

The background of the entire cover is a light teal color with soft, flowing, wavy lines that create a sense of movement and depth. The waves are more pronounced in the lower half of the image, where they appear to flow from the left side towards the right.

# space to exhale

a handbook for curating  
a soft, centered, serene life

LISA HURLEY



## **Praise for *Space To Exhale***

“Rarely have I encountered a book that truly speaks to the soul—*Space To Exhale* does that and so much more.

In her seminal work, Hurley helps Black women feel seen, valued, and celebrated—positing the revolutionary concept of centering ourselves and our needs by designing a life that nourishes, validates, and energizes us. While the book challenges fundamental paradigms on what a ‘successful’ life looks like, Hurley masterfully moves beyond ideology to offer practical tips and strategies for navigating workplace landmines and cultivating a life of meaning and serenity in the process.

Beautifully written in Hurley’s relatable, witty style, *Space To Exhale* is part love letter, part sermon, part guide—a gift to any Black woman striving to live a life that’s centered, purpose-driven, and joyful.”

**—Dana Brownlee,**

*Workplace Antiracism Advocate, and Author of  
The Unwritten Rules of Managing Up*

“The most powerful thing one can do is to intentionally curate a life that feels as good as it looks. In *Space To Exhale*, every reader is invited into a sanctuary of rest, self-love, and radical self-discovery. Written for Black women and anyone tired of navigating the relentless demands of hustle culture, this book is equal parts a balm for the weary soul, a shelter for the wounded heart, and a blueprint for a life rooted in ease, authenticity, purpose, and rest.

With each page, *Space To Exhale* invites you to breathe deeper, move slower, and live more intentionally. It’s a guide for curating a life that aligns with your highest self—bit by bit, breath by breath.”

**—Alechia Reese and Dani Bourdeau,**

*Hosts of the Triggered AF Podcast*

“As a Black woman who has experienced burnout myself, I can say with certainty that this book is much needed, and it has the power to change lives. *Space To Exhale* is more than a handbook; it’s a sanctuary. It offers practical tools, heartfelt wisdom, and a gentle reminder that living a life of ease, intention, and authenticity is not only possible, but necessary.”

**—Zee Clarke,**

*Author of Black People Breathe*

“*Space To Exhale* is not just a book. It’s a vibe. It’s sitting on the front porch sippin’ tea. It’s a balm for the soul. It’s a joyful guide to ‘reclaiming your time.’ Most of all, it’s a love letter to Black women across the African Diaspora. With her warmth, wit, and unapologetic honesty, Lisa Hurley offers a blueprint for thriving in a world that too often demands that Black women and femmes silence our voices and sacrifice our joy.

*Space To Exhale* is for every Black woman who has ever whispered, ‘There has got to be more to life than this.’ Sis, there is—and it starts with putting yourself first. This book is your permission slip to live soft, love hard, and exhale fully. Get ready to laugh, cry, and leave feeling seen, inspired, and ready to step into the fullness of your magic. *Space To Exhale* is a whole mood, and you don’t want to miss it.”

—**Joquina Reed,**

*Founding Steward and Creator of The AntiBlackness Reader Project*

“In a world that demands constant hustling over healing, Lisa Hurley’s *Space To Exhale* invites readers—especially Black women—into a sanctuary of self-discovery, self-love, and serenity. Lisa’s guide offers more than permission to rest; it provides a road map to reclaiming joy, balance, and authenticity. I cannot imagine anyone that does not need this road map.

Drawing on her own experiences as a Black woman navigating a world not built for her, Hurley creates a heartfelt and empowering narrative that speaks directly to the weary and overwhelmed. Hurley’s timely words remind us all that we are deserving of lives filled with ease, love, and intentionality. *Space To Exhale* is both a soothing balm and a clarion call to put ourselves first. It is a lifeline for those tired of pouring from an empty cup and an invitation to reimagine what it means to truly live. *Space To Exhale* is the companion we all need on the journey back to self.”

—**Amira K.S. Barger, MBA,**

*Communications, Marketing, DEI Executive, and Author of The Price of Nice*

“The soft life: That’s where real strength and power lie. Lisa Hurley’s debut book *Space To Exhale* helped me realize that it’s time to acknowledge my soft side.

