

EPISODE 1306

MSG: *White women have that privilege, right? That comes with being white in this country and that's not something – And I know that's a charged word, right? And people feel away about privilege. But being white in this country comes with certain advantages, and one of those is that your voice is often heard in spaces where other voices aren't. So we thought this is the group, right? This is the group that has so much power and the ability to use their voice to make change in ways that other groups can't. And if we can harness this group's power, like how amazing, like I can't even fathom.”*

[INTRO]

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. January 17th, 2021. Today, we remember Martin Luther King Jr. In the spirit of racial equality, in the spirit of knowing that we still have lots to learn and far more to go in our efforts to dismantle racism, I've invited on the show the co-authors of a new book called *Dear White Women: Let's Get (Un)comfortable Talking about Racism*. Authors, Misasha Suzuki Graham and Sara Blanchard met at college at Harvard as undergrads. They were about to leave a racial identity discussion group. We'll find out why. That spearheaded not only a close friendship, but many more discussions about what it means to be an ally, what it means to be a white woman in the context of racism and allyship. They are the co-hosts of a podcast called Dear White Women, where they're having these conversations and now a book, an anti-racism guide that's aimed at white people but particularly white women. They track the history of racism in this country, the threats against people of color, and why they wanted to dedicate this book to white women. Here's Misasha Suzuki Graham and Sara Blanchard.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Misasha Suzuki Graham, Sara Blanchard, welcome to So Money. It's a pleasure to have you.

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MSG: It's great to be here.

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FT: Now, you have a new book as a follow up to your phenomenal podcast, *Dear White Women*. You're the co-hosts of this very popular podcast, which explores race at the intersection of gender and what's going on in the world, very hot, important topics. Your book, it's called *Dear White Women* and interestingly inspired by motherhood. So let's maybe start there and talk about the inspiration for this book. Then I want to get into how the two of you met, what made you want to collaborate, some of the learnings through reporting on this book, how it applies not just to women but to perhaps everybody but why you chose to focus on white women, and so much more. But, first, tell us about motherhood as the impetus for this book. Maybe, Misasha, you could start before us.

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MSG: Yeah. So it's hard to talk about motherhood without talking about the two of us. I think both of us being biracial, growing up as the daughters of one Japanese immigrant parent each and one white parent has put sort of race and identity in the forefront of our lives. Because a lot of times, when you're biracial, people try and fit you into one box, right? We are neither solely white or solely Japanese. We are both, and especially, that becomes important when you think about your kids, right? So we're both mothers. We both – Even though we have this biracial experience growing up, which is similar in some ways and different in other ways, motherhood is where that path really sort of diverge for us because of who our kids are.

I'll let Sara talk about her own kids, but I have two boys who are nine and seven now, and they are black Japanese and white. So they're not biracial. They're multiracial. But how the world sees them is as black boys. It was difficult realizing that one of my biggest fears for my boys is that they will walk out of our house one day and not come back, solely because of the color of their skin. I think as a mother, as a parent, as anyone who loves kids in your life, like that fear

that you don't have that control over how your kids are treated is a really devastating fear. But also one that we weren't seeing reflected in the social circles that Sara and I were traveling in, which were largely full of white women.

Everyone has hopes and dreams and fears for your kids. But when you are raising non-white children in the United States, those fears look different. So we thought about what if we could change those conversations in those spaces? What if we could add narratives that weren't the dominant narrative in the United States, that weren't the ones that we were taught in school, that weren't the ones that are sort of control a lot of how our society is run? That's sort of the impetus for the podcast because we thought we like to speak, we like to write, so why not just focus on those two key things, and let's have a podcast.

We didn't know anything about podcasting at the time, but I think that has been our platform to have these conversations, to model these conversations, to interview people, to get different narratives in there, and to really talk about we're having these conversations. We're learning about the history that we didn't learn in school. Let's take it one step further. Like how then do we take what we know now and make changes in our own spheres of influence, however big or small those are?

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FT: Sara, what were your questions related to motherhood and race? What was the trigger for you there?

