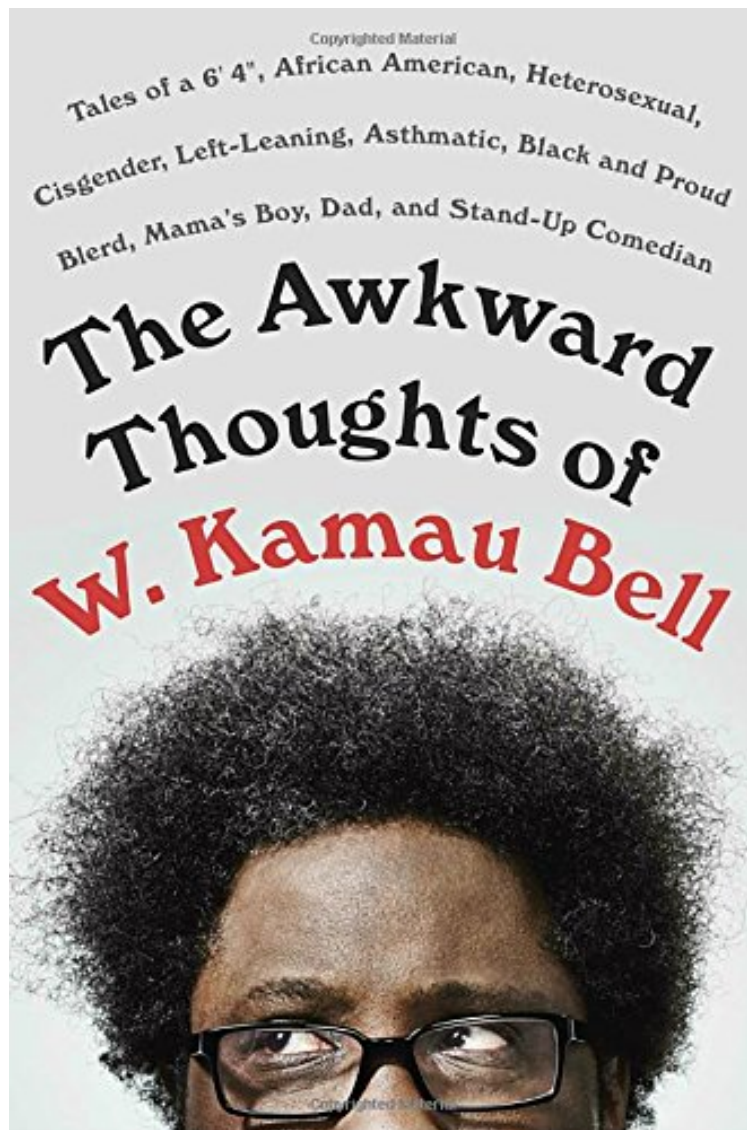


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W. Kamau Bell : The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell: Tales of a 6' 4", African American, Heterosexual, Cisgender, Left-Leaning, Asthmatic, Black and Proud Blerd, Mama's Boy, Dad, and Stand-Up Comedian

before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell: Tales of a 6' 4", African American, Heterosexual, Cisgender, Left-Leaning, Asthmatic, Black and Proud Blerd, Mama's Boy, Dad, and Stand-Up Comedian*:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. and wit to offer each of us a lifeline to recognizing where we are #asleep and to ways we can be better people with each other
By Leona George-Davidson I am grateful for the authentic (and hilariously awkward!) way W. Kamau Bell shares his experience, perspective, and wit to offer each of us a lifeline to recognizing where we are #asleep and to ways we can be better people with each other. I want more! p.s. I love his self proclamation of being a "blerd" - read the book to find out more!
5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. He's so smart. And so funny. And will make you laugh and squirm and think.
