in the workplace at all costs, Sandberg encourages women to maintain a commitment to the workplace without encouraging the workplace to maintain a commitment to them.” It is as though Sandberg believes a subculture of powerful elite women will emerge in the workplace, powerful enough to silence male dominators.

Yet Sandberg spins her seductive fantasy of female solidarity as though comradely support between women will magically occur in patriarchal work environments. Since patriarchy has no gender, women “leaning in” will not automatically think in terms of gender equality and solidarity. Like the issue of money, patriarchy is another subject that receives little attention in Sandberg’s book and in her many talks. This is ironic, since the vision of gender quality she espouses is most radically expressed when she is delineating what men need to do to work for change. It is precisely her avoidance of the difficult questions (like how will patriarchal thinking change) that empowers her optimism and the overall enthusiastic spirit she exudes. Her optimism is so affably intense, it encourages readers to bypass the difficulties involved in challenging and changing patriarchy so that a just moral and ethical foundation for gender equality would become the norm.

Women, and our male allies in struggle, who have been on the frontlines of feminist thinking and practice, see clearly the fairytale evocation of harmonious solidarity is no easy task. Given all the forces that separate women and pit us against one another, solidarity is not an inevitable outcome. Sandberg’s refusal to do anything but give slight mention to racialized class differences undercuts the notion that she has a program that speaks to and for all women. Her unwillingness to consider a vision that would include all women rather than white women from privileged classes is one of the flaws in the representation

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of herself as a voice for feminism. Certainly she is a powerful mentor figure for fiscally conservative white female elites. The corporate infusion of gender equality she evokes is a “whites only” proposition.

To women of color young and old, along with anti-racist white women, it is more than obvious that without a call to challenge and change racism as an integral part of class mobility she is really investing in top level success for highly educated women from privileged classes. The call for gender equality in the corporate American is undermined by the practice of exclusivity, and usurped by the heteronormative white supremacist bonding of marriage between white women and men. Founded on the principles of white supremacy and structured to maintain it, the rites of passage in the corporate world mirror this aspect of our nation. Let it be stated again and again that race, and more importantly white supremacy, is a taboo subject in the world according to Sandberg.

At times Sandberg reminds readers of the old stereotypes about used car salesmen. She pushes her product and she pushes it well. Her shpiel is so good, so full of stuff that is obviously true, that one is inclined to overlook all that goes unspoken, unexplained. For example, she titles a chapter “You Can’t Have It All,” warning women that this idea is one of the most dangerous concepts from the early feminist movement. But the real deal is that Sandberg has it all, and in a zillion little ways she flaunts it. Even though she epitomizes the “have it all kinda girl”—white, rich, and married to a wonderful husband (like the television evangelist Joyce Meyer, Sandberg is constantly letting readers know how wonderful her husband is lest we forget)—she claims women can’t have it all. She even dedicated the book to her husband “for making everything possible”—what doesn’t she have? Sandberg confesses that she has a loving family
and children, more helpers in daily life than one can count. Add this to the already abundant list, she is deemed by the larger conservative media to be one of “the most influential,” most powerful women in the world. If this is not another version of the old game show “queen for a day,” what is? Remember that the women on the show are puppets and white men behind the scenes are pulling the strings.

Even though many advocates of feminist politics are angered by Sandberg’s message, the truth is that alone, individually she was no threat to feminist movement. Had the conservative white male dominated world of mass media and advertising not chosen to hype her image, this influential woman would not be known to most folks. It is this patriarchal male dominated re-framing of feminism, which uses the body and personal success of Sheryl Sandberg, that is most disturbing and yes threatening to the future of visionary feminist movement. The model Sandberg represents is all about how women can participate and “run the world.” But of course the kind of world we would be running is never defined. It sounds at times like benevolent patriarchal imperialism. This is the reason it seemed essential for feminist thinkers to respond critically, not just to Sandberg and her work, but to the conservative white male patriarchy that is using her to let the world know what kind of woman partner is acceptable among elites, both in the home and in the workplace.

Feminism is just the screen masking this reframing. Angela McRobbie offers an insightful take on this process in her book, The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change, explaining: “Elements of feminism have been taken into account and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like ‘empowerment’ and ‘choice,’ these elements
are then converted into a much more individualistic discourse and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism. These new and seemingly modern ideas about women and especially young women are then disseminated more aggressively so as to ensure that a new women’s movement will not re-emerge.” This is so obviously the strategy Sandberg and her supporters have deployed. McRobbie then contends that “feminism is instrumentalized. It is brought forth and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means. Freedom is revitalized and brought up to date with this faux feminism.” Sandberg uses feminist rhetoric as a front to cover her commitment to western cultural imperialism, to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Clearly, Sandberg, with her website and her foundation, has many female followers. Long before she was chosen by conservative mass media as the new face of faux feminism, she had her followers. This is why I chose to call my response “dig deep,” for it is only as we place her in the overall frame of female cultural icons that we can truly unpack and understand why she has been chosen and lifted up in the neoliberal marketplace. Importantly, whether feminist or not, we all need to remember that visionary feminist goal which is not of a women running the world as is, but a women doing our part to change the world so that freedom and justice, the opportunity to have optimal well-being, can be equally shared by everyone—female and male.
1. This essay is a response to Sheryl Sandberg’s book *Lean In* (excerpted here on pp. 642–58), which encourages women to aim for positions of leadership and power. What is bell hooks’s overall assessment of that book, both positive and negative?

2. What does hooks mean by her title, “Dig Deep: Beyond *Lean In*”? The subtitle tells us that the essay is about *Lean In*; what does “Dig Deep” add, and why do you think hooks phrased it that way?

3. Even as hooks quotes and summarizes Sandberg and others, she makes her own views clear. How does she signal when she’s asserting her own views and when she’s summarizing those of someone else? (See Chapter 5 for this book’s advice on distinguishing what you say from what others say.)

4. According to hooks, “Sandberg uses feminist rhetoric as a front to cover her commitment to western cultural imperialism, to white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (paragraph 29). What exactly does she mean by these criticisms? How do you think Sandberg would respond to these charges?

5. Write an essay summarizing briefly the arguments made by Sheryl Sandberg and bell hooks and then saying what you think and why.