

A black and white portrait of bell hooks, a Black woman with her hair pulled back, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top and a patterned scarf. Her arms are crossed, and she is wearing a wide, metallic cuff bracelet on her left wrist. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light source, possibly a window with curtains.

bell hooks

RACE

CLASS

AND

MORE



Race and Class is a chapter from the brilliant little book by bell hooks called *Feminism is for Everyone*, the other two pieces were found online honoring the passing of bell hooks. This pamphlet was put together by Red Machete in Portland OR. We are a small communist cadre organization working to destroy white supremacist/settler colonialist capitalism from a militant revolutionary feminist praxis.

www.redmachete.com

RACE AND GENDER

No intervention changed the face of American feminism more than the demand that feminist thinkers acknowledge the reality of race and racism. All white women in this nation know that their status is different from that of black women/women of color. They know this from the time they are little girls watching television and seeing only their images, and looking at magazines and seeing only their images. They know that the only reason nonwhites are absent/invisible is because they are not white. All white women in this nation know that whiteness is a privileged category. The fact that white females may choose to repress or deny this knowledge does not mean they are ignorant: it means that they are in denial.

No group of white women understood the differences in their status and that of black women more than the group of politically conscious white females who were active in civil rights struggle. Diaries and memoirs of this period in American history written by white women document this knowledge. Yet many of these individuals moved from civil rights into women's liberation and spearheaded a feminist movement where they suppressed and denied the awareness of difference they had seen and heard articulated firsthand in civil rights struggle. Just because they participated in anti-racist struggle did not mean that they had divested of white supremacy, of notions that they were superior to black females, more informed, better educated, more suited to "lead" a movement.

In many ways they were following in the footsteps of their abolitionist ancestors who had demanded that everyone (white women and black people) be given the right to vote, but, when faced with the possibility that black males might gain the right to vote while they were denied it on the basis of gender, they chose to ally themselves with men, uniting under the rubric of white supremacy. Contemporary white females witnessing the militant demand for more rights for black people chose that moment to demand more rights for themselves. Some of these individuals claim that it was working on behalf of civil rights that made them aware of sexism and sexist oppression. Yet if this was the whole picture one might think their newfound political awareness of difference would have carried over into the way they theorized contemporary feminist movement.

They entered the movement erasing and denying difference, not playing race alongside gender, but eliminating race from the picture. Foregrounding gender meant that white women could take center stage, could claim the movement as theirs, even as they called on all women to join. The utopian vision of sisterhood evoked in a feminist movement that initially did not take racial difference or anti-racist struggle seriously did not capture the imagination of most black women/women of color. Individual black women who were active in the movement from its inception for the most part stayed in their place. When the feminist movement began racial integration was still rare. Many black people were learning how to interact with whites on the basis of being peers for the first time in their lives. No wonder individual black women choosing feminism were reluctant to introduce their awareness of race. It must have felt so awesome to have white women evoke sisterhood in a world where they had mainly experienced white women as exploiters and oppressors.

A younger generation of black females/women of color in the late '70s and early '80s challenged white female racism. Unlike our older black women allies we had for the most part been educated in predominantly white settings. Most of us had never been in a subordinated position in relation to a white female. Most of us had not been in the workforce. We had never been in our place. We were better positioned to critique racism and white supremacy within the women's movement. Individual white women who had attempted to organize the movement around the banner of common oppression evoking the notion that women constituted a sexual class/ caste were the most reluctant to acknowledge differences among women, differences that overshadowed all the common experiences female shared. Race was the most obvious difference.

In the '70s I wrote the first draft of *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. I was 19 years old. I had never worked a full-time job. I had come from a racially segregated small town in the south to Stanford University. While I had grown up resisting patriarchal thinking, college was the place where I embraced feminist politics. It was there as the only black female present in feminist classrooms, in consciousness-raising, that I began to engage race and gender theoretically. It was there that I began to demand recognition of the way in which racist biases were shaping feminist thinking and call for change. At other locations individual black women/women of color were making the same critique.