By Susan Ito W. Kamau Bell is one of this country's funniest and most intelligent, nuanced thinkers (and now writers!) on race. You may know him from the W. Kamau Bell Curve, Totally Biased, and now CNN's United Shades of America. He makes his viewers (and now his readers) think hard, feel uncomfortable and then laugh their faces off. While learning important stuff. Now he's put it all down in this book. I was inspired reading about his parents (HOW DID HE GET LIKE THIS?) especially his mom, the brilliant Janet Cheatham Bell and other behind-the-scenes stories. As usual, he's hilarious and also heartbreaking in illuminating the everyday racism of this country. He's not afraid to show all the things HE's learned about along the way, (*cough* sexism) which makes this even that much more appealing. Bravo, Kamau!
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. ... book as soon as it came and I really like everything W
By April Lemesh I did get a chance to read this book as soon as it came and I really like everything W. Kamau Bell said. He did a great deal of work trying to become a stand-up comedian and he is one now. From watching his CNN TV show for the last two summers I can tell what a wonderful man he is and he can get along with anybody. Not many can say that.

You may know W. Kamau Bell from his new, Emmy-nominated hit show on CNN, *United Shades of America*. Or maybe you've read about him in the *New York Times*, which called him "the most promising new talent in political comedy in many years." Or maybe from *The New Yorker*, fawning over his brand of humor writing: "Bell's gimmick is intersectional progressivism: he treats racial, gay, and women's issues as inseparable." After all this love and praise, it's time for the next step: a book. *The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell* is a humorous, well-informed take on the world today, tackling a wide range of issues, such as race relations; fatherhood; the state of law enforcement today; comedians and superheroes; right-wing politics; left-wing politics; failure; his interracial marriage; white men; his upbringing by very strong-willed, race-conscious, yet ideologically opposite parents; his early days struggling to find his comedic voice, then his later days struggling to find his comedic voice; why he never seemed to fit in with the Black comedy scene . . . or the white comedy scene; how he was a Black nerd way before that became a thing; how it took his wife and an East Bay lesbian to teach him that racism and sexism often walk hand in hand; and much, much more.

"Bell... tackles everything from racism to his life growing up as a Blerd (Black nerd) to his struggles to find his comedic voice in this illuminating memoir." —*Entertainment Weekly* "With insight and aplomb, stand-up comedian Bell recounts his career arc... Those unfamiliar with Bell's work or expecting a lighthearted read from a popular comedian will be surprised by the book's breadth and depth... This informative read will be illuminating and worthwhile for aspiring comedians and general readers." —*Publishers Weekly* "At times funny, at times somber, this debut will be enjoyed by fans of *United Shades*, Issa Rae's TV series *Insecure*, and anyone who enjoys comedy with a personal touch." —*Library Journal* "A funny, heartfelt tête-à-tête with a down-to-earth star." —*Boston Magazine* "At turns sarcastic, poetic and enraged, Bell's language is potent. His own realization of how racism intersects with other forms of discrimination, like sexism, broadens his platform and embraces a wide audience. *Awkward Thoughts* is definitely entertaining, but it also invites readers to look through different eyes. And those who aren't inspired to take action will at least have considered a new view. As Bell says, 'that's progress.'" —*Shelf Awareness* (starred review) "A comprehensive look at what gave rise to Bell's insightful, critical eye and his hilarious comedy." —*Booklist* "A unique perspective of the development of identity comedy in the 21st century." —*Kirkus* sAbout the Author W. Kamau Bell is a sociopolitical comedian who is the host of the Emmy-nominated hit CNN docuseries *United Shades of America*. Before *United Shades*, Kamau was best known for his critically acclaimed but criminally short-lived FX comedy series, *Totally Biased with W. Kamau Bell*. The series was nominated for both an NAACP Award and a GLAAD Award. Kamau is also the host of *Kamau Right Now!*, a public radio talk show that airs on NPR radio station KALW in San Francisco, and a cohost of the podcasts *Politically Re-Active* and the memorably named *Denzel Washington Is the Greatest Actor of All Time Period*. Before pursuing a career in stand-up comedy, Kamau and his mom lived all over the country. He was born in Palo Alto, California, then moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, then Boston, Massachusetts, then Chicago, Illinois, with several extended visits to his dad's in Mobile, Alabama, mixed in for good measure. Today he lives in Berkeley, California, with his wife and family. Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. *Awkward Thoughts about Superheroes and Doc McStuffins* When I was a kid I loved superheroes. I loved them in all of their forms. I loved comic books, action figures, superhero movies, and even superhero TV shows.