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SB: So I'm the mother of two white girls, who are a little bit older than Misasha's kids and sort of in the lower middle school kind of age range for my kiddos. I'm married to a white Canadian man, and so what we have in international perspective, my kids, as a quarter Japanese, three-quarters white, look white to the world. One of the things – Misasha and I have been best friends for 25 years. You talk everything from like shoes and fashion all the way to like the things that really matter. Not to say that shoes don't matter. But I feel like when we were starting to talk about parenthood, I could understand that sense of fear that you have for your kids because as

girls or as a mother of girls, I have this fear of them being pigeonholed because they are of the female gender.

But then I also have fears of them being attacked. I feel like as women, we can understand empathically with this idea of being judged for how we show up in the world because of our gender. But I realized they still had a leg up because they look light. Since we became parents, my husband and I have lived in predominantly white areas of the United States. We used to live in the major cities around the world. Now, we've lived in Arizona and in Colorado. I was realizing how, A, little exposure my kids are having two people who look different from them. I think, in fact, at one point, they saw an Asian woman crossing the street, and they're like, "Look, there goes O bāchan like grandma." I'm like, "Okay, we need to really think about how kids are understanding and seeing race, even when they have people who look different in their own family, if they're not exposed to it."

Then the second thing was I was seeing in schools how oftentimes it's not discussed. So knowing what I knew about identity, also growing up biracial, I really wanted to start having these conversations in the kids' school. I found myself doing more and more conversations and pulling in groups that talked about identity into my kids' public school. Then that's when Misasha and I sort of looked at each other, and we're like, "I think it's time we take our behind-the-scenes conversations that we're sharing people's narratives, we're looking at the history, we're talking about what we can do differently, and really bring it to more people by doing the podcast and then the book."

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FT: And specifically bringing it to white women. This was important to you, as opposed to speaking to everybody. You wanted to focus on this population. Tell us why because the title *Dear White Women*, it can sound to somebody who is just coming to it as like, "Oh, I'm going to get schooled and I'm in trouble. I've done something wrong. I need to listen." But tell us how you want people to approach this and why you also focused on women and white women in particular?

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MSG: Yeah. I'm really glad you asked this because it is the question we get asked the most. It's the question my white mother asked when we first started the podcast. Then again, when we called our book *Dear White Women: Let's Get (Un)comfortable Talking about Racism*, she's like, "Really? Do you need to do that again?" But the answer is yes, right? I think that it's for several reasons, right? First, being women, we recognize that women hold a lot of power. In a lot of different spheres of influence, be it at home, be it at work, be it at PTA meetings, book clubs, your gyms, wherever you're moving through, women hold a lot of influence that is often undervalued.

So we really wanted to talk to women to say, "Look, you have a lot of power that we often discount." But this is really important, especially here, and then in particular for white women because, again, we had moved through those circles. We knew what was being talked about. We knew what wasn't being talked about. But we also know that by virtue of living in this country and being white, white women have that privilege, right? That comes with being white in this country and that's not something – I know that's a charged word, and people feel away about privilege. But being white in this country comes with certain advantages, and one of those is that your voice is often heard in spaces where other voices aren't.

So we thought this is the group, right? This is the group that has so much power and the ability to use their voice to make change in ways that other groups can't. If we can harness this group's power, like how amazing, like I can't even fathom what levels of change that could be.

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SB: In terms of the statistics, I think right now, women control about a third of American households' financial wealth. I think they say that that's about \$10 trillion. But in the next 10 years, sort of by, say, 2030, American women are supposed to control about \$30 trillion in financial assets. Our spending power, our control over the direction that we're going to focus our money usage on is tremendous. If we can just see the disparities that have existed in our society because of access to resources, historical trends like redlining, like education, like all of these things that have been stacked against people of color in this country, imagine the change we could make if we started consciously directing our money towards women-owned

businesses, minority-owned businesses. We could really change the makeup of the entrepreneurial landscape in this country by deciding where we're going to spend our money, on whom.

I think that power can't be understated and I also think it's important to really recognize what you said at the beginning, which was like *Dear White Women* is a pretty pointed name. But I think it's so important for us to get across that we aren't coming after you. We are really working hard to welcome more people into the conversation because we are where we are, largely based on historic segregation, the lack of even education around where we are. We just don't know why we are where we're at, and so we aim to welcome people in a non-shaming tone. You'll see, like if you get to know us, we're really heart-led, warm, like nice people who are kind, right?

