

**Audio Title: The Book Stoop Myisha T Hill Healing Your Way Forward**

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### **Transcript**

**Rebekah Borucki:** Hello, friend! I heard you were looking for our spot. I got you.

So, you're going to go past the corner bodega and down the block from the fresh cuts barbershop, and there you'll find a brick row house at the intersection of Literature Place and Social Justice Blvd. That's the stoop.

Amanda, Amanda Lytle, she will be there to welcome you to the conversation. The Book Stoop, that's the name of the spot. We got the hottest takes on book culture, nerd culture, current events, with best-selling authors, change-makers, and risk-takers, the best kinds of folks.

Oh, me? I'm Rebekah Borucki, President of Row House Publishing, and this is our podcast. I am so glad you're here.

Now, I'm going to let you get to Amanda.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thanks, Bex. Hey friend. Let me be the second to welcome you to our spot, *The Book Stoop*. I feel incredibly honored to be the host of this podcast and I'm so grateful to have you with us.

Today on *The Book Stoop*, I'm speaking with Myisha T. Hill. Myisha is a mental health activist, healer, speaker, author, entrepreneur and founder of Check Your Privilege, a global movement that supports individuals on their journey of becoming actively anti-racist.

In the conversation today, Myisha speaks about the importance of making space for black men to exist as whole human beings and why centering elders is necessary for guidance, growth, change and inspiration.

Myisha tells us all about her journey with her upcoming book *Heal Your Way Forward* and the backstory behind Check Your Privilege. You will also hear about how therapy, peer support groups, Zumba and scuba diving are sources of nourishment for Myisha.

We start our chats on *The Book Stoop* with a rather fitting question. So, what are you reading these days?

**Myisha T. Hill:** I'm currently reading for my own book club by Bell Hooks, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. For those of you who don't know me, I am like – I call myself the biggest Bell Hooks fan in the world. Husband got me a whole collection of books for her last holiday season. So, we are doing a one-year book club in Check Your Privilege. So, the book we're currently reading is *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*.

**Amanda Lytle:** And if you were to give me one takeaway, what is something that has just blown your mind or like really hit you in the heart space?

**Myisha T. Hill:** Oh, it's so good and it's so dense and it's so hard to pull one thing from Bell Hooks. But I think the one takeaway that I'm getting is that we need to make space to allow black men to exist as whole human beings outside of the lens of like patriarchy and oppression, right?

We don't make space for black men to show up loving and nurturing, right? Just because of all the socializations and I think it's the call and it's really sticking on my heart to give black men space to be loved and be held and be nourished, right? I think that's like my one sweet spot right now.

**Amanda Lytle:** I love it. Love that it's a one-year book club.

**Myisha T. Hill:** You know, a lot of the work that I do when I teach – I teach from second and third grade feminism. So, I do a lot of work around – with Bell Hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw around intersectionality and systems of oppression.

It just fell on my spirit. I'm like, I have all of Bell Hooks' books. So, what does it look like? We talk about the work. We talk about her framework of interlocking systems of oppression. Let's just let this be our guide for the year because number one, it centers black women and black women stories and experiences. And two, who doesn't love a good Bell Hooks book? That could just be my own bias, right?

So, it was literally a way to – like I had all the books, and I was like, “Well, let's just do it.” But in this work, we like to center whiteness and white stories and we forget about the importance of the elders who are still living, who came before us, before fourth wave generation feminism, and really set the framework with that. I wanted to center their teachings and knowledge for us in the movement at this moment and our followers.

History likes to erase our stories. So, what better way to keep the elders – they're still living. Like Bell Hooks is alive. Kimberle Crenshaw is alive. Patricia Hill Collins is alive. And these are women. There are more women and black lesbians and femmes and black men who have been teaching and leading this, but they've been erased from authors such as – I'm not going to say their names, but predominantly white mainstream authors, right? Have taken their framework and ran with it, right?

So, the idea was like let's give reverence to the elders and let's let their work guide us in this new generation and momentum-building. So ...

**Amanda Lytle:** I love this because I know that you're in the writing process yourself, which is super exciting, and I want to hear all about it. Is there something that keeps you super inspired and super motivates as you're reading that you feel even more intrigued to write your own stuff maybe after having read something from these elders?