In those days white women who were unwilling to face the reality of racism and racial difference accused us of being traitors by introducing race. Wrongly they saw us as deflecting focus away from gender. In reality, we were demanding that we look at the status of females realistically, and that realistic understanding serve as the foundation for a real feminist politic. Our intent was not to diminish the vision of sisterhood. We sought to put in place a concrete politics of solidarity that would make genuine sisterhood possible. We knew that there could no real sisterhood between white women and women of color if white women were not able to divest of white supremacy, if feminist movement were not fundamentally anti-racist.

Critical interventions around race did not destroy the women's movement; it became stronger. Breaking through denial about race helped women face the reality of difference on all levels. And we were finally putting in place a movement that did not place the class interests of privileged women, especially white women, over that of all other women. We put in place a vision of sisterhood where all our realities could be spoken. There has been no contemporary movement for social justice where individual participants engaged in the dialectical exchange that occurred among feminist thinkers about race which led to the re-thinking of much feminist theory and practice. The fact that participants in the feminist movement could face critique and challenge while still remaining wholeheartedly committed to a vision of justice, of liberation, is a testament to the movement's strength and power. It shows us that no matter how misguided feminist thinkers have been in the past, the will to change, the will to create the context for struggle and liberation, remains stronger than the need to hold on to wrong beliefs and assumptions.

For years I witnessed the reluctance of white feminist thinkers to acknowledge the importance of race. I witnessed their refusal to divest of white supremacy, their unwillingness to acknowledge that an anti-racist feminist movement was the only political foundation that would make sisterhood be a reality. And I witnessed the revolution in consciousness that occurred as individual women began to break free of denial, to break free of white supremacist thinking. These awesome changes restore my faith in feminist movement and strengthen the solidarity I feel towards all women.

Overall feminist thinking and feminist theory has benefited from all critical interventions on the issue of race. The only problematic arena has been that of translating theory into practice. While individual white women have incorporated an analysis of race into much feminist scholarship, these insights have not had as much impact on the day to day relations between white women and women of color. Anti-racist interactions between women are difficult in a society that remains racially segregated. Despite diverse work settings a vast majority of folks still socialize only with people of their own group. Racism and sexism combined create harmful barriers between women. So far feminist strategies to change this have not been very useful.

Individual white women and women of color who have worked through difficulties to make the space where bonds of love and political solidarity can emerge need to share the methods and strategies that we have successfully employed. Almost no attention is given the relationship between girls of different races. Biased feminist scholarship which attempts to show that white girls are somehow more vulnerable to sexist conditioning than girls of color simply perpetuates the white supremacist assumption that white females require and deserve more attention to their concerns and ills than other groups. Indeed while girls of color may express different behavior than their white counterparts

they are not only internalizing sexist conditioning, they are far more likely to be victimized by sexism in ways that are irreparable.

Feminist movement, especially the work of visionary black activists, paved the way for a reconsideration of race and racism that has had positive impact on our society as a whole. Rarely do mainstream social critiques acknowledge this fact. As a feminist theorist who has written extensively about the issue of race and racism within feminist movement, I know that there remains much that needs to be challenged and changed, but it is equally important to celebrate the enormous changes that have occurred. That celebration, understanding our triumphs and using them as models, means that they can become the sound foundation for the building of a mass-based anti-racist feminist movement.

10 RULES:

FOLLOWING BELL HOOKS' INSTRUCTIONS FOR OUR MOVEMENT

February 1, 2022 Jess Eagle, Strategic Communications Manager

<https://www.equalrights.org/viewpoints/bell-hooks-10-rules/>

How to best honor a mother and creator of feminism, bell hooks: follow the instructions she provided for our movement. They are as relevant today as when she wrote them 30 years ago.

These are the tenets Equal Rights Advocates lives and works by. They guide our every decision.

“bell hooks taught us, love must drive our movement — our goals, our priorities, and *how* we do our work. **We cannot reject love as feminism’s cornerstone because we are afraid we won’t be taken seriously.**”

bell hooks told us, **feminism must center the needs of Black women** and others who are most oppressed by society and culture. We must commit to finding solutions for people of all genders. Our movement must **reject a fear-based scarcity mindset of white supremacy** that tries to fool us into seeing a limited number of seats at the table, that tries to divide us with the lie that we must choose our battles.

bell hooks taught us, we must do our work with the recognition that sexism, racism, homophobia, and all forms of oppression overlap to create women’s daily experiences of economic insecurity, gender-based violence, professional and creative stifling, and the devaluing of our lives and contributions. All forms of oppression have joined forces to keep us down, so we too must all join forces to achieve true freedom.