‘Capes off. Kimonos on.’ is one of Hurley’s rallying cries, and *Space To Exhale* feels just like one of those soft, silky robes. It feels like a hug. It embraces the reader with soothing, spa-like vibes of serenity, stillness, self-care, and sisterhood—and it’s time for more of us to embrace that energy. *Space To Exhale* is the book that will help us do just that.

Now that I’ve read *Space To Exhale* I feel armed with additional tools for my journey to curating my soft life. With every anecdote, affirmation, and meditation, Lisa reminds us all that ease is the new wealth and softness is the new strength.”

**—Jeri Bingham, EdD,**

*Founder of Black Introvert Week, and  
Founder of the award-winning podcast HushLoudly*

“Standing ovation. I have NEVER read a book like *Space To Exhale*. It breaks boundaries for how books should be written. Lisa Hurley has given us an incredibly impactful gift in the form of a road map to own your soft life. She shares her practices (affirmations, meditations, and more), and allows us into her stories that carry us gently from word to word and page to page. This book allowed me to exhale in new ways. Get ready for the source of truth for Black women.”

**—LaTonya Davis,**

*CEO of L. Davis Consulting, LLC and  
Founder of L. Davis Academy for Innovation and Impact*

“*Space To Exhale* is a breath of fresh air. Lisa has created not just a book but a sanctuary, a space where Black women can truly, finally exhale. Every page feels like a soft hand on your shoulder, reminding you that rest is your right, not a reward. As a Black woman and first-generation American navigating the complexities of entrepreneurship and life, I feel seen in Hurley’s words. Lisa names the exhaustion we carry and lovingly invites us to lay it down. *Space To Exhale* is equal parts validation and permission, as well as a guide for choosing softness in a world that demands hardness. More than a book: It’s a lifeline.”

**—Brianna Doe,**

*Founder and CEO, Verbatim*

“Though the book *Space To Exhale: A Handbook for Curating a Soft, Centered, Serene Life* is written primarily for Black women, Lisa Hurley’s insights transcend color boundaries, offering wisdom for anyone navigating identity and ambition.

As a Black man, her call to shed societal expectations and embrace rest deeply resonated with me. Lisa challenges the relentless demands of grind culture, offering transformative tools like breathwork, affirmations, and journaling prompts. Her poetic yet practical guidance invites readers to reclaim authenticity, balance, and joy.

*Space To Exhale* is more than a handbook—it’s a balm for the soul, urging us to pause, realign, and prioritize thriving over mere survival. Lisa’s work is a timely revolution, inspiring us all to create space for stillness and self-care, unlocking the freedom to live fully and unapologetically.”

—**Diamond Michael Scott,**

*Global Book Ambassador and Taoist Nomad, The Chocolate Taoist*

“*Space To Exhale* is a transformative guide for those yearning to escape the exhaustion of hustle culture and find comfort in a life of rest, reflection, and intentional living. As someone who centers Black women unapologetically, Lisa invites us to reimagine what it means to live fully—starting with prioritizing rest and well-being. This book is a must-read for those seeking rest, community, and renewal.”

—**Janice Gassam Asare,**

*Author of Decentering Whiteness in the Workplace*

“Lisa Hurley’s *Space To Exhale* is a powerful invitation to slow down, reconnect, and honor ourselves in a world that constantly demands more. With wisdom and warmth, she reminds us that true rest is about self-awareness, boundaries, and the courage to redefine success on our own terms. This book is a balm for the soul and a permission slip for anyone ready to embrace authenticity, rest, and the transformative power of self-love.”

—**Amanda Miller Littlejohn,**

*Author of The Rest Revolution*

space to  
exhale





space to  
exhale

a handbook for curating  
a soft, centered, serene life

LISA HURLEY

WILEY

Copyright © 2025 by Lisa Hurley. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com). Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permission>.

The manufacturer's authorized representative according to the EU General Product Safety Regulation is Wiley-VCH GmbH, Boschstr. 12, 69469 Weinheim, Germany, e-mail: [Product\\_Safety@wiley.com](mailto:Product_Safety@wiley.com)

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

**Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty:** While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit our website at [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is Available:***

ISBN 9781394290680 (Cloth)

ISBN 9781394290697 (ePub)

ISBN 9781394290703 (ePDF)

**Cover Design:** Rose Reynolds

**Cover Image:** © Lisa Hurley, 2025

**Author Photo:** © Lisa Hurley, by Fred Sly for Pocstock

*Dedicated to my Mama Bear, Kathleen Hurley:  
You are an angel. You are a light. You are everything.  
Love you MORE.*



