

You'll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey Reading Group Guide

Discussion with the Authors

The following dialogue is transcribed from a recorded discussion between Amber and Lacey.

Who would you like to read this book?

Lacey: I would love every single white person that I've ever worked with to read this book—and just white people in general. And white people who maybe think, “Well, is it really that bad? Is racism really that bad?” I would love them to read this book. And supervisors, people who are in charge of people. I want them to read this book and be like, “I am never doing that again. I am now going to go to work and call Linda “Linda” and not “Black Linda.”

Amber [singing]: I'm not Black Linda.

Lacey: I've told people and just told them, “I'm just writing a book.” I'm not even really going into depth. “Oh, I'll get your book.” “Yes. You need to.” I'm not going into depth. And then they're going to read the book, and I know that my phone's going to blow up. They're going to be like, “Oh my God, did that really happen to you? Oh my God, is that...?” Those are the people that I want to read this book. Because Black people know that this goes on every day. I want them to read it, too, because then they will be like, “Oh my gosh, that is happening to me now. Oh my God, maybe I'll start speaking up.” Or, “I need to speak up. I need to try to make some changes at work.” Because people need to start speaking up. But first and foremost, you know who I want to read this book. That's who I want. I have a long list of people that I want to read the book.

Amber: I think reading this book will change something in you. You'll be like, “Well, I didn't know this happened to this degree, with this frequency. Okay. When I look at a Black person, I will understand a tiny bit of what

they are carrying around.” You might feel a call to action, and that’s a great reaction I want people to have. You might feel more empathy. I want people to have that. But you also might just feel comforted, and hey, that’s enough.

Is racism really that bad?

Amber: I am a writer on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, and during the George Floyd protest, during the beginning of it, we didn’t know exactly how we were going to address that on the show. So I chose to tell stories that I tell in the book about my run-ins with cops. And so many people were like, “Now that you say that to me like that, I understand it.” And I just thought, okay, that’s good, but also it’s infinitely frustrating. And that’s part of what needs to break, is just that once you shake off the math we use to suss out what’s real and what’s fake, once you shake that off and you’re just a normal human being with logic, not being a piece of shit is the logical choice. It’s logical.

Lacey: Okay. Amber’s on TV. Amber’s telling that story, and it’s believable. People believe that story. I have told my stories at work about racism a million times. It’s like they don’t get it. They don’t get it. I think what the George Floyd video did was it gave credibility to all my little stories. And I have had people reach out to me and say, “Oh my God, Lacey, remember when you were in the meeting? I can’t believe this is happening.” *Now* you’re understanding me? I told you that this happened to me a year ago when I was telling you this story. George Floyd—that opened up people’s eyes. And I’m so angry that I already left my job. I wanted to be in that room. I called them up like, “What was the morning meeting like? What’s happening?” I wanted to be in that room because I seriously got texts from people going, “Oh my God, racism is so bad, and I remember when you stood up and told the story at work.” It’s like, now you’re getting it. So before, I’m telling you, my stories that I would say, and sometimes I’d have tears in my eyes, and be telling people and they would just be like, “Lacey, I really think you’re overexaggerating. I don’t think that racism is this bad.”

Race in the workplace

Lacey: So when I'm at work, it's a fine line. Do I want to be fired that day? Or am I going to go home? I'm not usually overworried about that, but how crazy is that? That you have to say in your head, "I'm about to lose my job today because the CEO came in and called us all Negroes. So I'm going to have to correct him, which is going to lead to me being fired in a week." Like, imagine *that*. And that happens all the time.

And then, we have the "meeting after the meeting"—for which I got into trouble and was told not to have a meeting after the meeting with the few other Black people that may work with me. So then you pull everyone aside and you say, "Okay, this happened. It's 2020. I can't. I got to say something." And everyone's like, "Well, it was nice working with you. I'm not going to say anything. Lacey, you can go ahead and say something." That has happened throughout my entire life. So you just have to pick and choose when you want to say something, but you know that you may not have a job the next day.

Amber: Conversely, if anyone says anything crazy to me at work—I work in comedy and almost always have—I can simply say, "If you talk to me like that again, I will take you outside and beat you." And I can say it with a smile and be like, "Ha-ha." And they'll get the message, or I can say exactly that dead serious to the bossiest boss of my boss. And they'll be like, "Oh, yeah. All right." But because I think if you work in comedy, good and bad, you can basically say whatever you want.

Questions for Discussion

1. Racism obviously exists everywhere, but Amber and Lacey describe having very different experiences of racism in their current lives. In your experience, have you noticed different forms of racism in different parts of the country (or not)?

2. Which story of Lacey's surprised you the most? What do you think made it unexpected?
3. Is there a story that made a significant impact on you? How did it feel to read that story, and in what ways has it stuck with you?
4. Do you identify with any of the stories or conversations between Amber and Lacey, and if so, how?
5. While in some of the stories people do have malicious intent, there are many stories in the book that involve white people who are clueless about how absurd their behavior is. How would you respond to something like this in the moment? Would your response depend on whether you were a bystander or directly involved?
6. Amber and Lacey were discussing these stories together long before they had decided to write a book about them. What is the impact of sharing experiences like this? Do you have someone in your life whom you connect with in a similar way?
7. Early reviewers have had a big reaction to Amber and Lacey's stories, specifically noting the balance of humor and gravity while tackling such a fraught subject. What is your biggest takeaway from the book?
8. Has your relationship with racism changed at all since the mid-2020 rise in antiracist demonstrations and dialogue?