

# MY BLACK WOMAN STORY: BELL HOOKS



*Karen Anahi Alban*

# AGENDA

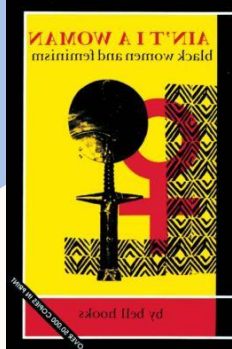
- ❖ *Childhood & Education*
- ❖ *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*
- ❖ *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*
- ❖ *Works Cited*

# TIMELINE



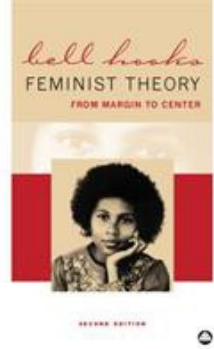
1952

Birth of Bell Hooks



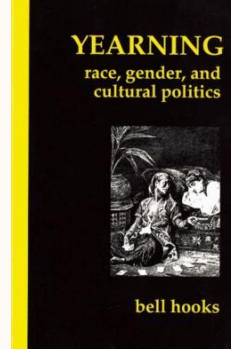
1981

Published book *Ain't I a Woman: Black Woman and Feminism*



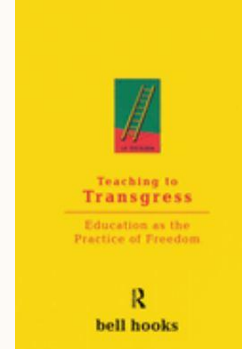
1984

Published book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*



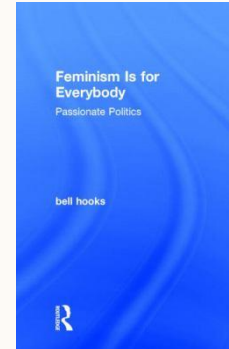
1990

Published book *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*



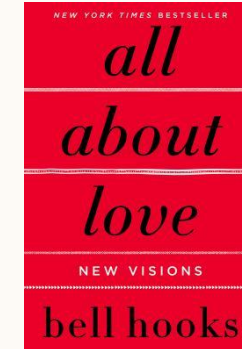
1994

Published book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*



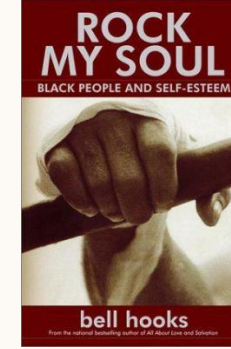
2000

Published book *Feminism Is For Everybody: Passionate Politics*



2000

Published Book *All About Love: New Visions*



2003

Published book *Rock My Soul: Black People and Self Esteem*

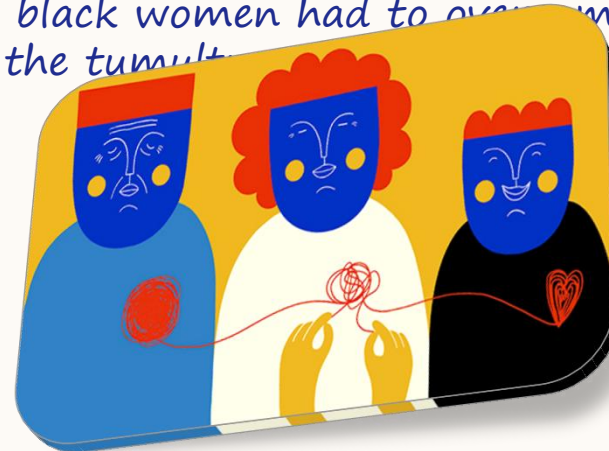


2021

Passing of Bell Hooks

# INTRODUCTION

In order to heal from her oppressive background, Gloria Jean Watkins, better known by her pen name "bell hooks," invented bell hooks to stand for a new identity (Henderson, 2010). In 1925, women were not permitted to be well-spoken or intellectually educated in her native Kentucky. Her mother worked as a maid and her father as a janitor in white families' homes (Henderson, 2010). The expectations placed on women included performing housewife duties, showing obedience, and refraining from engaging in any activities that would threaten their white counterparts. Gloria Jean Watkins was inspired by her maternal great-grandmother Bell Hooks, a fiery advocate against racial, social, and gender discrimination. Through her work, Bell hooks successfully exposed the trauma black women had to overcome that stem from their ancestors and the tumultuous struggle for control of their own narrative.