# Table of Contents

<i>Prologue</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Author's Note</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>PART I    Know Yourself</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> Know Your Self: Remember	13
<b>Chapter 2</b> Know Your Values: Align	29
<b>Chapter 3</b> Know Your Strengths: Focus	49
<b>PART II    Love Yourself</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b> Curate Your Thoughts: Manifest	77
<b>Chapter 5</b> Curate Your Circle: Connect	107
<b>Chapter 6</b> Curate Your Capacity: Rest	133
<b>PART III    Be Yourself</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b> Working While Black: Learn	169

<b>Chapter 8</b>	Curate Your Career: Strategize	205
<b>Chapter 9</b>	Curate Your Energy: Elevate	225
<b>Chapter 10</b>	Curate Your Soft Life: Exhale	245
<i>Conclusion</i>		265
<i>Epilogue</i>		271
<i>Resources</i>		273
<i>Glossary</i>		275
<i>Acknowledgments</i>		281
<i>About the Author</i>		287
<i>Notes</i>		289
<i>Index</i>		297

# Prologue

## **The Alchemist**

My spirit asked for this  
I am an alchemist  
I'm the antithesis of low

I am transforming now  
I am brainstorming how  
High and how far I will go

God is at work within  
Balancing yang and yin  
Making me ready to go

Farther than ever  
Like stars up in heaven  
I'm finally one with The Flow

© Lisa Hurley





# Author's Note

Let us take a collective breath

Inhaling ease, and joy, and peace

Exhaling the exhaustion and disconnection so many of us feel

Breathe

Breathe

Breathe

It is time for a divine recalibration

I am ready for one, and by opting to respond when this book  
chose you, you are clearly ready for one too

We are aligned and we are agreed:

There must be a better way

Of living this thing called life

Not hurried, or harried, or constantly hustling, but

Soft

Centered

Serene

This is your invitation to a life gently lived

To a state of grace

To a return to self

To a slower pace

This is your invitation to practice the pause

To divest and rest

To be much more

To do much less

Beloved, this is your invitation to exhale

We have created a sacred space in which to do our healing work

So let us embark on this heart-centered journey together

Inhale

Exhale

Let us commence



There is little that is not made better, easier, and more manageable by pausing to take a breath. That said, *Space To Exhale* is not a book about breathwork—at least not solely. That is its core, but there is so much more.

Neither is it a book about achieving perfection. We don't need the pressure of trying to achieve the unachievable. Healing is not linear; it is not a destination that can be reached like a terminus in a station. The journey is always ongoing, but incremental advancements can be made along the way.

*Space To Exhale* is a book about making progress, bit by bit, step by step, and yes, breath by breath, toward enjoying a more easeful life.

It is about making room so your mind, heart, spirit, and body can heal. About creating a divine vacuum into which abundance can flow.

This book is my gift to you. Thank you for choosing to receive it. It is a gift to myself as well because I, too, am still on my healing journey. And isn't any road trip better with company? I love that we're traveling together

Let's turn up the music and go.

## Why Did I Write *Space To Exhale*?

To answer that I must take you back to the summer of 2023. I was exhausted. So were many of the Black women in my circle. And we had been tired for a long, long time. In addition, most of us in the activism space were being repeatedly bullied, microaggressed, and censored. We felt stressed, unsafe, and burned out from trying to navigate spaces that were actively built to hinder us from thriving.

We were—and are—tired of being strong for everybody else, but having no one to lean on when we need support.

There were many group chats and backchannel conversations about us needing to feel safer and more relaxed; about us needing spaces where we do not have to fear censorship or reprisal simply for stating facts; about us needing a space where we genuinely belong. We wanted to be away from prying eyes and from people who, in mixed-demographic groups, usually ended up harming us. My response was twofold:

First, in order to encourage Black women to take a breath and practice the pause, I started posting more frequently about the need for us all to rest. In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, when we were all still trying to figure out up from down, I wrote this post:

TFW you're done with the week, but it's only Tuesday.

It feels like somehow Covid has simultaneously sped up and slowed down time. Whyyyyy are the weeks so long?

It feels as if we're collectively:

- Frozen in the present, but focused on the future.
- Panicked, but productive.
- Blessed, but burned out.
- Needing, yet resisting, rest.

Over the past year and a half everything has changed, but we're expected to keep on keeping on as if everything is the same.