**Myisha T. Hill:** Oh, absolutely. Like I – you know, I – what’s interesting is that I’ve always had these ideas and thoughts, right, before I got into the scholarly work or reading like just the educational piece of it for myself. I’m reading this book by Bell Hooks and she’s naming experiences I had lived and thoughts that I’ve had when it comes to like black-white binary or patriarchy.

The way that she is saying it, it’s speaking to my heart in such a way that I could be – like I’m in the middle of a chapter right now and the light bulb clicks. Like that’s what I was trying to say. It just informs me as a writer, as an author to like pull from that and let her work and other work empower me to move forward.

Like there’s some work that I have to do in my book around internal families, IFS, internal family systems. I didn’t create that. Dr. Richard Schwartz did. So, what does it look like? We would have a conversation with Dr. Schwartz. Like hey, yes, you are a white man, and this framework is awesome from the work that I do, right?

Every time I read even stuff from his book or Bell’s book, it just informs me to write in a way that makes sense for me and makes sense for the audience and it’s super inspiring. So yes, the light bulbs are always like flickery.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. I want to hear all about *Heal Your Way Forward*. Where did – I was going to say, “Where does the courage come from?” because I feel like writing or expressing and sharing a lot of what you believe in and your perspectives and everything, diving into writing is a big journey. So, I would love to hear about how that came about.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Well, it’s really interesting because I recognize that I actually have a trauma wound with writing, right? Being told at a young age due to dyslexia and other things that my writing sucked, right? So even the title *Heal Your Way Forward*, as I’m writing, I’m actually healing that traumatic story. Like I’m writing a new story, right? So, it’s like *Heal Your Way Forward*, yes, it’s for co-conspirators but it’s also healing me. Like a lot of the chapters, as I’m writing them, I’m like, “Holy – wow!” Like this is not just about like – the book is for the audience, right? Which is predominantly white, white passing, both. Let’s just be clear.

But as I’m writing it, I’m inviting inner connections of my own healing, right? And it’s all rooted in this framework that when I first started this Check Your Privilege – what? Four years ago, almost now, I started to notice the patterns of behavior and I created what was called this co-conspirator’s journey and that is the journey that’s informing the writing of *Heal Your Way Forward*, of just taking each step of what I notice and breaking it down because a lot of folks like to compartmentalize antiracism work as this other – they utter it as it’s just like this thing – OK. Well, I’m going to do it because it’s convenient or it’s just a fad. So, I will just handle it.

And it’s really like this idea of healing your way forward is like actually, no, because when you heal your way forward by living and breathing and being in this work, like your healing, like your ancestor wounds, you’re healing for future generations, and you get to cocreate what building a

new system within yourself because we're all systems of oppression. But building a better future for the liberated collective.

**Amanda Lytle:** It's such a journey. When is it due to come out?

**Myisha T. Hill:** July of 2022.

**Amanda Lytle:** Now just because you said it and I wrote it down, the Check Your Privilege, yeah, almost four years ago. That in itself is a journey.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Yes.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah, big time. So, can you take us there? Because I found a couple of links here.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Yeah. So, it started three and a half, four years ago. What happened was there was a disruption in the friendships that led me to interrogate my relationship with anti-blackness, my own censoring of whiteness, my own socializations and having friends of marginalized identity saying, well, you know all white people are bad. Throw the white people away, right?

Well, I was socializing to Christianity, and I was serving. I was ordained as a deacon and like this – my own personal beliefs outside of ordination and my socialization is like you don't just throw people away. Like everyone makes mistakes. There's room for grace for everybody, like period.

So, I actually called some of my white friends and said, "Hey, I'm going to do a YouTube series, right, as part of my healing journey of not doing white women away," because at that time I thought was just white women. Can you all do these YouTubes with me?

So, I actually like went into my email marketing software, made all these videos and I would email out these videos to folks about like, hey, this is what happens when you don't work on your relationship with privilege, and this is what you should be doing.