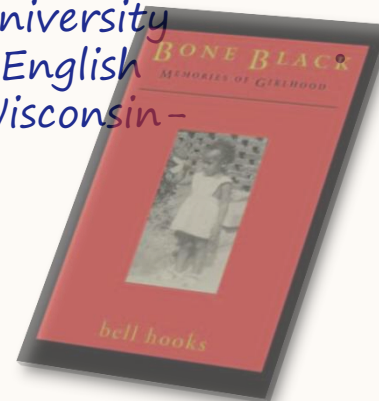
# CHILDHOOD & EDUCATION

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## EARLY CHILDHOOD

- Bell Hooks was educated in segregated public schools during her early life until transferring to an integrated institution in the late 1960s.
- Hooks describes her "effort to build self and identity" while growing up in "a rich magical world of southern black culture that was sometimes paradisiacal and other times terrifying" in her autobiography *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* (1996).
- Prior to earning her BA in English from Stanford University in 1973 and her MA in English from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1976, Hooks graduated from Hopkinsville High School.



## QUOTES FROM *BONE BLACK: MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD*

- "“Tell me that I am lucky to be lighter skinned, not black black, not dark brown, lucky to have hair that is almost straight, otherwise I might not be in the wedding at all.”"
- "“She has learned to fear white folks without understanding what it is she fears.”"
- "“We can tell that our mama is not like other mothers. We can see that she is working hard to give us more than food shelter, and clothes to wear, that she wants to give us a taste of the delicious, a vision of beauty, a bit of ecstasy.”"

These quotes all share the **sentiment of feeling alienated** from the outside world. Hooks questions whether her hair and skin tone are limiting her from opportunities, which indicates that she is treated differently from her white classmates. She states, "her mom is different," and that she must put in more effort to give her

*Black nationalism, was a political and social movement prominent in the 1960s and early '70s in the United States.*

BLACK NATIONALISM, WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON SEPARATISM AND FORMING NEW CULTURES, HAS ALLOWED MANY BLACK PEOPLE TO THINK THAT WE HAVE SOMEHOW LIVED IN AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS AND YET HAVE REMAINED UNTOUCHED, UNINFLUENCED BY THE WORLD AROUND US. IT IS THIS ROMANTICIZED NOTION OF OUR BLACKNESS (THE MYTH OF THE NOBLE SAVAGE) THAT ALLOWS MANY PEOPLE TO REFUSE TO SEE THAT THE SOCIAL ORDERS BLACK NATIONALISTS HAVE PROPOSED WITH THEIR FOUNDATION OF PATRIARCHY WOULD NOT HAVE CHANGED IN ANY WAY NEGATIVE FEELINGS BETWEEN BLACK WOMEN AND MEN. IN THE NAME OF LIBERATING BLACK FOLKS FROM WHITE OPPRESSORS, BLACK MEN COULD PRESENT OPPRESSION OF BLACK WOMEN AS A STRENGTH—A SIGN OF NEWFOUND GLORY.

-hooks

# AIN'T I A WOMAN: BLACK WOMEN AND FEMINISM

In *"Ain't I A Black Woman: Black Woman and Feminism"*, Hooks argues that movements like **Black nationalism** was primarily a **patriarchal and misogynist** movement that sought to bridge racial divides between black and whites by strengthening sexist ones between black men and women (hooks, 2015).

Hooks notes how initiatives "meant" to support and fight for black women frequently only provide the impression of doing so. When black people pleaded with white people to support them in their fights to defend black womanhood, their appeals went unanswered.

Hooks expands on this point by claiming that slavery-era stereotypes continue to affect black women. Slavery-related stereotypes portray white women as **"pure feminine virgins"** and black women as **"seductive jezebels,"** devaluating black femininity to "whores" and "prostitutes". Even if an individual black female became a lawyer, doctor, or teacher, she was likely to be labeled a whore or prostitute by whites (hooks, 2015).

**"The mammy"** is another slavery related stereotype which depicts black women that work for white families and nurse the family's children. Black women are still held to toxic standards by male partners, often black women are expected to care for everyone else often ignoring their own well-being or goals.

