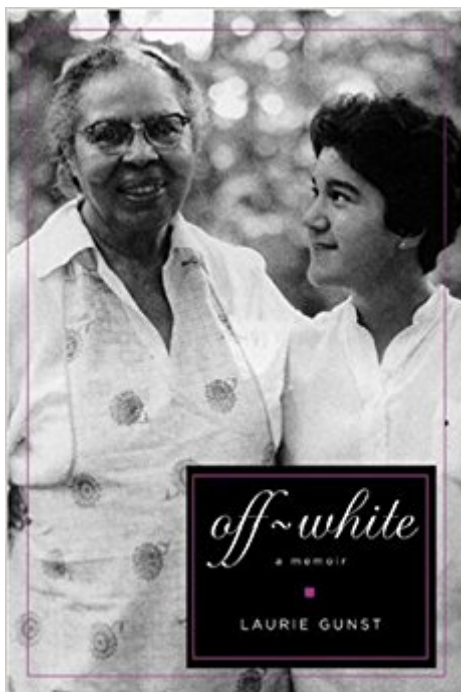


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Off-White: A Memoir



Synopsis

"[Gunst] writes with a clarity and honesty that belie the racial paradigm that was Richmond and the South.... This is a triumph of the spirit."âLouisville Courier-Post "Poignant and emotionally wrenching at times, Gunst successfully navigates the positives and negatives of her familial history."âUpscale â Laurie Gunst writes with authority about the complicated relationship between southern Jews and African Americans. Off-White perfectly captures the South in the latter half of the twentieth century and brings to mind the work of Truman Capote.ââ Alfred Uhry, author of Driving Miss Daisy Laurie Gunst is the youngest child in a well-to-do southern family of German-Jewish descent. Her primary source of care and love is Rhoda, a great-hearted African American woman who as caregiver presided over three generations of the Gunst family amidst the vicious racism of the Jim Crow South. The intimate relationship between caregiver and child is strong. So is Laurieâs shame at aspects of her familyâs racially-intolerant past: an ancestor fought for the South in the Civil War and another cooperated with the Klan in fomenting a race riot. As a vulnerable child she witnesses firsthand the unfairness of segregation that consigns the woman who cares for her to a lesser status. Laurieâs outrage at racial discrimination sets her apart from other white southerners, even her father. Love for Rhoda marks Laurie indelibly, just as it did her mother before her. Ultimately, she acknowledges Rhoda as a spiritual mother who shaped her life as much as her biological mother.

Book Information

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> Jewish

Customer Reviews

Somewhere between the harsh lines of black and white lie the inevitable shades of gray, as Laurie Gunst so adequately describes in her memoir, *OFF-WHITE*. Growing up in Richmond, Virginia, Gunst formed a strong bond with not only her nanny and caretaker Rhoda, but with all of the faces of color that shared her life. Already marked different because of being Jewish, Gunst felt her insides were different as well. In many ways, she saw herself as a white face with a black psyche due to her family's racially liberal ideals and her environment. She was the surrogate child of many African-Americans who were not only workers in her family's wealthy home, but also genuine adopted family members. She takes her readers on an identity pilgrimage throughout her childhood and adult years, adventures at Harvard and in Jamaica, and climaxing with the search for ancestors of both blood and spirit. While I thought *OFF-WHITE* started out a little slow, once I got to know the cast of characters in Laurie Gunst's life, I was smitten, intrigued, and enthralled with every last one of them. Gunst's writing is pensive and reminiscent without being too philosophical or academic. While the prose is certainly intelligently written, it was done so in a way that I felt she was telling me a story rather than relating mundane facts. Valuable lessons and awakenings abound in Laurie Gunst's memoir, and I am glad I got to know her and the people who touched her life. Reviewed by CandaceKof The RAWSISTAZÃ Â™ Reviewers

Laurie Gunst's book takes you inside the world of the country-club South and gives a unique portrait of the "upstairs/downstairs" relationships. Her topic is supposed to be race. She provides a compelling account of her relationships with the blacks in her life, and how she has won her struggle to create human relationships that overcome the distortions prescribed by society. But I also found the work very powerful in talking about the hidden intensity of surrogate mothering -- in her case, the black caregiver who was emotionally available to her in ways that her biological mother could not be. There are passages of great beauty in the writing, as well as painfully honest self-examination. This is not a perfect book, but it is brave, admirable, and unfortunately still necessary in a society that continues to take comfort in certain forms of self-deception.

as a young southern "christmas tree jew", i found this book to be touching, and sad. as someone who did not feel the direct sting of jim crow and still seeing the ghost of it everywhere, i thought the story of the 'unsavory grandfather' fascinating. the duality and doubly binded mentality is examined, tho not as thoroughly as i would have liked it to be in her later years. i think gunst's story is triumphant in many ways, and what my hope for it is is, not to piss off black folks (which i am sure it will) but to make white folks think about their own relationship with their own whiteness in the

world. i think this book is a good tool to educate and open discussion - the childhood memories (mythic thought) and adolescent (romantic) are honest and true and well written. however, in the end, in adult life, she does not quite make it to the higher level of thinking (philisophical). she is on the cusp. i felt certain questions were unanswered, for fear of failing to do so. maybe her next novel will cover that one. maybe it will only raise more questions. i liked this book. it's gutsy.

I valued her personal honesty and commitment to digging for the socio-political realities of her life experience. I would have enjoyed even more analysis in some areas, so I didn't give it 5 stars for that reason.

This is just more mammy business. If you're white, you're white. Period. Nobody knows or cares about what went on in your house or wherever. This is America, and you're American, and you're white. That means racist. Stop trying to act like you're better than everybody else.

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