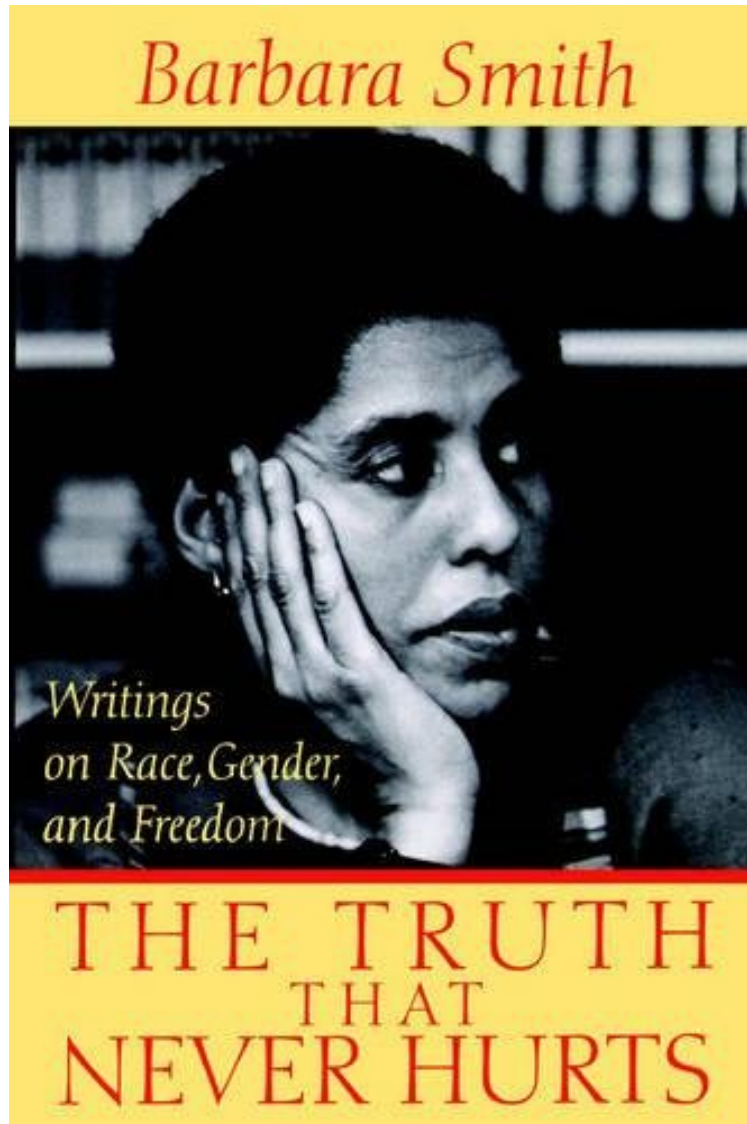


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The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom

Barbara Smith

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Barbara Smith : The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom:

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Intriguing perspectives on race, sexuality, and art By Michael J. Mazza Since the mid-1970s, Barbara Smith has been one of the United States' most productive and distinctive public

intellectuals. As a critic, essayist, editor, and publisher, she has made available some incisive analyses and explorations of the paradoxes of American culture. And she has always written boldly and confidently from her own perspective as an African-American lesbian and feminist. "The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom" brings together Smith's own non-fiction prose writings from the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. In this collection we can see her development as a thinker. The pieces include her groundbreaking 1977 essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," her tribute to James Baldwin, and much, much more. Smith discusses the work of such Black women writers as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Particularly interesting is her exploration of the work of other Black lesbian writers like Pat Parker and Audre Lorde. She also writes about such volatile political issues as Black-Jewish relations, the Rodney King verdict, and the police brutality case involving Haitian immigrant Abner Louima. And she doesn't shy away from taking on other critics and public intellectuals. Smith doesn't discriminate on the basis of race, gender, or sexual orientation in her feisty quarrels with such figures as Darwin Turner, Elaine Showalter, and Andrew Sullivan. As I write this review, I can hear the cynics and scoffers sneering, "Hey, if she wasn't Black, gay, and female, she wouldn't have anything to write about." To such a statement I would reply: Read Smith's writings with an open yet critical mind, and with an appreciation for the historical context of each piece. I believe that she has important insights for all people, regardless of our own ethnic or sexual self-identification. In her tribute to James Baldwin, Barbara Smith writes that she loved him "because he made me want to shape prose with a clarity and fire that gave it the power to make people change." I believe that, in the course of her remarkable career, Smith has indeed changed our world for the better with her passionate writings. Read "The Truth That Never Hurts" and experience her own "clarity and fire." 1 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Thoughtful introduction to radical political action