That's the tone we invoke in this book, and we've gotten a lot of positive feedback for it. So I think we say the name as *Dear White Women* because this is an uncomfortable conversation. But that doesn't mean that we are going to come after you. We really want to help everyone understand the power of influence that each of us has in our own spheres of daily life right now.

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FT: I like how the book shares not only the conversations that you can be having but also the actions that you can take. You just outlined a few of them; supporting black-owned businesses, supporting minority entrepreneurship. What are some other action steps? I know because we won't talk about some of the conversations we should be having, and that can for some of us be even more uncomfortable than the doing part. It's like, "Oh, I can open up my wallet and help." That might be a shortcut in some ways, but then we still have to have the conversations. We still have to have those connections. But what are some other action steps that we can take to not just talk the talk but actually walk it and show it and spend it?

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SB: One of the first uncomfortable conversations that comes to mind, we started this conversation about motherhood. I think it's so uncomfortable, but it is so important for all of us to – When the kids are younger than you sort of want them to be, explain what the N word is, and

tell them why they should never ever, ever, ever use it if they are not black, right? I'm not going to tell a black person what vocabulary they can or cannot use in their own homes. But it is a word that there is no real equivalent to in terms of power to hurt that exists for white people or basically any other population. The historic ties to that word are explained in the book, and I think it's surprising to most white people to understand that their kids are actually using it. They're hearing it in elementary school.

My third-grader came home, and she'd already been told what the word was and said, "Mommy so-and-so got called the N word at the playground today. And he came in and was crying behind me. And I had to take his hand, and we went to tell the teacher." When I tell people of color this story, they're like, "Oh, yeah. That happens." When I tell white people this story, they're like, "Oh, no way. You don't want your kid to be the one calling somebody else the N word or not helping to look out for the friends who are called that by anybody." So I think that is one uncomfortable conversation that as parents we want to be having early enough with our children.

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FT: How did the two of you meet in the first place? Did you meet through your kids? Or I guess much earlier. It sounded like you know each other for many, many years. Then what was the final conversation where you're like, "Okay, this is it. We're collaborating."?

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MSG: So we have known each other for so many years, right? We met 25 years ago, walking out of a racial identity conversation at Harvard. I think it's important to note that we were walking out of this conversation before it ended, right? Basically, it was the Half Asian People's Association. The question that was presented was, "Are you half a person? Or are you double a person?" At that point, a few of us got up and were like, "We might be in the wrong room." Sara and I met walking out at that moment.

I guess it's not surprising that 25 years later, we're talking about issues of race and identity, and asking why and why. Why are we asking that question over and over again? But I think that it was those moments where we – When I was talking about before and how we've been talking

about before that we knew what conversations weren't happening, and in particular when it came to writing the book because we've had these conversations on the podcast, and we recognize that not everyone is a podcast listener, and this message is really important.

But it was also when we were writing the book, it was COVID, right? It was a shutdown. We were homeschooling our kids, which is not easy. It was after the murder of George Floyd, and we were talking about writing this book, and Sara asked me, "Okay, so tell me why. Why should we do this right now?" I said, "I'm trying to save my kids' lives." It was a very honest moment, those like Speed Round questions where they're like, "Tell us your first answer," and that was my truth. I still think that regarding the book and the podcast and all the work that we do, if one person reads it, who has the ability to make that choice as to whether my kids survive or not or kids who look like them survive or not or any kids really survive or not, then it's completely worth it.

So it is a very personal why for me, for us. But I think that that is what fuels these conversations, and that is what fuels this work in the end because it is really hard and it is really uncomfortable. You mess up all the time, right? I mess up daily. So I think that that personal why is really important.

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FT: Well, it's a really important point that the whole messing up stuff. I mean, it's going to happen and I think we just have to be okay with that because unfortunately, that is what is part of what prevents people from even having these conversations. I'm speaking specifically about people like myself even, white women. We're worried about tripping and saying the wrong thing and offending. But it's like I always try to remind myself. It's like, "This isn't about me. This isn't about my feelings, me feeling a little uncomfortable." I mean, I want to be like conscientious and thoughtful and research before I start a conversation. But this is something that we have to work through, and that process is going to be messy.

