

***Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* by bell hooks. New York:  
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By Andrea Anderson, Osgoode Hall Law School, York University, Canada

1 As a black feminist and social activist, bell hooks addresses the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality and religion, and their ability to produce and perpetuate systems of oppression and domination. In her latest work, *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice*, she attempts to strategize the ways in which scholars, activists and readers can challenge and change systems of domination. In *Writing Beyond Race*, bell hooks provides an insightful and compelling analysis of the discourse and media representations of race and racism, and provides suggestions for the ways in which people can bridge cultural and racial divides.

2 *Writing Beyond Race* is a smart, engaging and passionate book about thinking beyond race in order to fight white supremacy through critical awareness. hooks introduces the admittedly awkward phrase, "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy", to capture the intersections of various systems of domination that characterize contemporary American life. In understanding how imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy works to oppress everyone, hooks challenges the reader to think about white supremacist practices that are the foundation of all systems of domination based on skin color and ethnicity. In describing systems of oppressions in the United States, hooks uses this phrase to describe the interlocking political systems that are the basis of American life. hooks explains that she has found this phrase useful because it does not prioritize one system over another, but rather, offers a way of thinking about interlocking systems of oppressions that work together to maintain the status quo (4). That said, in her work hooks illustrates how the United States was founded and colonized on the beliefs of white supremacy. This approach makes the collection an important contribution to research and writings on race and racism.

3 For hooks, the term white supremacy is more descriptive of race relations problems in America than racism. She critiques the lack of discussion of white supremacy in feminist writings and suggests thinking about white supremacy as the foundation of race and racism because it allows us to see beyond skin color (hooks 6). hooks identifies the system of dominating patriarchy as the real divisive factor between people.

4 The book consists of a collection of essays, divided into 18 chapters offering stories of resistance and strategies for change as it relates to white supremacist thought and black

self-determination. The book begins by exploring ways to consider post-racial America and offers a compelling discussion of the need to move beyond the term racism because, as hooks argues, it evokes the notion of overt discrimination. In her introductory chapter, hooks addresses the use of the term white supremacy as it “allows for the uncovering and exposure of all the covert and insidious ways that coping with trauma” and the stress associated with the term “may diminish one’s chances of being in good health” (22). hooks explains that in using the phrase ‘imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy’, she wanted to adopt language that would remind the reader of the continuous interlocking systems of domination that define our reality. Gender and race are important issues. Yet, by using this particular phrase in this way, she attempts to establish a concise way of articulating the way that racism, sexism, and classism are actually functioning simultaneously at all times in our lives. Further, as hooks explains it, as a black female of a certain age group, if she wanted to better understand what is happening to her in this moment of her life, she would not be able to understand it only by looking through the lens of race, or through the lens of gender or simply looking at how others, - white people - see her. For hooks, this is an important breakthrough in her work. By using the term white supremacy over racism she argues that racism in and of itself does not really allow for a discourse on colonization and decolonization. Rather, the recognition of the internalized racism within people of colour allows for things to be kept at a level at which whiteness and white people remained at the center of the discussion.

5        The remaining chapters contextualize the way(s) race and racism has been talked about, particularly in the post-racial era within the United States. hooks provides harsh criticism of a number of books and films and their impact on race and representation. These include *The Help*, the *Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and recent autobiographies of Malcolm X (hooks 70). In her critique, hooks offers her unique perspective as an African American woman. She illustrates in the chapter on the stories told in the book and movie, “*The Help*”, the analysis of media and its appropriation of black female narratives. hooks argues that both mediums purport to deconstruct class and race relations, yet reinscribe the same harmful social tropes movie goers have come to expect: cat fights and an inability for women to display partnership. Through excerpts of a conversation with filmmaker Gilda L Sheppard, hooks also thoroughly addresses the movies *Crash* and *Precious* and their pornography of violence (134). She also includes more personal essays about her parent’s marriage and living as a black woman in a predominantly white community. She further reflects on the contemporary significance of African American leaders such as W.E. Dubois,

Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and highlights the contributions of black women writers such as Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison and Sonia Sanchez. Subsequent chapters weave together discussions of the importance of putting academic theories into real life practices to end discrimination. Returning back to the power of white supremacy, hooks argues for self-awareness and self-determination in order to unlearn racism and, in turn, white supremacy (144).

6 The reminder of the book is centered on an examination of love as a means to address oppression. By focusing on the role of love in ending discrimination, whether by addressing issues of racism, sexism, homophobia or classism, hooks argues for love and learning to accept other people's differences (1). In the final chapter, hooks suggests developing a critical consciousness, - a decolonialization of the mind - by becoming aware of the influences of white supremacy's sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and colonialism while simultaneously holding out hope for change (193). hooks encourages healing and reviving solidarity among people of colour to thus become empowered to live with purpose and dignity. As a cultural critic, hooks is at her best in *Writing Beyond Race*, using models of diversity to criticize existing books and films to put forward her vision of a better American society.

7 bell hooks wrestles with the complex, and emotionally charged topic of race and racism in America, but does so in a readable and accessible manner. *Writing Beyond Race* is particularly important contribution to race writings because it promotes moving beyond our general understanding of racism in order to adequately address the complexity of white supremacy. Additionally, the themes in hooks' book resonate with current discussions of the reality of racism and sexist oppression occurring in communities throughout the United States. For example, following her approach presented in *Writing Beyond Race*, the recent demands of the 'Say Her Name' movement in the United States as a means to adequately address the previous lack of inclusion of women in the discussion of victims of state misconduct, must be understood under the implications of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Because of its focus, a number of audiences will find this book interesting and valuable.

8 If you are not familiar with bell hooks writings, then *Writing Beyond Race* is, overall, an excellent introduction to her work. Thoughtful and provocative, *Writing Beyond Race* collects many of hooks' major writings on a variety of topics (film, love, race, pedagogy) and cleverly provides an overview of her critique of white supremacist imperialist capitalist patriarchy as the hegemonic discourse that oppresses everyone. While everyone is affected by

the dominant culture, she notes that some suffer more than others and in different ways. Throughout the book, hooks urges for partnership and mutuality and argues for a truly intersectional view of hegemony where many issues converge to oppress. She maintains that issues of race, class, and gender all interlock to produce culture and that if you want to deconstruct one, you must address the others as well.