

For bell hooks

In Memoriam

“A generous heart is always open, always ready to receive our going and coming. In the midst of such love we need never fear abandonment. This is the most precious gift true love offers—the experience of knowing we always belong.” — bell hooks, *All About Love: New Visions*

Dear bell hooks,

You have influenced and inspired so many and there is a deep loss among those who have long embraced your work, your philosophy, and your activism. Your books on feminism, education, politics, and spirituality have given us a roadmap for interrogating how we live our lives and have left us with many ideas to ponder. You remind us that the most important gift we have to give to this life is “love.”

Your act of changing your name from Gloria Jean Watkins to bell hooks in honor of your grandmother Bell Blair Hooks and your choice to use the lower case “b” and “h” symbolize your unselfish desire for us, writers, educators, activists, artists, students, and the general public, to focus on the words and ideas you have generated, not your identity.

Your book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice to Freedom* epitomized my approach to teaching. Like you I had read Paulo Freire whose work on critical pedagogy underscored the importance of actively engaging students in learning. You emphasized the significance of critical pedagogy when reflecting on how your learning environment changed after you moved from a segregated school with Black teachers to an integrated one with primarily White teachers. You had moved from a caring and nurturing space to one where you felt silenced and marginalized. Your reading of Freire provided a lens by which you could critique those classrooms that disempowered Black students. You reflected on the differences between education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination. You understood the necessity and importance of providing Black students with experiences that caused them to critically examine educational practices that did not support acts of resistance to

racism, sexism, and domination. In *Teaching to Transgress* you advocated for classrooms where students were actively encouraged to expand their minds through intellectual inquiry.

Your book, *All About Love* spoke to me in a different way. The act of love in our collective struggle for liberation from oppressive practices, racism and sexism is an ideal but important concept. You recounted how Black people in America have been traumatized and subjected to hopelessness, powerlessness and despair. You noted that the movement forward in the struggle for liberation requires a radical vision of social change rooted in a love ethic that will convert, as it did with the Civil Rights movement, masses of people, Black and non-Black. A love ethic is also a way to renew the needs of the spirit. You note that by choosing to embrace the love ethic as practice, we choose to work collectively for the survival of the beloved community

You have left a rich legacy that is guided by love, passion, and deep thinking and that provides a way for us to sustain ourselves, emotionally and spiritually, as we face a society that continually challenges us to resist racism, sexism, and oppression. You have called for Activism. You have given us the black gaze on life. Your ideas are critical, now more than ever. We cannot allow the successes we have had with voting rights, civil rights, and social justice to waver and be dismantled.

Thank you for your dedication to pursuing an intellectual journey that has given us pathways for how we can make a difference in this world and for showing us how to practice love.

Rest in Peace bell hooks.

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