I met with a friend who was like an executive coach, and she ended up helping me build out a vision for what you see today. So, she asked me, "What do you see Check Your Privilege as?" Oh, education and advocacy for white folks to heal and do their work consistently without ghosting.

They said, "Well, what can you provide people so that they can just stay on this journey?" I'm like, well, we could do a co-conspirator's lounge. It's a paid membership. I can do a podcast. I could do a book. I could offer coaching. This is written down and I have a picture of it on a piece of paper four years ago and to this day, there is a podcast, there's an anthology series, there's the lounge and it all exists for white and white passing people to really engage in the work.

Now the new thing with it is that we are really trying to focus on what I'm calling seven areas or seven dimensions of privilege because we have to learn as folks on this journey to get outside this black-white binary and binaries that keep us hyper-focused on race. So, we're actually in the process with Check Your Privilege of really looking at ableism and gender privilege and economic

privilege and class privilege because if we want to be real – and I’m going to say this is that everyone has privilege. Like I’m black and I have privilege. Just I have an able body. That is a privilege in itself.

So, we’re really looking where I am today as expanding this notion of Check Your Privilege. It’s not just, oh, check yourself because you’re white. It’s check your able body privilege, right? Check your class privilege. Check your gender privilege and really moving on from there. But still offering those different community layers of support for folks to be in process together.

**Rebekah Borucki:** Hey friend. We are coming straight back to *The Book Stoop* after a quick break.

**Amanda Lytle:** Pre-recording chat, we were just talking about education and about how important it is to go student first before curriculum and I think that you’ve made some really awesome points here about how important it is that even in this space, you’re ultimately creating curriculum. But how it is so geared towards everybody as an individual, meeting them where they are. I think that that’s so powerful in this space.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Absolutely. I think a lot of it is – I try to do this work where it’s sematic, where it’s not heavy, where it’s integrative. We have a framework that we say that we like to move and as a teacher, you know this. The head, the heart, and the hand.

**Amanda Lytle:** You got it.

**Myisha T. Hill:** I want you to hear it and learn it, but I wanted you to feel it in your heart, so that you can go out with your hands and make an impact. So, we know that the individual journey is head, heart, and hands. But we have this collectiveness community mindset. Like we call our co-conspirators’ lounge a community intentionally and on purpose because the work does require relationships and many people are in the world doing it in a very heady, intellectualized, isolating space and that’s where a lot of people get lost in this journey.

You can know like equity, diversity and inclusion and have a really great job and career. But if you’re not embodying that in your personal life, right, if you’re not embodying that in community with others who are like you, then what are you really doing? Like are you living into the work? Are you just doing the work? Yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah. It has got to be heart forward.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Absolutely.

**Amanda Lytle:** I have a question about your journey with your writing but also with Check Your Privilege because I recognize that this is such a self-reflective journey. So, backing up to the disruption of a friendship that you had back in 2018, the actual reflective journey that was taking place in that time. Can you elaborate a bit on that?

**Myisha T. Hill:** Yeah. Well, for me, it was – I had to recognize that I grew up around white folks my whole life. Literally from elementary school through high school and so as a black youth, when you grow up and white is normal and you are made to feel inferior by your white peers, you learn to oppress yourself and elevate whiteness and you work to get the attention and appease whiteness and white people because you're socialized in that way.

I mean let's think about it. For me to be a black, plus-sized cheerleader in a predominantly all-white high school in a predominantly all-white community where the KKK was still attacking people publicly, like eight years before I moved into that community, I was seen as inferior or abnormal, right?

Like I got perms, right? I straightened my hair. I wore weaves and wigs because in cheerleading, you have to wear a ponytail. I had to socialize into whiteness to feel accepted, right? And as that played out in my later years in adulthood, I found myself performing to maintain relationships with white folks and when I say performing, it was I would put – it's almost like – and I describe it in one of the books. It's almost like this unspoken expectation by white folks that black and brown folks will caretaker you and be your [0:15:35] [Indiscernible], right?

So, in some relationships in adulthood, I learned that – let's say they were codependent, right? I said this in books before. Like I believe that relationship sometimes with white and black people can be narcissistic and co-dependent, right? Because we're socialized to depend on the approval of whiteness and white people to feel like we belong.

