

# how we ended racism

Realizing a New Possibility  
in One Generation



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 **sounds true**  
BOULDER, COLORADO

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# Introduction

## Who WE Are

We are liberal and conservative.

We are black, white, and brown.

We are Republican and Democrat,  
Independent, oppressed, and free.

Standing on the shoulders of all who came  
before us, we are the torch bearers,  
relaying the torch to a destination that  
has never been reached before.

We are a message from the future, ancestors  
and descendants at the same time.

We are everything in between.

We are now.

It is time.

*We rise together.*

**I t's time to end racism.** Does racism need to end systemically? Yes. Governmentally? Yes. Socially? Yes. Institutionally? Yes. Relationally? Yes. Internally? Yes. Is racism more than just a “Black” and “white” issue? Yes. Does it need to end in places all around the world? Yes. Do we, as the authors of this book, know how to accomplish all of that alone? No. **But together, we all can.** “We” means all of us. Together we can create the conditions that need to arise for us to arrive at the finish line, once and for all.

In July 2020, amid the global COVID-19 pandemic and the growing protests surrounding the murder of George Floyd and the increased momentum of movements for social change, we, Justin and Shelly, sat together in a state of despair and outrage and like many, asked “What more can we do that will really make an impact?” So, we—a Black queer millennial man and a white straight Jewish Gen X mother—put our very diverse heads together and decided to try something: we created a curriculum that we thought could help end racism.

We know what you’re thinking: “Is ending racism even possible?” Don’t worry, we once thought the same thing, too. And we definitely had our doubts. At first we thought it was delusional or at best naïve to be asking such a question. But we decided to challenge ourselves and instead of approaching “Is ending racism even *possible*?” from a place of doubt and cynicism, we forced ourselves to shift our mindset to a perspective that we imagined the most inspiring leaders throughout history must’ve come from—a place of possibility. That’s when everything changed. Making that shift wasn’t easy, but it created an opening where there was once only a closed door. What we learned gave rise to this book.

But before we codified the teachings into a book, we tested it with people from across what seemed like every divide and from all over the world, by hosting virtual and in-person workshops. After running several programs, we put our work through a rigorous two-year fellowship at the Garrison Institute, a center on the East Coast of the United States that applies the transformative power of contemplative practice to today’s pressing social and environmental concerns, with one goal: to help build a more compassionate, resilient future. At the same time, we hired professional independent academic researchers to host focus groups and conduct surveys with our participants along with studies happening before, during, and six months after the program to examine whether what we were teaching could actually create the conditions we hoped would lead to the type of transformation we were hoping for—the kind needed to end racism. What we found astonished us.

The researchers found that after participants learned this material and applied it to their lives, they felt less reactive and more

compassionate, more comfortable being bold when they needed to speak up, more comfortable being authentic and building connections with people who seemed different from them, and more comfortable spreading knowledge about ending racism from a place of confidence. Participants reported being more open-minded and thus better able to find common ground with people who they once considered on the other side of a divide, and researchers found that participants felt more comfortable having difficult conversations about touchy subjects such as race than they had ever been before (and felt that they had learned to have those conversations in ways that actually helped build connection instead of causing more division and harm).

But the thing we're most proud of is that most folks in our program *took action* in their families, workplaces, communities, and schools in ways they never thought possible before taking the program. Internally, participants reported feelings of self-growth, improved self-awareness, improved mental health, improved relationships with the people around them (including those outside of the program), more compassion for others who made mistakes, and most importantly—a renewed sense of hope. We were astonished as we watched our participants become a family and connect across divides while healing their differences. Then, once we wrote the first draft of this book, we sent it to people who are typically considered to be in a battle against one another, such as a PhD chief diversity officer at a social justice organization and a writer for a prominent conservative news outlet. Tears rolled down our faces when we heard their responses: Both said they believed in and were transformed by this work. We were blown away to hear that parties who typically can't even sit in a room together could agree on the work in this book.

*Shifting to a perspective of possibility transforms everything.* What we discovered on our journey opened our hearts. It changed the way we think about everything, and we hope the same happens for you.