- 💔 Our bodies are tired.
- 💔 Our minds are tired.
- 💔 Our hearts are tired.



Our spirits are tired.



And we're tired of feeling tired.

We need rest.

More to the point, we need to normalize and prioritize rest, rather than rewarding busyness for its own sake.

Today, give yourself permission to rest. Even if just for a few minutes.

Rest.

Rest.

Rest.

Take a breath.

Companies, if you can, show your employees some grace. Give them permission to take a break (A day? A week, maybe?) without fear of judgment or reprisal.

Let your employees rest.

Second, I'm a believer in verbs, so the other thing I did was take action. I created the soft, safe sanctuary I could tell Black women needed: The Great Exhale (TGE). It's an online community for any Black woman across the diaspora who is ready to remove her superwoman cape, take a deep breath, and rest. It's a community focused not so much on networking and clawing our way to the top,\* but more so on sisterhood, soft living, serenity, and support.

Of course, because questioning Black women is a global pastime, I received lots of pushback about making the community exclusively for Black women. (Many people have a belief that being pro-Black means being anti-everything else. That is not the case.) However, I knew then what some of us have always known and what even more of us have now accepted in a post-2024 election world: Black women need to stop carrying everyone else and start lifting ourselves and each other. And that begins by prioritizing our self-care.

---

\*Don't get me wrong, networking communities are also necessary. There is need, and room for all of us.

Because we're done. DONE. We're done with caring for others to our own detriment.

We're done with being the voice of reason and humanity to people who don't see us as fully human. We're done with dealing with people who prioritize blue bracelets and pink hats over Black lives.

**We're done with being the “Strong Black Woman.” The era of the Soft Black Woman has begun.**

In the pre-launch phase of TGE I also received pushback about the community being “too quiet.” Apart from the fact that I'm an introvert, so there's literally zero chance of me creating anything frenetic, my response was, “It's called The Great Exhale, not The Great Adrenaline. The whole goal is to relax.” Constant work and everlasting busyness are what is expected of Black women—and that's what inflicts some of the deepest damage upon us. The Great Exhale is an antidote to those harmful expectations. You don't go into a meditation room only to find disco balls, strobe lights, and loud music. You expect zen, peace, and rest. That is what The Great Exhale provides.

I chose to stay true to my vision. I'm happy to say that my instincts were right. The feedback from my community members has been overwhelmingly positive, and one of the things they mention most often is how beautifully calming the vibe is. Black women have to be “on” everywhere else. Inside TGE, we get to relax and simply ... be.

We focus on meditation, affirmations, journaling, soft living and, of course, breathwork. There's a lighter side too: I created channels within the community dedicated to joy, to jokes, to celebrating our hair and our culture. We get to frolic and be free. We get to talk about what we want to talk about without having to parse our words, code switch our language, or spend time explaining what we already know to people who are committed to misunderstanding us. We get to post what we want to post without having to be on the lookout for Uncle Algo (the algorithm) or feel fearful of being censored. And since it's important to circulate the Black dollar, there's also a channel named Minding Our Black Business where community members can promote their products and services or those of any Black-owned company.

*Space To Exhale* is a continuation of the heart work that I started with The Great Exhale. While it is possible that the virtual community could change in the future—evolution is inevitable—what will remain constant is

that it will always be a space for Black women. That is my vow. I owe that to my sistas and to myself.

That said, I want us *all* to heal: It's the Reiki Master in me. *Space To Exhale* therefore extends a warm welcome to *everyone* who is ready to live a softer, more serene life. I have always said that if just one person is positively affected by my words or my work, then I have done my job. However, to have my work make an even broader impact and hopefully help more people is part of the assignment that I have been entrusted with. I am being obedient.

## **The Framework**

My firm belief is that we need to move from the exclamation point energy that the world demands of us, to the exhalation point energy that our souls crave. With that in mind, I created the Exhalation Point Framework to help us dispense with hustle culture and instead embrace ease.

The framework is composed of three elements: **Know Yourself**, **Love Yourself**, and **Be Yourself**.

### **Know Yourself**

Curating a soft life starts with knowledge of self. When you know who you are, it is easier to build a life that is steeped in the energies of peace and abundance.

### **Love Yourself**

Curating a soft life is built on self-love. When you love yourself, you make better choices that serve your highest good.