But I think if you're coming from a place of wanting to sincerely help and learn, that's going to come across. I think that's a genuine thing that comes across and to not be worried about that

so much that it prevents you from even taking that first step of having a conversation with a friend or your child or whoever is important in your life.

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SB: Absolutely. I mean, I think the other thing to think about from the money angle or for people who are running corporations is what you were saying that people can tell if you're doing it just for the sake of doing it versus because you're connected to why you care. I think that being said, if a company needs to be motivated by the reality that having more diverse employees and managers and executives actually improves the bottom line of companies. The more diversity you have involved in your company, generally speaking, the better your bottom line performance is, all the more reason. If that's your first why because you want to make more money, but then you backtrack into understanding that we're actually still talking about human beings here, if you're really believing that humans are like the most valuable part of your organization, then you do you want to engage in this. You can't just talk about other things and tiptoe around race. It is one of the centerpieces around how we all relate to one another in our society. So you want to get more comfortable making mistakes but learning and sincerely understanding why this matters to so many people out there in our country.

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FT: Well, the cancel culture, that's what people are afraid of too, is like saying the wrong thing. Or maybe I said something wrong 20 years ago, and it shows up. Can you speak to that a little bit? Because I feel like that can be an impediment and a fear that people have, again going back to this idea of like, "I'm going to say the wrong thing. Or if I don't just –" Even as a company, right? If you're just proclaiming that you believe in black lives matter but not doing the work. But you're just like, "I have to have to do something. Because if I don't, then consumers are going to think that I don't care." It's like, well, where's the genuineness in that? So talk a little bit about that because I feel like cancel culture complicates things a bit.

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MSG: Yeah, absolutely. I think there has been this move towards you say one thing, or we found this on your social media, or we found this on your Twitter 20 years ago and when you were a teenager, and you're done. Your voice is silenced. That is absolutely the wrong way of going about making change, right? Because that also assumes that you're defined by your worst moment or your mistake or any mistake, right? I don't think any of us want that, to be thought about for ourselves, right?

Also, I think that that assumes that perfection is, A, attainable, B, a good thing, or, C, something that we should be striving towards. I think that a lot of this work in so many things, right? But in in race and racism, it's about the journey and about the ability to grow from each mistake. Because, I mean, who wants to fail? But then once you fail or, like in business, when you fail, you actually learn more, right? You're next. If you're an entrepreneur, those failures are really important to getting to that next business level, to getting to the business that is successful.

The same way, it is about talking about race. Especially when in our country, if you think about what your first memory was about talking about race, were you encouraged to do that? Or were you told like, "Oh, we don't talk about that, right?" I think a lot of us grew up hearing that we don't talk about it. So it's not like you're automatically going to become an adult and know exactly how to do this, right? It is messy. It's super uncomfortable. But I think the important point is, well, a couple. First, you want to keep doing it, right? I know it's super uncomfortable. But we do a lot of things that are uncomfortable and hard in our lives, and this is so crucial for the growth of our society as a whole to be having these conversations.

You're going to mess up. I think we should all know that to be true. You will say the wrong thing. I, as someone who is terrified of saying the wrong thing and as a litigator and basically paid to not say the wrong thing a lot of times, like it's a block, right? You tend to not say anything for fear of saying the wrong thing, rather than standing up and saying that's not right. Or saying some words and being corrected. I think we also learn from those mistakes, so to own up to those mistakes.

For those corporations who make big statements and then don't do the work afterwards, I think it's really important to think about why, right? Like what is the intentionality? Because the whole thing about making mistakes is that you're very intentional too about your growth, right? You

make a mistake, you learn, you change, and you move forward, right? So the path is forward. So for those corporations who are thinking like, "Okay, I made this big statement, and people are asking why," like it is not too late to do that work too. It's not too late to have these conversations. It's not too late to get involved. But that intentionality that, that forward, progress is slow. Yes, you're going to make mistakes and own up to them, rather than trying to shove them under the rug and move on is really, really important, personally and professionally.