“bell hooks told us...our movement must **reject a fear-based scarcity mindset of white supremacy** that tries to fool us into seeing a limited number of seats at the table.”

bell hooks showed us, love must drive our movement — our goals, our priorities, and *how* we do our work. **We cannot reject love as feminism’s cornerstone because we are afraid we won’t be taken seriously.** In a culture that tries to convince us love has no value outside the home, rejecting love as our movement’s North Star means conceding to the very forces that oppress us in the first place.

bell hooks reminded us, **the love that leads our movement for change must include self-love**, the most radical exercise of anti-oppression a woman can practice.

This Black History Month, we honor bell hooks by recommitting ourselves to her instructions for the feminist movement:

1. “Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. **Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences;** this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.”
– Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope, 2003
2. “To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.”
– Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope, 2003
3. “**All our silences in the face of racist assault are acts of complicity.**”
– Killing Rage: Ending Racism, 1995
4. “We continue to put in place the anti-sexist thinking and practice which affirms the reality that **females can achieve self-actualization and success without dominating one another.**”
– Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics, 2000
5. “It is obvious that many women have appropriated feminism to serve their own ends, especially those white women who have been at the forefront of the movement; but rather than resigning myself to this appropriation I choose to re-appropriate the term ‘feminism,’ to focus on the fact that **to be ‘feminist’ in any authentic**

sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression.”

– Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism, 1981

6. “One of the best guides to how to be self-loving is to give ourselves the love we are often dreaming about receiving from others... It is silly, isn’t it, that I would dream of someone else offering to me the acceptance and affirmation I was withholding from myself. This was a moment when the maxim ‘You can never love anybody if you are unable to love yourself’ made clear sense. And I add, ‘**Do not expect to receive the love from someone else you do not give yourself.**’”
– All About Love: New Visions, 1999
7. “We can’t combat white supremacy unless we can teach people to love justice. **You have to love justice** more than your allegiance to your race, sexuality and gender. It is about justice.”
– [interview](#) with Jet Magazine, 2013
8. “Marginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation. In fact I was saying just the opposite: that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance.”
– Marginality As a Site of Resistance, 1990
9. “The process begins with the individual woman’s acceptance that American women, without exception, are socialized to be racist, classist and sexist, in varying degrees, and that **labeling ourselves feminists does not change the fact that we must consciously work to rid ourselves of the legacy of negative socialization.**”
– Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism, 1981
10. “The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. **The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom**, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others.”
– Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations, 1994

A LIFE IN QUOTES: BELL HOOKS

The groundbreaking feminist critic, poet, and intellectual on love, feminism, patriarchy, white supremacy, forgiveness and the power of art

Adrian Horton

bell hooks, the feminist author, poet, theorist and cultural critic, has died at the age of 69 at her home in Berea, Kentucky. Her works, including *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, *All About Love*, *Bone Black*, *Feminist Theory and Communion: The Female Search for Love*, were beacons for a generation of writers and thinkers in academia and beyond.

Here's a handful of her most memorable quotes:

On love:

The one person who will never leave us, whom we will never lose, is ourself. Learning to love our female selves is where our search for love must begin.

– *Communion: The Search for Female Love*, 2002

But many of us seek community solely to escape the fear of being alone. Knowing how to be solitary is central to the art of loving. When we can be alone, we can be with others without using them as a means of escape.

– *All About Love: New Visions*, 1999

The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others.

– *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, 1994

On community:

To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.

– *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, 2003

Dominator culture has tried to keep us all afraid, to make us choose safety instead of risk, sameness instead of diversity. Moving through that fear, finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.

– *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, 2003

On feminism:

It is obvious that many women have appropriated feminism to serve their own ends, especially those white women who have been at the forefront of the movement; but rather than resigning myself to this appropriation I choose to re-appropriate the term 'feminism', to focus on the fact that to be 'feminist' in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people, female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression.

– *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, 1981

If any female feels she need anything beyond herself to legitimate and validate her existence, she is already giving away her power to be self-defining, her agency.

– *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, 2000

No Black woman writer in this culture can write 'too much'. Indeed, no woman writer can write 'too much' ... No woman has ever written enough."