And I was born in 1973, so superhero TV shows were weird. Take the 1970s Spider-Man TV show. Spider-Man wore his web shooters on the outside of his costume because apparently the producers thought they were too big and clunky to fit on the inside of his costume. And also (apparently) the makers of the TV show didn't think that we, the watchers of the TV show, would suspend our disbelief long enough for the producers to make the fake web shooters small enough to put them inside the pretend, not-real, made-up freaking costume where they belong! There was also The Incredible Hulk. A TV show that I LOVED. LOVED! LOVED! LOVED! I loved it so much that my mom cut up old clothes of mine that I could wear while watching the show so that when Dr. David Banner "Hulked out," I could "Hulk out" too. I know you are thinking that it sounds adorable. But it wasn't. I was six years old, and I was a very ferocious Hulk. Very ferocious. You'll just have to take my word for it. The Polaroids have all been destroyed. The Incredible Hulk was a TV show that could only have been born of the 1970s. At its core it was one of comic books' greatest stories. It was Stan Lee and Marvel Comics's twist on Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde with a whole lot of Frankenstein thrown in. The Hulk was invented in the throes of the Cold War and America was learning to live in constant fear of nuclear annihilation. A puny—that was the word that the comic often used to describe him—scientist named Dr. Bruce Banner got exposed to way too much gamma radiation while saving a young man from an explosion of gamma radiation. This was a simpler time in superheroes that I honestly miss. Back then, a comic book writer could just write "bathed in radiation," and the reader would say to themselves, WELL OF COURSE! THAT'S DEFINITELY GOING TO LEAD TO MAGICAL POWERS AND NOT SOME FORM OF LYMPHOMA! People had more room for mystery back then. Now we know too much. The reason that every modern Super- man movie sucks is because we all sit in the audience thinking, So wait ... Lois is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and she can't figure out that the key to Superman's secret identity is glasses? The 1970s were the last time that Superman made sense on the big screen. And the original Superman movie is still better than every other one since (special effects notwithstanding). I loved that movie. In fact, if you asked me who my favorite actor was in 1978, when it came out, I would have instantly said, "Christopher Reeve!" Even though I had never seen a movie where he played someone other than Superman. But when I love something I go all in. It's tunnel vision. And it's annoying. All my friends know who my favorite bands are (Living Colour, Fishbone, and Rage Against the Machine); favorite athletes (Michael Jordan and Muhammad Ali); favorite, ummm ... Bruce Lee (Bruce Lee); comedians (Bill Hicks, Chris Rock, Dave Chappelle, Robert Hawkins, Dwayne Kennedy); and actors (as a kid, Christopher Reeve, and as an adult, Denzel Washington, aka the Greatest Actor of All Time Period). And in 1977 my favorite TV show was The Incredible Hulk, and my second favorite TV show was The Dukes of Hazzard, where every week the bright orange car named the General Lee, with the Confederate flag painted on top, would save the day as the two hillbillies, Bo and Luke, inevitably screamed, "YEE-HAW!!!" My mom was so proud. But back to superheroes. The reason why the 1970s were the last time Superman made sense as a movie is that the 1970s were also the time when Hollywood got dark and cynical. It was the rise of the auteur as filmmaker. People like Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Stanley Kubrick, and many others. Even Steven Spielberg decided to scare the shit out of us all with Jaws. And clearly the creators of The Incredible Hulk TV show were all about this darkness too. They took a simple comic book tale that every comic book fan could relate to (puny guy gets pushed to anger and turns into a huge green monster), and they ladled heaps and heaps of the 1970s on it. Actor Bill Bixby played the scientist David Banner. (Reportedly, the makers of the show renamed the character because they thought the name "Bruce" sounded too "gay," because "puny" is one thing, but "gay" was too weird.) Bixby played David as totally tortured and drowning in guilt. He was on the run from the "sin" of turning himself into a destructive green monster. Later, when I watched reruns of the show as an adult, I could tell that Bixby thought he was a much better actor than the show allowed him to be. He often had the look of the actor who wanted to be acting up against DeNiro