Such as Aunt Sally in 1875 have been used to sell household items, especially breakfast foods, coffee, detergents, planters, sewing accessories and beverages. Aunt Jemima (seen in the second image) is a popularized image of "the mammy" stereotype still seen today.

Black women's features are exaggerated as seen in the last image: large red lips and bulging eyes. The sexist image is oversized breasts, hence the name "big titty." Also, the female's mouth, which is drawn to depict her as flirtatious which purpurates the Jezebel stereotype.



Through writing in the lens of bell hooks, she discovers her own radical voice. She redefines feminism to take account the experience of black women and exposes gender inequalities. Hooks introduces the term "intersectional 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. ”

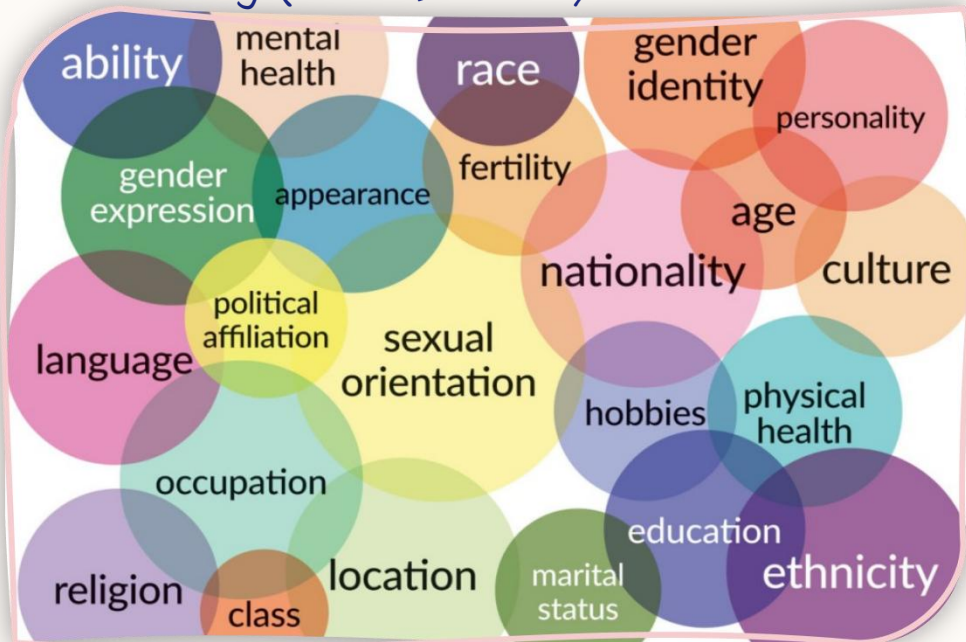
- hooks



# FEMINIST THEORY FROM MARGIN TO CENTER

## Intersectional feminism theory

Hooks theory recognizes that social classifications (e.g., race, gender, sexual identity, class, etc.) are interconnected, and that ignoring their intersection creates oppression towards women and change the experience of living as a woman in society (hooks, 2000).



- In her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, Hooks discusses how "unlearning racism workshops," which are frequently led by white women are attempting to white-wash and own the narrative of a black woman's grueling hardship during slavery. White women-led workshops frequently focus on innate psychological personal prejudice without acknowledging the need for corresponding change in political commitment and action (Hooks, 2000).
- Women who attend these workshops without the intention of acknowledging their racial privilege or aim to transform preconceived racial prejudice does not lead to actionable change in a political or institutional scale, white women attempt to be allies but don't take the effort to learn about their privilege or educate themselves about it.
- In addition, Hooks discusses how racism and sexism interact to affect black women and how this interaction has led to black women having the lowest position in American society.

# CONNECTION TO CLASS

## TEXT

I chose this class to learn more about african tradition and culture because i identifiy as afro-latina and in my household they don't really accept the fact that we come from black descendents.

Bell Hooks' life's work was to dispel the myths such as “sapphire, jezebel and mammy” about black women that colonialism imposed so that black women may rewrite their own stories rather than submitting to the myths which this class taught extensively. Traditional Africa had values and extreme respect for women that allowed them to participate in war, commerce and leading villages showing success in their ruling unlike contemporary society.

# WORKS CITED

Biana, H. T. (n.d.). *Extending bell hooks' feminist theory*. Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University.

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Henderson, F. B. (2010). Hooks, Bell. *African American Studies Center*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.47894>