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FT: I was reading an interview that the two of you gave in the Harvard Gazette. I would love to share one of your answers with our audience to the question about focusing specifically on the black experience when it comes to racism. As two Japanese American women, I'm sure you would agree there's plenty to put in a book about the Asian American experience when it comes to racism. Yet you wanted to focus on the black experience. Why was that more important to you, and do you think in the future you would like to address something that is more personal, like the Asian American experience?

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MSG: In the book, we have three sections, right? One is being white in America, which is really about answering some of the questions that we hear and that we've heard. I don't have white privilege like, "What is this? Isn't it all lives matter?" A lot of those issues that come up again. When you don't know what to say or you're afraid to say the wrong thing or different ways to think about it. For us, that second section in the book, which is on being black in America, was really important because the history of slavery is really the history of America, right? Like those two are so closely linked when you look at all of the policies that we have now, right? Why we live in segregated neighborhoods, right? Why there is no generational wealth, or it's so much harder for black Americans to have generational wealth. Why we have redlining. Why the GI Bill happened the way it did. All of those are very much tied to the existence of slavery, which has been around since our country started, right?

But once we had that foundation to understand that real base for systemic racism in our country, we did want to devote that third section of our book to being a non-black person of color in this

country. So we were able to address, while not a focus, being Asian in this country and the China flu and all of the anti-Asian hate that really has been around forever, basically, but really sort of spiked during COVID. But then also the Native American experience in this country, the immigrant experience in this country, and the Hispanic experience as well.

Well, it wasn't a focus, and definitely I think this is something we want to talk about more and work on more for ourselves. We really did think that if you don't have that basis of understanding the black experience in America, then it's very hard to fully understand why racism is such a big problem that affects all of us.

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FT: As we look at the new year and also reflecting on all of the experiences of the past two years, especially, what are the next level conversations that you think we should be having or that you have questions about that? In other words, why should we tune into your podcast? Because I want to get everyone to subscribe.

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SB: First, I will say that there are a lot of people who are very, very new to the conversation about race and racism. So we would want people to step in and start to get a baseline level of comfort, fluency, understanding of the history and the languaging around these discussions to start because we're going to be coming up on the second-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd. Unfortunately, the reality is that's not going to be the last. There have been major headlines. They will continue to be terrible news headlines that hit the waves, and we want people to be able to engage meaningfully and understand the depth of what we're discussing when those things happen.

Next Level conversations. Oh, my gosh. First, there are so many things. There's like no shortage of things to talk about, right? We had the privilege to sort of skim the surface of the Japanese American incarceration experience during World War Two, and we are planning to dive into that even more deeply with survivors of those camps. We have interviews lined up with really prominent white women to discuss their ideas and conceptualization around their personal

growth when it came to race. What else do we have lined up, Misasha? We have so much already coming up. But I think – Go ahead.

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MSG: No. I think black women's health care is another big thing and the disparities in health care. I know that that was something we had touched on very early in the podcast, but it's something that we'd like to focus on again, especially in COVID we have seen those disparities up close and also when we are looking at Supreme Court decisions that are coming down. How that is going to have like a disparate impact and how it always does on communities of color, as well as socio-economic disparities. So I think we really want to dive into those deeply and still with a focus on like, "Well, what do I do about this?" Because I think a lot of times this can get very intellectualized, and we can talk about the theories of racism. But having those conversations and then translating into action steps, that don't have to be huge, right? They can be small. But as long as they're intentional, and they're top of mind, I think that's the through line that we always want to tie and increasingly so in 2022.

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FT: Well, we look forward to all of it. Misasha Suzuki Graham, Sara Blanchard, your book, your podcast. It's called *Dear White Women*. We thank you for your commitment to this and encouraging us all to join you in this journey, in this conversation. Have a great year.

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MSG: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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FT: To learn more about the podcast and the book, *Dear White Women*, head over to [dearwhite women.com](http://dearwhitewomen.com). If you have a question for me for the Friday episodes of Ask Farnoosh, we have a

new way to get in touch through text messaging 415-942-5002, 415-942-5002. Send me your questions. Not a whole lot of people have subscribed yet. So chances are if you text me there, I'll read it, and we will get to the bottom of your question in an upcoming episode. Thanks for tuning in, and I'll see you back here on Wednesday. In the meantime, I hope your day is So Money.

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