In this book, we will share what we believe to be the primary conditions needed to end racism. **This book is here to teach you the inner work, internal and external perspective shifts, conversations,**

**practical tools, and action steps you need so that when racism arrives in your presence, you end it.** We will expand on *how* to do that throughout our journey together. Whether you're starting from zero and have never done a moment of work around racism in your life, or you're on the opposite end of the spectrum and have spent your entire life working for change, or you're somewhere in between—our studies have shown this work can work for you. You don't need a PhD to do it, you don't need to have spent your life in politics—you just need to have an open heart and willingness to start from wherever you are now.

Think of the idea of ending racism as a metaphor for our immune system. In order to have a healthy immune system, we can't just fight sickness—we must also be proactive in cultivating wellness and good health. We invest in our health to build what the mindful researcher Dr. Amishi Jha calls “precovery” and “presilience,”<sup>1</sup> so that when something goes awry in the body or we encounter something toxic, our immune system is strong enough to fight it off. Thus, by cultivating health (not just fighting sickness), *we are changing the conditions and context in which sickness tries to occur.*

Look at ending racism the same way—we are not “fighting racism,” ***we are changing the conditions and context in which racism occurs.*** This requires us to **evolve our culture.** *We—each of us—create that culture.* And no, we don't need to give up all of our values, beliefs, and traditions or become one big homogenous “melting pot” for racism to end. That will never work. We must do something much greater. We must evolve our culture to be one that has an even *better equipped* immune system to hold competing ideals—one that has practices, knowledge, and systems in place that make it hard for racism to show up; and when and if does, *the immune system of our culture* is strong enough to handle it. *You are what creates that culture.* The conditions in this new culture are set such that we are capable of handling racism in a way that does not leave us in shambles, more distrusting of one another, or more divided in the aftermath of racism rearing its ugly head. In this way, we're not resisting racism but rather creating the conditions for it to end. *We embody* the conditions required for it to end. *We—each*

*of us, individually—are the end of racism.* When racism touches you, it ends. If enough of us learn the skills needed and take them into our individual areas of influence—with all of our fields of expertise, into all of our circles, into all of our interactions, and into all of our relationships—we will end racism, together.

## Repairing Our Old House

A metaphor we often like to use in our workshops, which is from Isabel Wilkerson’s book *Caste*, is that living with racism is like inheriting an old house. When we inherit a one-hundred-year-old house and realize the pipes downstairs are rusted and the foundation is sinking or the support beams are starting to crack, we don’t walk into the house and say, “Well, I’m not responsible for fixing any of this stuff because I’m not the one who built it. The people who built the house one hundred years ago need to fix it since it’s their fault it wasn’t built correctly.” Yet this is what we often do as it relates to our history. But if this world is the old house that we all inherited and we are the ones living in it, there’s no one else to repair it but us. Yet we often find people spending so much energy laying blame to who caused it and pointing fingers at who should be responsible for repairing it. It’s time we stop waiting for somebody to show up to fix things and realize that we are, in fact, that somebody. Each of us is. It’s time we all step up to do the work that is each of ours to do within our specific fields of influence and expertise in the corners of the world that only we can reach. If you’ve already been stepping up, we hope this book supports you to make an even bigger and more significant impact. Wherever you are along your journey, if you picked up this book, we know you are ready.

## The Journey

What you will find in these pages is a carefully curated and integrated voice that combines decades of our work (which builds upon centuries of work by others, as well) to create one unified “we” voice that seeks to prop up the collective vision for a future without racism. There are times throughout the book that we share our individual stories, but for



the majority of the content, you will see a voice that models exactly what we are hoping to teach you—that we are stronger when we come together, that *we all* (you and us, white and Black, People of Color, Americans and the global community at large, all of us!) have work to do to end racism, and that it *can* be done together.

