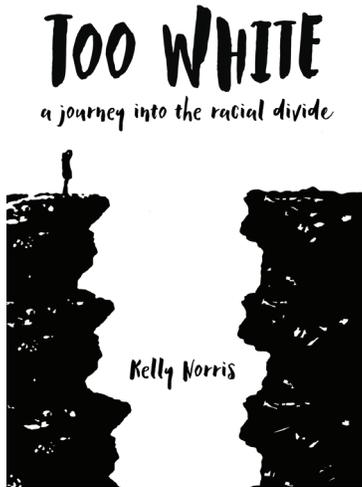




## Too White

by Kelly Norris

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Although scholars have outlined the stages of white identity development, it wasn't until Kelly Norris was the single mom of a biracial child, teaching in a suburban school where she'd been called a "nigger lover," that she began seriously considering them. Kelly had long been struggling with identity and race in America, haunted by the question: what does it mean to be white? Her early attempts to answer this, however, focused primarily on what it meant to be black.

*Too White* is a memoir of a white woman's journey to explore the racial divide. In this sometimes embarrassing, sometimes painful, but often exhilarating journey, she confronts racism head-on, ultimately forging a positive white, anti-racist identity. Unlike the theoretical body of work on the subject, this memoir offers an intimate, honest look at the motives, struggles, and revelations attending white identity development.

### From the author

I went to Ghana for a year in college but never really understood why. In fact, that trip was part of a life-long exploration of the meaning of race, starting from the isolated suburb where I grew up. When I finally recognized my privilege, and the consequences of growing up in a segregated society, I was able to see the systematic nature of racism, and pathways to resistance. At that point, one of my mentors in community activism said to me, "More white people should tell their stories." So that's what I did.

### Discussion Questions

1. Early on, the narrator recalls a trip to K-mart where she first noticed racial differences. What are your earliest memories regarding race? What feelings came up? What do you think now?
2. What do you make of the encounter at the mall in Part One? Why do you think the fight occurred?
3. The narrator says, at the end of Part One, that she wants to be "less white." What do you think that means to her? Do you agree with her assessment?
4. In Ghana, the narrator begins to make general comparisons between white culture and black. What are some of the conclusions she comes to? Why do you think she arrives at these conclusions? Are your experiences similar or different?
5. Do you think it is a good idea for the narrator to take the job in Bridgeport? Why/why not? Why does she?
6. At the end of Part Three, the narrator has decided to try to "find a black community and blend in, hide out." Why do you think she does this? What are all the factors that feed into this choice?
7. What do you make of the characters in Part Four? Why do you think they hang out with the narrator? Why does she hang out with them?



8. Part Five focuses more on family. Why do you think this storyline is necessary for the narrative?
9. What has the narrator learned about race by the end that could have helped her in the beginning?
10. Look up Helms' stages of white identity development, as referenced in the Author's Note. How do you think each of the five parts of the book fits or doesn't fit into these definitions?

### **About the author**

Kelly Norris is a teacher, mother, writer, and activist living in Amherst, Massachusetts. Several of her essays dealing with anti-racism in the classroom have appeared in anthologies and online journals. As a Teacher Consultant with the National Writing Project, she's presented workshops for fellow educators on topics such as teaching for social justice, using hip-hop in the classroom, and addressing privilege with privileged groups. Kelly holds an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Lesley University and is working on a second book of nonfiction, a collection of profiles of radical people living outside of mainstream. When she's not writing, she can be found hiking trails, sitting on her yoga mat, subverting the dominant paradigm, and looking for new places to travel.