– *Remembered Rapture: The Writer At Work*, 1999

We continue to put in place the anti-sexist thinking and practice which affirms the reality that females can achieve self-actualization and success without dominating one another.”

– Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics, 2000

On racism and white supremacy:

Marginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation. In fact I was saying just the opposite: that it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance.

– Marginality As a Site of Resistance, 1990

Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people. If we only view the margin as sign, marking the condition of our pain and deprivation, then a certain hopelessness and despair, a deep nihilism penetrates in a destructive way the very ground of our being. It is there in that space of collective despair that one’s creativity, one’s imagination is at risk, there that one’s mind is fully colonized, there that the freedom one longs for is lost.

– Marginality as a Site of Resistance, 1990

All our silences in the face of racist assault are acts of complicity.

– Killing Rage: Ending Racism, 1995

We can’t combat white supremacy unless we can teach people to love justice. You have to love justice more than your allegiance to your race, sexuality and gender. It is about justice.

- interview with Jet Magazine, 2013

On patriarchy:

The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem.

– The Will To Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love, 2004

I still think it’s important for people to have a sharp, ongoing critique of marriage in patriarchal society – because once you marry within a society that remains patriarchal, no matter how alternative you want to be within your unit, there is still a culture outside you that will impose many, many values on you whether you want them to or not.

– Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics, 2000

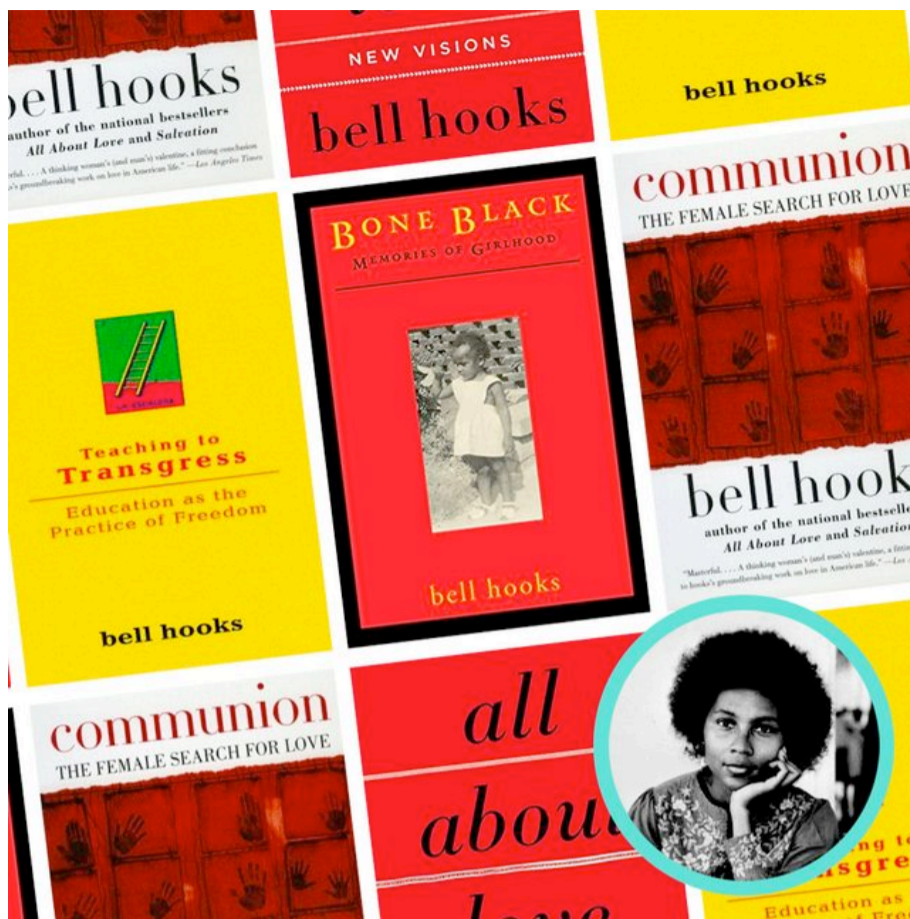
On forgiveness and hope:

For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?

– in conversation with Maya Angelou, 1998

The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is – it’s to imagine what is possible.

– Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations, 2012



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