While we have both been teaching for over four decades combined and have taught and researched the conditions that allow rapid, large-scale change to transform a culture, we have also both personally been deeply impacted by the existence of racism. Justin grew up in a biracial family that disowned his mother for marrying outside of her race but learned to come together and find a unity and love that defied the odds of the time. Shelly was raised in a culture that taught her to fear and hate a perceived “enemy” from a different culture, but she now advocates and fights on behalf of the rights of the so-called enemy population. It is because of our experience not just in our professional lives but also in our personal lives that we know racism can end.

The vision we are setting forth is that we can all create a reality where our descendants will look back in history upon this era of racism the same way we look back now on many things humans did before that seem nonsensical to most of us today—from human sacrifices, to murdering young children and the infirmed elderly who couldn’t keep up with their tribe or required too many resources, to even more recent (and perhaps relatable) examples of smoking cigarettes on airplanes or riding in cars without seatbelts. One day humanity will reflect on this historical timeline and scratch their heads, saying, “Can you *believe* people did that?! Why on earth would people separate themselves because of this made-up concept called ‘race’?!”

*That’s our North Star. That’s how you’ll know we’ve made it.*

We’ve synthesized the teachings from our workshop into eight distinct pillars for you. *How We Ended Racism* is the amalgamation of all the most effective tools that we’ve gathered from well-researched teachings, experiences, and proven methods—including techniques for inner healing, talking across divides, shadow work, forgiveness, calling one another forward instead of calling out, and much more. The eight pillars

are designed to help you move beyond simply “hoping for” the end of racism and instead have you *become* the end of racism. These conditions don’t arise spontaneously out of the ether—*they must be consciously cultivated*. For this reason, we’ve provided a special set of additional resources to support your journey. You can find those resources and others we mention throughout this book—such as audio guided practices, printable guides and worksheets, podcast episodes, and ways to connect with our global community—at [HowWeEndedRacism.com/resources](https://HowWeEndedRacism.com/resources) or by scanning the QR code on page 9.

It’s important to note there are entire research institutions and books specifically devoted to the topics presented in each of the pillars, so we don’t want you to think that each chapter is the be-all and end-all guide on every concept introduced. Rather, we aim to teach you just what you need to know to start taking action now. We believe that the concepts, skills, tools, and techniques that we present are prerequisites for the possibility of ending racism as evidenced by our research and work—that racism will never end without them. But we also understand that these are not the *only* skills that can be learned to help. We are hoping that as you engage in the inner work and start to change the conditions in your own life, you will find additional pillars to build an even stronger foundation for our “old house” and you’ll do your part to bring them to the world.

We need for each of you—the policy makers, teachers, Republicans, Democrats, activists, artists, parents, students, politicians, executives, nonprofit leaders, young and older folk alike from every generation and every identity—all of us—to show up and build upon these foundations a stable, safe house that we can all enjoy living in together. We hope you do, and we hope you share them with us as well. This is what it means to cocreate.

Last, we want to thank you for entrusting us to take you on this part of the journey. We—a Black queer millennial and a white Jewish Gen Xer—came together just like it’s been done throughout history, to model for you what it looks like for two regular people to join hands and take a stand for a brighter future. We began this journey by

placing ourselves in the future, in a world where racism has ended, just as we will to teach you to do, and we asked, “It’s the year 2050 and racism has ended—what *did* we do *today*, in the earliest part of the twenty-first century, that would’ve *caused* this outcome?” This book is our contribution to creating that world. By the time you’re done reading this, you will be equipped to ask this same question of yourself, and when racism arises, you will have the tools to end it—not because of what we teach you but because of who you chose to *become*.

Let us all come together to realize a new possibility in one generation. This is our time. This is the moment. It’s time to end racism.

## The 8 Pillars of Possibility

**We Anchored into a New Vision**

**We Agreed on the Truth**

**We Owned Our Emotions**

**We Became Intraconnected**

**We Did Shadow Work**

**We Practiced Forgiveness**

**We Had Big Conversations**

**We Took Action**

# Resources

For all the resources we mention through this book visit [HowWeEndedRacism.com/resources](https://HowWeEndedRacism.com/resources) or scan this QR code.