and Pacino but got stuck in TV due to his roles in My Favorite Martian and The Courtship of Eddie's Father. There was a little "I can't believe this shit" in his face. The same way Harrison Ford looks throughout the first three Star Wars movies, as opposed to how he looks in the 2015 Star Wars movie: "Thanks for calling me!" The tone of The Incredible Hulk was dark. The soundtrack was not the soundtrack of a fun "superhero show." It was a soundtrack filled with mourning and melancholy. And the theme song was all anxiety and foreboding, and had a sullen voice-over that reeked of terror. Whenever David was pushed into "hulking out," he was riddled with regret for what he was about to do as the Hulk. Bodybuilder Lou Ferrigno played David's alter ego, the Hulk, as a reluctant monster. In the comic books, the Hulk was partially a comedic character, full of malapropisms and broken sentences like "HULK SMASH!" But on TV, the Hulk didn't talk. He just wailed plaintively. And the end of every show was virtually exactly the same. It featured David skulking out of town, walking down a road (usually a freeway), thumbing for rides, while the music ended on a dissonant note of dread. There was no "YAY! The hero has saved the day again!" And just to fully set it in the 1970s, David was skulking out of town in... bell-bottoms. And that shows you how great an actor Bill Bixby was. Bell-bottoms are the single most difficult item of clothing to wear while also skulking. So even though CBS had taken my simple monster tale and turned it into Midnight Cowboy minus prostitution plus a six-foot- five-inch bodybuilder slathered in green body paint (not to say that a six-foot-five-inch bodybuilder slathered in green paint can't participate in prostitution too)—I LOVED IT! I loved it because no matter how much of the 1970s the producers ladled on the show, the core of it still remained. A person (Banner) who felt powerless and bullied (who

knew deep inside that he was smarter and more sensitive than the bullies) could rise up against the bullies as his alter ego (the Hulk). It was literally every comic book geek's dream: No one understands how smart and cool/ am. But if they keep pushing me, I'll show them. My love of the Hulk and Spider-Man lasted through my teenage years. Superman got left behind in the '70s. I still watched the movies when they came out, but I didn't buy the comic books. Superman becomes boring real fast. He's too strong. Too powerful. He is invulnerable. And his weakness is boring. It's a rock. A rock from his home planet, Krypton. Who cares? I couldn't relate to being invulnerable. I was a Black kid growing up in America. The Hulk and Spider-Man were regular people who had extraordinary abilities. I was also a regular person. I also had extraordinary abilities . . . I mean, I thought I did . . . I hoped I did. And there was something else here too. The Hulk and Spider-Man weren't white. I mean, yes, they were white people. David Banner and Peter Parker were both white men (OK, Spider-Man was a teenager when he began his superhero career), but when they were superheroes, the Hulk was green (usually with purple pants) and Spider-Man was mostly red and blue. You didn't know if Spider-Man was white or Black. When the Hulk showed up, nobody said, "Sure, he looks green. But I bet that when he calms down, he whitens up good." That meant, as a kid, I could easily envision being Spider-Man or the Hulk. Everybody knew Superman was white. Everybody knew Batman was white. And those were the big four superheroes when I was a kid. And yes, there were a few Black superheroes around when I was a kid, but nobody really cared about them. They were side dishes to the main-course superheroes. There was Black Lightning, Black Vulcan, the Black Panther . . . Notice anything? Yep, when I was a kid it seemed like every Black superhero had to have the word "Black" in their name. Like it wasn't enough that they were Black. It wasn't enough that their skin was Black. There was seemingly some sort of contractual obligation to put the word "Black" in their superhero name. (Bill Cosby made fun of this idea on his cartoon Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids by naming their favorite superhero the Brown Hornet.) Later, when I grew up, I discovered a Black hero named Blue Marvel, but the only way he got away with not using "Black" in his name was to cover his face so you couldn't see his skin. And there is a story in the comic book that once President Kennedy discovers that the Blue Marvel is actually Black, he asks him to retire, because I guess a president having an affair with Marilyn Monroe is one thing, but a BLACK SUPERHERO? ARE