So, my work was to go back and track all the moments of my life that I've performed for the eyes of whiteness and white people and how I was socialized from my ancestors, from enslavement, from how – I was raised and socialized to be in the world. I have to take my own journey backwards so that I could move forward, right? And interrogate. Why am I censoring whiteness? Why are predominantly all my friends white? Am I looking at black women a certain way? Am I not making space for other black women? Am I not relating to my own black identity because I want to be seen by white people? Am I performing for white people? Like it was a whole – and I still do it because it's a lifelong work. It's a lifelong progress, process, right?

So, it has been a journey of soul-searching and really reflecting on my own relationship with whiteness, remembering that I was moved into suburban living so that I would have better schools, better outcomes, better opportunities. But that comes with a double-edged sword.

**Amanda Lytle:** Who is a huge source of guidance throughout this journey for you?

**Myisha T. Hill:** I'm going to say Bell Hooks, Patricia Hill Collins and Kimberle Crenshaw.

**Amanda Lytle:** Nice

**Myisha T. Hill:** Literally. Like using their work, Audre Lorde, the elders, and the ancestors who came before me. Reading their words are the words that helped propel me to understand my own identity and who I am.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Now I grew up knowing black history. That was the best thing to do at my household, right? I know black history. I know black culture. But just because you know something doesn't mean that you're actively practicing it in your life.

**Amanda Lytle:** That's very true, yeah.

**Myisha T. Hill:** So, the words of Bell Hooks and the words of Audre Lorde and the words of – there are so many. Like I probably have a whole playlist watching old videos of Huey P. Newton and the Black Panthers. There are so many people that have informed our journey right now that I'm so grateful for that have guide – they're my guides. It's almost like how people say your therapist has to have a therapist. Well, as a guide, I have guides and it's just a list of people who are elders and ancestors, who have taken learnings too. Also work with Pastor Lyvonne Briggs. She has been very inspirational on my journey, specifically healing around Westernized Christianity. I have a whole list of people, sorry.

**Amanda Lytle:** No, I love these lists of people and the reason I was asking about guidance is because the self-reflective work can get really heavy. So, it's also – I was kind of leading into a question about how you nourish yourself. You know, when you're nourishing your mind, body, soul because you do a lot of reading and reflecting. So, what are some other things that you do just to make yourself feel really whole?

**Myisha T. Hill:** Absolutely. Like I tell people all the time, therapy is amazing. Peer support groups that I don't facilitate.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah, yeah.

**Myisha T. Hill:** So really going into other containers where I can be held and seen and valued. Zumba, I have not done it yet, but I am a certified Zumba instructor. No one knows that.

**Amanda Lytle:** No!

**Myisha T. Hill:** I am certified in Zumba.

**Amanda Lytle:** It's so fun!

**Myisha T. Hill:** Isn't it amazing?

**Amanda Lytle:** Yes! I am so bad at it, but I don't even care.

**Myisha T. Hill:** That's the best part. You don't even have to be good.

**Amanda Lytle:** Exactly.

**Myisha T. Hill:** It just feels good.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yes, it's so good.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Yeah.

**Amanda Lytle:** Yeah, that is soul food for me. That is ...

**Myisha T. Hill:** Absolutely. So, I would say Zumba therapy, scuba diving.

**Amanda Lytle:** Right. I meant to ask you about that because scuba diving is also – isn't that an interesting thing? Because for me, my brain is so busy all of the time and when you are underwater and you are seeing the most magnificent things, you can't even speak about it. You can't share it. It is such an internalized journey.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Yeah. And I would say shout out to Black Scuba Bear, my husband who got me into diving. Let me tell you something. Like it is totally a wild experience and I'm going to say because of black people's trauma with water – and shout out to Lyvonne Briggs who reminded me of this. Like we have a trauma with water because we were enslaved and brought over, over water, and we were – just there's such trauma with black folks on water.

So, to have a partner who's like, "Guess what I got for my birthday. I got you scuba diving lessons to be certified," and I was like, "OK, great." But it was such a beautiful like trust-building exercise and it's still trust-building because like your life is on the line, right?