By Robin Orłowski In this anthology of essays from her political career, Smith challenges America and the social science fields to recognize the multi-layered experience of queer women of color whose histories have been marginalized and erased in every single way imaginable. Better yet, she emphasizes that this struggle (through whatever means) is by nature hard, long and certainly not glamorous. The best political organizing is not done for material or financial gratification, it is done for the betterment of all segments in the same society. But it simultaneously attacks its own strong points through oversimplification of the facts regarding queer organizing in the late 20th and early 21st century. I feel that she is too quick to dismiss the contributions of groups such as HRC to the public policy table in favor of a romanticized version of policy making where radicals are the only ones doing any type of work to stop prejudice. The HRC has attained and sustained numerous criticisms from people who believe the group's policies are a form of "sanitized" politics: because the group tends to court the more moderate politicians, it constructs a narrow context of gay rights suggesting that GLBT Americans are no different from their straight counterparts and can fit into the existing structures of society, only if they are allowed to. In the fall of 2001, I worked on a local campaign that sought to halt passage of a ballot initiative prohibiting the Houston City council from even considering the offering of domestic partner benefits to GLBT municipal employees. The group I was with was a multicultural coalition of activists whose strategizing embraced the very radicalism Smith claims will bring true change. Furthermore, HRC sent their representatives down to follow the agenda that we had already confirmed--although I realize much of the strategies and tactics differed from what they would have done in a similar situation without an existing radical coalition. Even though I am personally more in line with Smith's ideology, I also recognize that moderate civil rights groups provide a stepping stone for people new to political organizing---those who remain content with the level of analysis will stay with the organization, whereas the more politically assertive will look for other organizations who can fulfill their needs and address their issues in an appropriate manner as they begin to make deeper connections between their lot in life and the very structure of society itself. 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Excellent read!

By A Customer I encourage everyone to read this new collection by Barbara Smith. She is one of the greatest writers of our time, and this new book will not disappoint.

"The Truth That Never Hurts: Writings on Race, Gender, and Freedom" brings together more than two decades of literary criticism and political thought about gender, race, sexuality, power, and social change. As one of the first writers in the United States to claim black feminism for black women, Barbara Smith has done groundbreaking work in defining black women's literary traditions and in making connections between race, class, sexuality, and gender. Smith's essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," is often cited as a major catalyst in opening the field of black women's literature. Pieces about racism in the women's movement, black and Jewish relations, and homophobia in the Black community have ignited dialogue about topics that few other writers address. The collection also brings together topical political commentaries on the 1968 Chicago convention demonstrations; attacks on the NEA; the Anita Hill Clarence Thomas Senate hearings; and police brutality against Rodney King and Abner Louima. It also includes a never-before-published personal essay on racial violence and the bonds between black women that make it possible to survive.

From Publishers Weekly A feminist writer and theorist of some repute, Smith founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press with the late "black lesbian mother warrior feminist poet" Audre Lorde, and was the first woman of color

appointed to the Modern Language Association's Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession. Her seminal 1977 essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," which puts forth the notion that a "Black women's literary tradition" not only exists, but thrives, fittingly opens this collection of newer and older, still vibrant works, most previously published in often hard-to-find journals or anthologies. Noting that "it is unnerving to imagine" what kind of writing she might have produced had she not come out, Smith registers obstacles to her current work on a wide-ranging history of black lesbians and gays in America, citing a recent two-volume encyclopedia (Darlene Clark Hine's *Black Women in America*) in which there are only six entries under "Lesbian." In the final essay of the collection, "A Rose," Smith recalls her friend, the late Lucretia "Lu" Medina Diggs, and mourns the loss of her and Lorde, stressing that she will not be deterred from her fight for political awareness and compassion. Smith's writing frequently reaches strident polemicist peaks, but, just as frequently, stretches of sublime prose translate her crystalline intellect to the page, exciting both mind and senses. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal*

In these essays, Smith, an independent scholar and editor, explores several explosive issues, among them sexual politics, racism and women's studies, and homophobia. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Kirkus*

A provocative collection of impassioned essays written from a radical, gay, African-American, feminist perspective. Smith, co-founder and publisher of *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*, has been publishing literary and social criticism for over 20 years. As a literary critic, she chastises the academic establishment for often misinterpreting and largely disregarding the voices of black women in particular. In one of her most influential essays, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," written in 1977, Smith, contending that "black women writers constitute an identifiable literary tradition," pleads for a black feminist approach toward examining literature. Only the black feminist critic, she argues, is fully able to comprehend the nuances of work by black women, such as the depth of Sula and Nells relationship in Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*. Smith is also critical of nonlesbians addressing the black lesbian experience. In "The Truth that Never Hurts," published in the late '80s, she argues that positive depictions of black lesbians are sorely lacking and that "far too many non-lesbian black women who are actively involved in defining the African-American women's literary renaissance . . . completely ignore black lesbian existence or are actively hostile to it." Smith's equally fervent social and political writings are informed by a Marxist viewpoint. She argues, sometimes unpersuasively, that heterosexism and sexism can wither only when capitalism is destroyed. She's especially concerned about the lack of role models for gay black youth; and she takes to task her gay brothers and sisters who have chosen to stay closeted because they are "more concerned with their individual security and careers than they are with building community and working for radical political change." This manifesto is always challenging and often convincing. -- Copyright 1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.