



Homegrown: Engaged Cultural Criticism

By bell hooks, Amalia Mesa-Bains

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Mainstream rhetoric has made a concerted effort to polarize African Americans and Latinos, emphasizing differences in language and religion, while designating one or the other as the “favored minority” at will. In *Witness*, Amalia Mesa-Bains and bell hooks invite us to reexamine this politically popular binary and consider which differences are manufactured and which are real.

In *Witness*, Mesa-Bains and hooks explore their own similarities and differences, sharing the ways their childhoods, families, and work have shaped their political activism, teaching, and artistic expression. Drawing on shared experiences of sexism, classism, and racism, hooks and Mesa-Bains show how people from divergent cultural backgrounds can work together for radical social change.

While the black/Latino divide and the increasing cross-community political collaboration has been addressed in progressive newspapers and magazines, *Witness*, an inclusive call to reflect and act, is the first of its kind to look at these issues in depth. And Amalia Mesa-Bains, a pioneer scholar and producer of Chicana art, with bell hooks, one of the most acclaimed of African American theorists—prove an unparalleled match for the job.

bell hooks is one of the leading public intellectuals of her generation. She has written extensively on the emotional impact of racism and sexism, particularly on black women, as well as the importance of political engagement with art and the media. In her recent work on love, relationships, and community, she shows how emotional health is a necessary component to effective resistance and activism.

Amalia Mesa-Bains is an artist, curator, and writer who has initiated comprehensive exhibitions of Latino art, including *Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation* and *Mi Alma, Mi Tierra, Mi Gente: Contemporary Chicana Art*. Her artwork incorporates various aspects of Chicano/a history, culture, and folk traditions, exploring religion, ritual, and female rites of passage. She won a MacArthur Fellowship in 1992.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Mesa-Bains' conveys... the epochal sweep of Latin American experience and captures the transformed sense of reality characteristic of diasporan life." -- *Transition*

"[Mesa-Bains'] examines the way that gender and ethnic identity are defined, explores the complex contemporary dilemmas of the Latino community." -- *Art in America*

"[bell hooks is] one of the foremost black intellectuals in America today." -- *Publishers Weekly*

"bell hooks is ardent, questioning, and rigorous...a formidable feminist social and cultural critic." -- *Booklist*

"hooks is an astute and downright brilliant... social critic and thinker." -- *Kirkus Reviews*

About the Author

San Francisco resident Amalia Mesa-Bains is an artist, scholar, curator, and writer who has been involved in the Chicano artist movement since the 1960s. A leading installation artist and MacArthur awardee, Mesa-Bains incorporates Chicano culture and folk traditions into her work, utilizing themes inspired by Catholic rituals, Mexican pre-Christian religious imagery, Chicana history, and female rites of passage.

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