YOU CRAZY? Creating Black superheroes with the word "Black" in their names was a way for America to once again normalize whiteness. It wasn't "White Superman" or "White Batman" or "White Green Lantern." Because "white" is normal. White doesn't need to be mentioned. But "Black," on the other hand, needs to be announced. To me, it made the superheroes sound less intimidating, less powerful, less normal than their white counterparts. I think some of that had to do with my own feelings at the time about being Black. I was growing up in post-'60s Civil Rights-era America. I had been taught that Martin Luther King Jr. had ended racism one day when he and his friends took a long walk. But something didn't feel right about that. If racism was over, why was mom always referring to white people as "crackers"? Early on in my stand-up act, I had a joke where I said that I was eleven years old before I realized that a cracker was also a delicious snack. I was joking, but just barely. The best kind of joke. And that's what these "Black Black" superhero names felt like: a joke. Think of the absolute ludicrousness of a superhero putting his own race in his superhero name. You can choose ANY NAME. And you choose something with "Black" in it? The whole idea of taking on a superhero name is to protect your secret identity, AND IN YOUR ALIAS YOU ARE GIVING OUT CLUES TO WHO YOU ARE??? It would be like if instead of Clark Kent just naming himself Superman, he called himself "Superman . . . you know . . . from Smallville." Putting "Black" in the name just felt corny to me when I was a kid. And that corniness made it obvious that these characters were being created by people who weren't Black. It went so far that there was actually a white superhero named Goliath, and when his powers ended up in a Black guy, the Black guy's superhero name was Black Goliath. I have no words for how dumb that is. WHY WOULD THAT BLACK GUY DO THAT TO HIMSELF? Am I supposed to imagine him saying to himself, Nobody would ever believe that I'm Goliath. I'd better go by Black Goliath . . . because I have low superhero self-esteem. It may not seem as ridiculous to you. But think about it with a more famous superhero. "Don't worry, Lex Luthor. Regular Superman isn't here. He sent Black Superman instead. We don't have to fight him. Just call the cops. They'll take care of him for us. They'll arrest him for loitering." And yes, there were Black superheroes who didn't have the word "Black" in their names—Falcon, Cyborg, Power Man—and there was even a Black Green Lantern who was just named Green Lantern, not Black Green Lantern or Dark Green Lantern . . . or even Pine Green Lantern. But that didn't seem better. Everybody knew that the real Green Lantern was (white) Hal Jordan. (Black) John Stewart (yes, the Black Green Lantern's name was John Stewart) was just holding the position until Hal showed back up . . . which Hal always did. And Cyborg didn't really count because his cyborg-ness made it such that he didn't really have a secret identity anymore. He had half a robot face. Good luck convincing anybody that you're not a Cyborg with that going on. "What do you mean, you think I'm Cyborg? You're being ridiculous, I don't look anything like Cyborg! . . . Anyway, I gotta go change my eye battery and reboot my face's operating system." And Falcon . . . Sigh . . . Falcon is one of those superheroes of many different races, including white, who just has the general feeling of a comic book writer saying to his boss, "WHAT? The new superhero is due tomorrow? Ummm . . . No . . . I totally have something to show you! It's going to be great. I'm just going to get in my brand-new Ford Falcon and go home and get my brand-new superhero . . . Wait a second! I GOT IT!" Heroes like Falcon—whether they were meant to or not—felt like they were designed to

purposefully give the Black heroes shitty superpowers. Falcon's big powers were that he had the powers of a falcon ... Also he could talk to falcons. Falcon was like Aquaman but much less impressive. At least Aquaman had a blue whale for backup. Falcon only had one bird hanging out with him. His powers are so ridiculous that when they put the character in the Avengers movie, they just gave him some robot wings and left the "falcon powers" behind. Rightfully so. And Power Man started out as the superhero version of the star of a Blaxploitation film dressed like an extra from The Pirates of Penzance. He had blue pants, swashbuckler boots, a bright yellow puffy shirt, metal wristbands, and a weird metal headband. Eventually he gave all that nonsense up, and now he just wears regular clothes and goes by the much better name Luke Cage (exploding out of a Netflix box near you!). So when I was a kid, as much as I paid some attention to these Black heroes, I rode hard with Spider-Man and the Hulk. All I had to do was picture my face under all that red and blue fabric of Spider-Man and under Hulk's green skin. It was easier than calling myself "Black Batman" or trying to get excited by a Black superhero with the powers of a gnat—Gnat-Man! Like Ant-Man, but even smaller! And this is important. This is about representation. For some reason, white people in America are perfectly comfortable with the idea of people of color just contorting their imaginations such that we can imagine ourselves as white heroes, but white people generally aren't OK with imagining themselves as Black heroes. Every time there's talk of a new actor taking on the role of James Bond and Idris Elba's name comes up, white people freak out: "HOW CAN A BLACK MAN BE JAMES BOND???" Meanwhile Hollywood regularly takes characters of color and turns them white whenever it wants. In the movie Prince of Persia, the prince (and most everybody else) was white. In the movie Gods of Egypt, the gods were not Egyptian. I guess their godly status had caused them to transcend the Egyptian plane . . . and skin tone. And while we're on the subject, I'm not even sure that I want Idris to play James Bond. Because I don't know if I even want a Black James Bond. Well, truth be told, I'm not that excited about the white James Bond. Seems a little rapey and way too homicidal-maniac-y to me. I'm a fan of Idris bringing his own action hero to the big screen. One that he can turn into whatever he wants. It's not enough to have Black James Bond. We need new heroes. We need new heroes who can build their own legends and not be walking in white characters' footsteps. Enter Doc McStuffins. The need for Black heroes has become increasingly clear to me since I've had my oldest daughter, Sami. Like me, she was born with the TV gene. She can sit and watch TV for hours. Like it's an Olympic event and she's trying to set a new world record in the five-year-old division. I'm so proud. But it was important to me, as I saw her fall in love with TV the same way I had, that she have heroes who look like her. Not just Black versions of white heroes, not just Black heroes who seem like diminished versions of white heroes, and certainly not just white heroes who require my daughter to always twist and contort her imagination to put herself in those white shoes. I want my daughter to have her own Black girl (yup, I'm aiming for the stars here) heroes. And that's where Doc McStuffins has come to the rescue. When Sami was around two years old, she was just starting to really dig into TV. I had hooked her through Sesame Street, the gateway show to good children's television. Sesame Street had been there for me and was there for my daughter. And thanks to YouTube, many of the same exact segments were there for Sami. It gives me great pleasure that Sami knows how to count to twelve using the same jazzy Ella Fitzgerald-esque manner that I learned, thanks to Sesame Street. But around the time Sami turned two, a new sheriff showed up in town, and just like in Blazing Saddles, this sheriff was Black ... and not really a sheriff. She was better than a sheriff. She was a doctor. Dottie, aka "Doc," McStuffins. Doc Mc- Stuffins is to TV what Shirley Chisholm was to Congress or what producer Shonda Rhimes was to primetime television or what Oprah was to daytime talk shows . . . or what Oprah was to book clubs . . . or what Oprah was to a billion dollars. Doc McStuffins is a Black woman in a space not normally welcome to (and certainly never dominated by) Black women. Which is even more impressive when you realize that she's only seven years old. OK, I'm getting ahead of myself. Doc is a cartoon character who is the star of a show named after herself on Disney Junior. And Disney Junior is ethering the game right now. (That's probably not a sentence that's written that often.) Look, I'd love to be one of those people who is too righteous to support a corporation, or one of those people who can't trust anything that comes from corporate America, but I can't. And believe me, I wish I could. It would get me invited to much cooler parties in Oakland. I am totally suspicious of corporate America, but honestly, I'm also the person who, when I'm hungry in an airport and can't figure out if I'm going to eat at the "sad sandwich" place, where the premade sandwiches are wrapped in plastic and the lettuce often tastes like it gave up and took its own life and the bread tastes like buttered shoe leather, or the "Asian fusion" place, where the orange chicken has been there so long that it should be called oranged chicken, looks up and sees the golden arches, and like the five-year-old I used to be, runs frantically toward it, screaming, "YAY! McDONALD'S!!!" So I ain't afraid of Disney. Yes, Disney has heavily contributed to "princess culture" in America's young girls. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was the first of many mighty blows to get young girls to think that "princess" was a job, the same way young boys wanted to be firemen, astronauts, and cowboys. Disney clearly recognizes that they should expand the definition of what girls can do, and which girls can do it. After decades of white princesses, they finally added a Black one, Tiana; a Chinese one, Mulan; an Arab one, Jasmine; a Native American one, Pocahontas; and recently a Latina one, Elena. Well, maybe Elena—while she is a Latina princess, she hasn't actu-ally made the cut as an official Disney Princess on the list of princesses on the Disney Princess website. I'll keep updating my browser as you read and see if anything changes. Maybe she's on probation. Not a great look for Disney to just sort of, kind of add

a Latina princess, when so many Latinos in America are also having so many problems being officially added to this country. But since Sami's been around, Disney has expanded the list of jobs a little girl can have to include sheriffs (OK, technically Sheriff Callie from Sheriff Callie's Wild West is a cat, but she is a female cat), undersea explorers on The Octonauts (hell, Tweak, a rabbit, is even the ship's female mechanic), and, yes, even astronauts. Miles from Tomorrow not only features a mixed-race family (Asian and white), but the captain of the ship is THE MOM!!! It may sound like I am making too much out of all this, but the only way you can allow a kid to truly dream is if you expand their idea of what is currently possible. A kid who has nothing, sees nothing, and is taught nothing can only dream of breakfast. They can only hope to get to the next moment successfully. I want more than that for my kids ... just like my mom wanted more than that for me. And I want them to want more than that too. And Doc McStuffins went way further to expand Sami's world than I ever could have imagined. And the show—and Sami's and later my daughter Juno's reaction to it—blows my whole childhood dream of "Maybe I could be Spider-Man or the Hulk" completely out of the water. Doc McStuffins is about a seven-year-old Black girl. That basically makes the title character the Diahann Carroll of children's TV. Diahann Carroll was the first African-American woman to be the star of a TV show ... who wasn't playing a maid. Diahann's show was a sitcom called Julia. It ran from 1968 to 1971 (which is the equivalent of twenty-one seasons of twenty-first-century white television). Julia was a single mom ... because of course. And since then not enough has changed in grown-up real-life TV, especially if you subtract shows produced by Shonda Rhimes. And kids' TV is even worse as far as meaningful diversity and inclusion. How many children's TV shows other than Doc McStuffins have a Black female lead character? Hint: The answer is "not nearly enough." In the show, Doc McStuffins is a doctor for her stuffed ani-mals and toys. And that may sound merely adorable to you, but I'm raising a pair of powerful Black girls who will one day be powerful Black women. And Doc McStuffins is the reason that my four-year-old could say the words "stethoscope," "otoscope," and "sphygmomanometer" when she was two years old. I had to use Google just to figure out how to spell "sphygmomanometer." Being a doctor is Doc's job. Doc diagnoses, fills out a chart (the Big Book of Boo Boos), and heals. She does everything from replacing dirty bandages to full-on surgery. Doc also encourages her patients to brush their teeth, wear helmets on bicycles, and be good friends. And she makes house calls. By any measure, Doc McStuffins is a more reliable and trustworthy TV doctor than Dr. Oz. And she's not even real. And then there are Doc's parents. On the show, Doc's mom is an actual doctor. Which means young kids don't have to wait until they're old enough to watch Grey's Anatomy to see a Black female doctor on television. And it means that for my daughters, a Black female doctor is no big deal, as it shouldn't be. The show even has interstitials with actual Black female doctors to prove that the idea of a Black female doctor isn't just for cartoons. Did I just blow your mind? No? Keep reading. Next, we have Doc's dad. What's his job? Well, actually, I'm not sure exactly what he does. I'm pretty sure he's a stay-at-home dad, which is also