### **Be Yourself**

Curating a soft life is based on being true to yourself. When you're true to yourself, your inner and outer worlds are aligned, you stay in the flow, and you are able to exhale.

## **Who Is *Space To Exhale* For?**

As I mentioned before, as a Reiki Master, I want everybody to heal. May all of humanity elevate. However, as a healer (and activist) who navigates the world in Black skin, I will always center Black people, and especially Black

women, in my work. I say this without apology because it often feels as though Black women are last on everyone's list. In my world, Black women are moved from the margins to the center, from the bottom to the top, from the back to the front.

**In my world, Black women matter.**

Therefore, when I first conceived of *Space To Exhale*, my goal was primarily to speak to Black women, and about Black women's lived experiences. My goal was to share stories, reveal insights, and provide resources uniquely suited to us. The experts always advise you to write about what you know. So I have.

That said, the book speaks to everyone who is tense, anxious, and perpetually exhausted. It provides moments of reflection, recalibration, and respite. It is for anyone, regardless of race, orientation, gender, or identity, who has ever asked themselves, "Is this ... it?" It is for anyone who has ever realized that their life isn't working as they would like it to. It is an invitation for us *all* to rethink our priorities and move toward living more meaningful, considered, rested lives. And because I live in the energy of seeking solutions, *Space To Exhale* provides tools and tips for how to do so.

**This book is for you if:**

- You're tired of feeling tired, and you're ready to get some rest.
- You're through with hustle culture and ready to experience a more serene lifestyle.
- You're done with being the "Strong Black Woman" and are ready to step into your Soft Black Woman era.
- You're one of the 92 percent of Black women voters in the US who voted for Kamala Harris.<sup>1</sup> The energy is "Let somebody else handle it. I'm doing me."
- You're *still* suffering from post-election grief; still reeling from the harmful "your body, my choice" rhetoric.
- You're an "only" who needs tips on how to navigate working while Black.
- You want cheat codes on how to avoid pitfalls in your life, relationships, and career.
- You desire to live a life that truly serves your highest good.
- You're ready to finally relax ... and exhale.

If you feel burned out, disconnected, and tired till it hurts, *Space To Exhale* proposes an alternate path—the path of least resistance—and provides you with advice on how best to travel it. Within these pages you'll get validation for how you're feeling as well as tools and inspiration for living a kinder lifestyle. You'll learn about soft-living principles and how to put them into practice. If you value contemplation and prefer quieter pursuits (Introverts: I see you!), you'll also find breathwork exercises, prayers, and meditations to elevate your energy and nurture your soul.

In addition, *Space To Exhale* is for my niece Taryn, my “adopted niece” Ayanna, my goddaughter Joy, and all the young’uns coming up who every now and then need a reminder of how amazing they are—and how loved. A reminder that they are intelligent, worthy, and capable—and that they are nobody’s mammy. That they are seen, understood, and valued. That they matter. That there is beauty in their melanin and power in their personality. It’s a loving admonition to trust their gut, know their worth, take up space, and choose the path that works best for them. A reminder that it’s okay to change their mind, and to take their time. There is no need to rush. Breathe. All will be well.

It’s also for the younger generations who sometimes have so many questions and would just like a little advice on how to navigate life—without actually having to speak to anyone IRL. It’s for the ones who are open to receiving cheat codes to make their lives a little easier. For the ones who are uncertain about their path but who are nevertheless already clear that they want a gentler experience for themselves than what some of their elders have endured. It’s for the young folks who already feel suffocated by the weight of people’s expectations and crave the freedom of their self-directed path. Auntie is here to help.

Honestly, this book is for me too.

It’s for multiple versions of myself throughout the years. It is for eight-year-old Little Lisa with the Trini accent (before the Bajan one kicked in), big glasses, big dreams, big smile, and small afro, who was so often afraid of just being herself. It’s for the little West Indian girl who always loved to play with words. It’s letting her know that she can relax and be confident because, ultimately, as Brother Bob sings, “Everything’s gonna be alright.” Little Lis’, you grow up, and you still get to play with words. Best of all, your words help people.



It's for teenage and young adult me who was always interested in yoga, prayer, energy, crystals, Reiki, and healing; who wanted to exist in that world for a living but couldn't see the way forward. It's for the version of me who always craved sisterhood in addition to my big sis but was never quite sure how to achieve it. Guess what, Lis? You get to do all that and more. And you have a whole community of sisters online.

