

WISCONSIN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

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BELL HOOKS

1952-present
City: Madison
County: Dane

University of Wisconsin graduate bell hooks is a prolific writer, speaker, and scholar who is best-known for her work on gender, race, and class.

hooks, who was born Gloria Jean Watkins to working-class parents in a racially segregated Kentucky community, later adopted the pen name bell hooks (intentionally lowercase) in tribute to her grandmother. An avid reader at a young age, she published her first poems in a Sunday School magazine. After graduating from high school, she studied English at Stanford University in California. She started writing her first book — AIN'T I A WOMAN: BLACK WOMEN AND FEMINISM, which examines racism and sexism from a Black woman's perspective — when she was only 19; it became an influential feminist work when it was later published. hooks earned a master's degree in English literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1976 and taught college courses for several years before earning her doctorate from the University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1983. She later taught at Yale University, Oberlin College, and the City College of New York. Since 2004 she has been Distinguished Professor in Residence in Appalachian Studies at Berea College in Kentucky.

hooks has written dozens of books. Many of them look at the connections — rather than the differences — among various kinds of oppression; one example is FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYBODY: PASSIONATE POLITICS. She has also written memoirs, volumes of poetry, and several children's books focused on raising self-esteem — including HAPPY TO BE NAPPY, which praises Black girls' hair. Her work, which also touches on love and spiritual healing, appeals to a wide range of people, and she speaks to packed audiences. hooks's life and work were celebrated in a “year of bell hooks” in 2014, at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin. In 2015 she returned to St. Norbert for a weeklong residency that included a public dialogue with another famous feminist, Gloria Steinem.

LEARN MORE

hooks, bell. BONE BLACK: MEMORIES OF GIRLHOOD. Henry Holt, 1996.

“Year of bell hooks.” Cassandra Voss Center, St. Norbert College. <http://www.snc.edu/cvc/programs/2013-14/bellhooks/>

“bell hooks Residency 2015.” Cassandra Voss Center, St. Norbert College. <http://www.snc.edu/cvc/programs/2014-15/hooksresidency/>

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