revolutionary for multiple reasons. (Mom works. Dad's at home taking care of the kids. And again, these are Black people!) But what Dad mostly does is hang out in the kitchen chopping vegetables and offering them to Doc and her friends—vegetables that he seems to grow in his garden!!! Now did I blow your mind? And then there are Doc's patients. The toys. Now, yes, there is the argument that the toys are the real show here. Doc has a room full of toys, and her friends are always bringing new toys over, and every toy is a marketing opportunity for the Big D! (And, yes, Disney does take many of these opportunities. But I ain't mad at 'em.) See, the toys that Doc attends to are her friends as well. They all come to life and talk with the help of Doc's magic stethoscope. Yup, I said "magic stethoscope." Now, at first when I watched the show, it was a Calvin and Hobbes situation. We, the audience, didn't know if the stethoscope was really magic or if Doc just had a vivid imagination. But overtime it has become clear that the stethoscope's magic is very real. And it is also clear that the toys really are living a life of their own when Doc's not around. When Doc walks into a room and presses the bell of her stethoscope, it emits a melody that is as ubiquitous in my house as the "YEE-HAW!" of the Duke boys was in my mom's house when I was a kid. And when that noise rings out, every toy in the room comes to life. And I mean every toy: stuffed animals, dolls, action figures, remote control cars, soccer balls, xylophones. And each toy serves a role in helping teach kids how to communicate with real-life doctors and the world around them in general. Among Doc's dozens of toy friends, there's a toy with asthma, a toy in a wheelchair, and even a toy that Doc teaches how to respond to inappropriate touching. Yes, that happens in a kids' cartoon. And it happens with a song. And like any good mystical amulet, Doc's stethoscope's powers grow. In the third season it suddenly becomes a time machine and takes Doc and the gang back to nineteenth-century London to meet a young Florence Nightingale. And later we learn that Doc received the stethoscope from her grandma. So not only is #BlackGirlMagic real, but #BlackGrandmaMagic is real too. And any TV show that is going to teach my daughters to respect the mystical power of old Black ladies has a permanent spot in my DVR. The show's objective is to get kids to be more comfortable speaking up for themselves and to not be afraid to get help when they need it. But wait, there's more! There was the episode about a big storm that was coming. Hallie the Hippo and Chilly the Snowman are separated from Doc and the other toys, and they get scared. I swear I wasn't crying. I just had bad allergies that day. And at the beginning of the episode, Professor Hootsburgh just happens to mention in passing, "As the earth gets warmer and warmer, big storms get bigger and bigger." Yup, Doc McStuffins just told kids about climate change. OK, now your mind is definitely blown! And no matter what the theme of each episode is, they all are inherently about inclusion and acceptance. There's an episode that is basically

about people with curly hair accepting that it won't ever be long and flowing. In my house of mixed daughters, that hit us right where we live. / swear, I wasn't crying that time either. Again, these damn allergies! Recently, the show has released some episodes about taking care of pets, and in the process it's gotten meta, which is to say that some of the characters now occasionally seem aware of the show's conceits (the songs, the magic stethoscope). Which means my kids will appreciate metaumor years before I did. And another episode about the parents of a friend of Doc's contains the takeaway that the parents are two moms. BOOM! And through every episode, Doc is there handling everything. She is the boss. She is the Olivia Pope of children's television. Doc McStuffins is not only one of the best shows on television, it's also one of the most important shows in the history of television. And my two daughters watch it thinking it is awesome, but more importantly, they think it is normal. A Black female doctor is no big deal. And it should be no big deal for children of all races. But it is. And the proof is that it took TV a lot longer to have Doc McStuffins than it did for TV to have a seven-foot-tall green monster. And as much as I love the Hulk, Doc is way more important. Because one day I might get to play the Hulk in a movie or TV show (with lots of makeup ... and even more steroids). But my daughters can actually be Black doctors. I know they can. Because they've already seen that it's possible.