It is for mid-career me trying again and again to prove myself to people who were unqualified to judge me. A love-rooted nudge to remember Who I Am. I never needed their approval. I was meant to walk my own path. And so I am.

I have Type A tendencies, so this book is also a tap on the shoulder to the me of today who still sometimes needs a reminder that I am enough and that I've done enough. There is nothing for me to prove. It is okay for me to rest, to pause, to take a few moments to breathe. It is me writing myself a permission slip to slow down and embrace progress over perfection. It's a permission slip for you too.

You cannot hustle and heal at the same time.

Happily, the book is also for future me who I already know is rich, relaxed, and reaping the rewards of rest. Life is good.

## Why Me?

First off, why *not* me? I have all the degrees, awards, and expertise needed to prove my credibility. But also, as the saying goes: I'm not new to this, I'm true to this. I have always been this person. From a young, young age, even as far back as four or five, one of my favorite phrases was "But that's not fair!" Now I grew up in a certain culture, and there was no way I was going to risk actually saying those words out loud (shout-out to my West Indian fam, I know y'all get it), but I thought them, frequently, for myself and for others. Injustice of any kind has always disturbed my spirit. I have always been inclined to root for the underdog. I can't stand to see anyone be hurt or mistreated. Seeking justice is a part of who I am at my core. It is no wonder that I became an activist, calling out that which is not fair, just, or equitable.

In addition, my parents have always been very pro-Black. When I was between six and eight, I remember occasionally wishing that Mummy's afro wasn't quite so huge or that Daddy did not so often wear the dashikis that Mummy had painstakingly embroidered with intricate designs; however,

that phase did not last long. I quickly became very proud of how they presented themselves. I did not know the phrase “Blackity Black Black” back then, but that was definitely their vibe. As an educator and intellectual, Daddy focused on Pan-Africanism and is professor emeritus of Africana Studies at Stony Brook University. My pride in my Blackness and focus on the Black experience was bred into me and modeled for me. That, too, is a part of who I am and how I navigate the world. My current focus on Black women reflects who I have always been.

My mother is a healer, giver, and artist. She is also a builder and a doer. She has a bent toward action. If there is a problem and she has the means and capacity to solve it, she will. I inherited many of those traits from her, and she also taught me that if there is something you want to see in the world, you have the power to create it.

For example, my mom is one of the founders of the Barbados Reiki Association, a community of Reiki practitioners. So I learned about building a healing-focused community like The Great Exhale from her. She is a quiet but strong leader who demonstrated that you don’t have to be the loudest person in the room to make a positive impact on the world. That was an important message for her introverted second-born child to absorb. She gave me permission to walk through the world exactly as I am. My mom is also highly empathetic and hates to see anyone suffer. We are similar in that way as well. My innate empathy currently expresses itself by seeing and feeling the pain of my sistas and having a desire to help reduce it.

Writing is in my blood: My father and sister are published authors several times over. In addition, they are both poets, and both have a background in academia as professors. My sister is also a former journalist, and she created the curriculum for the master’s in journalism at Coventry University in the UK.

It is little surprise, therefore, that for as long as I can remember, I’ve been writing in one form or another. I wrote my first song at about age four, and I’ve been writing ever since—poems, essays, ranty posts, you name it. For a large part of my career I was also a marketing copywriter, so I literally spent all day writing. However, I love writing so much that I also do it during my down time. I have a couple of blogs where I write about, well ... all the things. Everything from pop culture, racism, and fashion, to spirituality, careers, and mental health.

There's even a little poetry. Some of the poems are admittedly angsty, but there are others that stand the test of time. Case in point, the poems that open and close *Space To Exhale* are decades old. In fact, I wrote the original version of the closing poem "Why I Breathe" more than 25 years ago. It was a foreshadowing. If that doesn't exemplify being true to this, I don't know what does. I have always been on this vibration. I've always been interested in breathing as a conduit to deeper connection with self.

Spirituality, yoga, affirmations, meditation: I have been intensely interested in all things esoteric since my early teens. I'm a lover of good energy and good vibes, so when I first heard about Reiki, I was instantly fascinated. Like many great things in my life, I was introduced to Reiki by my mom back in the '90s. I've been a Reiki practitioner since then, and have my first and second degree in Usui Reiki. A few years ago, I decided to go deeper into my spirituality journey and was initiated as a Reiki Master, also by my mom, who has been a Reiki Master Teacher for several years.

