedded in our current cultural landscape. Speak about those conversations. Were there any that surprised you? Any that you, in your own experiences of parenthood, have or haven't had with your own children?
10. Throughout Nefertiti's story, she is often confronting the idea that, in America, motherhood equals white. How does she fight against that bias? How can we erase this stereotype and expand the view of motherhood to allow everyone to have a place at the table?

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A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

1. What inspired you to write *Motherhood So White*?

I was inspired to write a memoir because white mothers had so many avenues for support. Whether they were slacker moms or housewives or working moms, there were an abundance of books written with them in mind. I used to sigh and wonder: Where were the mom narratives that featured moms who looked like me or addressed my unique experience as a Black mother? This erasure did not sit well with me, and that's when I began telling my own story.

2. What is one of the biggest lessons being a mother has taught you?

Being a mother has taught me that asking for help is a strength. Most women raised during the second wave of feminism were taught to be strong, independent, and not need anybody. This "I can do it all" mentality has gotten us into a heap of trouble and hurts us not only physically but also emotionally. Our mental health, especially for Black women, has suffered mightily, leading to depression and isolation. We need to lean on our support systems and demand assistance from policy makers, husbands, partners, friends, and our children.

3. If you could wish for one thing for August's and Cherish's futures, what would it be?

I continue to wish that their futures are fulfilling and they have the strength to live out their dreams.

4. As a single mother to two young children, how did you find resources and a support system for you and your family?

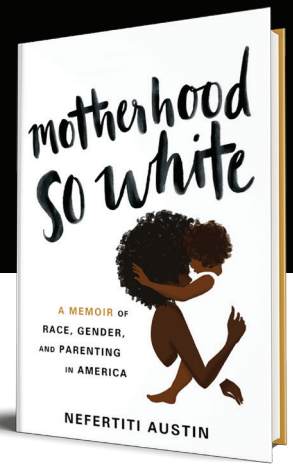
Before becoming a parent, I did my due diligence. I looked into foster parent organizations, adoption support groups, and mom groups. Disappointed by the paltry resources for Black motherhood in general and Black adoption specifically, I filled in the gaps. I created a male community for my son, relying upon male friends and coaches to support August's and then Cherish's emotional development. My friends from my pre-mom days continued to help me juggle two kids, and my family also pitched in. My support system doubled when the kids started school, but I still had to make the effort to seek out and nurture these new relationships. I hope that this book is the resource for mothers of children of color that I did not have.

5. If you could give one piece of advice to a new mother, what would it be?

You will be a better mother if you practice self-care. Putting your oxygen mask on first is crucial for your well-being, and the well-being of your family.

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6. What does your writing process look like?

I've been writing my whole life. Whether it's romance novels, women's fiction, or nonfiction, once I get an idea, I start the writing process with research. I go to the library or use the internet or talk to people to ensure that I understand the topic and then commit to putting in the time and work to offer a different slant on a common topic, like motherhood. My first drafts are typically a mess. I give myself permission to get all my thoughts on the page, without worrying about grammar, complete sentences, or cohesive thoughts. I set that aside for a few days or weeks and later create an outline. Then I write between four and five hours per day, during the day, while my kids are at school. Every now and then, if I'm on a deadline, I write late into the night. Once I have taken my work as far as I can on my own, I ask my mentor or a trusted friend, who is usually but not always a fellow writer, for constructive criticism. After receiving notes, I get back to work and rewrite and rewrite and rewrite, ad nauseum, until it's done.

7. Did you find it difficult to write about some of your more personal experiences?

Yes! I am an introvert, so naturally, I only share my more personal experiences with close friends and family. And my day job, as an adjunct history instructor, lends itself to my being most comfortable observing people or events from a corner in the room. This observer perspective did not bode well for a memoir, and early versions were too academic. Since I wanted to connect with readers, I took a deep breath and stepped outside my comfort zone. I'm still a little nervous about all that I shared, but I found the experience cathartic.

8. What do you ultimately want readers to take away from your story?

I want readers to know that there is diversity within motherhood. Whether you are Black, white, Latinx, Asian, LGBTQ+, multiracial, single, married, differently abled, or an auntie/cousin mommy, we all have important, relevant information to share and can learn from one another. Let's respect and appreciate our differences because there is nothing more universal than a mother's love for her child.