But when you go under, everything else goes off. All the noise, all the voices. The world just gets quiet because you know that if you aren't breathing, it's not a good situation. We will just say that. I don't want to scare folks who have never tried scuba diving.

But it's so surreal and it's so peaceful and it's so beautiful and it's just like, ah, I just got to close my eyes because I see myself and I'm feeling myself in that moment. That is the one thing that is so, so soothing to the soul that I wish everybody who listens to this podcast could experience it.

**Amanda Lytle:** And also, I feel like the weight – it sounds interesting but the weight of the water around you is almost just like this full body hug, if that makes sense.

**Myisha T. Hill:** When you put it that way, absolutely. Like the BCD jacket and the weight and then like all your tools. It does feel like you're being held. There's actually a picture of me. I'm going to see if I can find it where like I think I'm like going downward and you can like see like the shadow of hands coming out of my body. Like a very surreal experience of just feeling connect – like I belong here. Like I'm underwater. I'm breathing. I'm here. Relax.

It is the most beautiful and I would say – if I would say number one on self-care, I would say scuba diving, then therapy, peer support and Zumba. Yeah.



**Amanda Lytle:** Yes! That's a great list.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Yes. Scuba diving, therapy, peer support, Zumba.

**Amanda Lytle:** OK. I didn't know that you were certified with Zumba. Is that ever anything that you want to be teaching?

**Myisha T. Hill:** Again, you know – sorry. You know, you're like, "What?" Maybe in the future. Like I've thought about like, oh, I can teach this as part of the co-conspirator's lounge and I'm like that is too much words.

**Amanda Lytle:** You're already so busy.

**Myisha T. Hill:** And I'm already so busy. But I mean I – I would. Like if somebody – my favorite part of Zumba was the word – they're called Zumba-thons. I don't know if you've ever been to one but it's like a fundraiser basically, a Zumba fundraiser for like three hours. Different instructors get together to raise money for a cause. Oh, that's a good idea for Row House. So yes, I would. I would teach a Zumba-thon for Row House Publishing as a fundraiser.

**Amanda Lytle:** OK. Bex ...

**Myisha T. Hill:** Absolutely.

**Amanda Lytle:** ... get on it. This is so amazing.

**Myisha T. Hill:** I can put together a virtual Zumba-thon for Row House. So, yes, I would do it again, depending on the cost, absolutely.

**Amanda Lytle:** OK. All right. We're on to something here.

**Myisha T. Hill:** I know. Bex is going to text me soon. I can feel it.

**Amanda Lytle:** She caught on. OK. Myisha, I was wondering about a shoutout for an account or a person, an organization, a disruptor, activist, or a change agent that you would love to give a shoutout for.

**Myisha T. Hill:** Oh. You know who I'm going to shout out today? I'm going to shout out Mary Fashik of Upgrade Accessibility. Mary is one of the most phenomenal people that I've met on my journey. Upgrade Accessibility is a really beautiful organization that is a disability justice-led movement that Mary founded as a disabled woman. She has trained Check Your Privilege on how to make our content accessible, how to write image descriptions, what it means to really fight against ableism. She took over the Check Your Privilege account over the summer.

Just a phenomenal individual, phenomenal movement. She does an accessibility camp every summer where she doesn't charge participants and they have – I remember I was texting her and she was going to a ballet class with **Kim [0:24:11] [Phonetic]**, with other disabled individuals and it was so beautiful to see that she gives so much of her time and energy for free, for the disability justice movement and that is who I want to shout out right now, Mary Fashik and the organization Upgrade Accessibility.

**Amanda Lytle:** That's so beautiful. Myisha, thank you so much for being on *The Book Stoop*. This has been incredible. Thank you.

**Myisha T. Hill:** You're welcome. Thanks for having me. Anytime. I would love to come back.

**Amanda Lytle:** Thank you so much for being with us. We hope you loved the conversation, and we will be back again soon. Please be sure to follow us on your podcast app and leave a rating where you're able to do so. Writing a written review helps reach more listeners too. Check out all of the show notes for the links and share *The Book Stoop* with your friends. Talk soon.

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