One of the main themes of the book is burnout: What it is and how to address it. While I mention the syndrome from a theoretical perspective, I also have lived experience with suffering from it and overcoming it. Although I am not a mental health professional, I do believe that my "burnout battle" story will be helpful to readers who might be experiencing the same thing.

All of this is to say: I am the right person to write *Space To Exhale* because I have lived the life and done the work. The book is a tapestry of everything my multipotentialite heart is interested in, as well as an extension of my activism and healing work. It is an expression of my traits, talents, interests, experiences—and purpose. And a part of my purpose is to serve my community and my readers from a place of authenticity. To paraphrase Hillel: If not now, then when? If not me, then who?

## **What to Expect from *Space To Exhale***

### ***This Is a Book of Self-Healing***

*Space To Exhale* is the book I needed when I had to get up after a breakdown. I felt burned out, exhausted, and constantly anxious because of the effects of existing and working while Black. If the phrase "make your mess

into your message and your test into your testimony” were in book form, this would be it. It has given me a way back and a way forward. My hope is that if you are in a similar place it will do the same for you.

### ***This Is a Book of Community Healing***

It is a reminder that, although there are aspects to healing work that one must undertake alone, one can never fully heal in isolation. We need each other. We need support from the collective; to be rocked in the cradle of our community. We need the village. Let us create one together right now.

### ***This Is a Book of Encouragement***

It is a way finder for those who feel stuck on the treadmill of life: Who feel fatigued, stressed, burned out, and overwhelmed. It is for anyone who has ever felt like adulting is a scam. It is for those who are searching for a deeper meaning; for a more fulfilling life, to let them know that it is possible to create the life you truly want. Hold on. Stay encouraged. Better is coming.

### ***This Is a Book of Curation***

It is about choices. It's about the small daily actions we can all take to elevate our existence, to make ourselves feel better, to thrive rather than merely survive, and to get closer to living the life we've always imagined for ourselves—in healthy, balanced ways. It encourages us to be the sculptors of our own lives; to cut away that which is not needed (or not good for us), and reveal the beauty that has always been waiting beneath the surface.

### ***This Is a Book of Expansiveness***

It encourages us to make room. For ourselves. For our dreams. For our truth. For our destiny, our health, and our restoration. Room to breathe. It reminds us that it's okay to want better for ourselves—and to ask for it. It is okay to want something different from the norm. We're allowed to have our own definition of success, and to clear a path for it to manifest. Importantly, it reminds us to be open to receive; to make space in our minds, our homes, and our lives for what we most desire. Abundance abounds.

### ***This Is a Book of Relaxation***

Meditation, contemplation, a conscious daily exhale. It is also a book about baby steps. Slow and steady wins the race. Better yet, just slow and steady. We can opt out of the race. This is not about competition or sprinting to a finish line. There are no awards and gold stars, apart from the ones you can confer upon yourself for treating yourself more tenderly. It is about moving toward a life more tranquil. This is about us embracing our inner tortoise and going slower; about consciously and consistently choosing the path of least resistance.

### ***This Is a Book of Validation***

It's not just you: We are all collectively exhausted. *Space To Exhale* is for all of us who are tired of the daily grind; for those of us who are burned out; for those of us who have gotten used to feeling fatigued as our default. It is for everyone who has felt forced to do what is expected of them, as opposed to what their heart desires. It's for anyone who has ever thought "Is this all there is??" I get it. I've been there. At times I am still there. The good news is it's never too late to reinvent yourself. It's never too late to choose differently. It's never too late to embrace calm, and relax fully into your life. This is not all there is. There is more, and you get to experience it. Just choose.

### ***This Is a Book of Sisterhood***

It is most especially for my Black sistas around the world: No matter how they try to divide us, we are one. Solidarity. I see you, sis. I feel you. I love you. I am you. You are not alone. It's not all in your head. I know you're tired, sis, but it is time to rest. We finally get to rest. It is time for us to lay our burdens down and put ourselves first.

Of course, it is also for my sisters within *The Great Exhale*: We get to continue what we started together. We get to keep building a soft, serene sanctuary within our community—and within these pages.

And finally,

***This Is a Book of Alignment***

So:

Thank you for showing up.

Thank you for slowing down.

Thank you for choosing you.

Thank you for seeing me.

Thank you for giving yourself time and space to exhale.