

OPINIONS ON CURRENT READING

A Black Intellectual at War With the Establishment

**Killing Rage:
Ending Racism**

by bell hooks

(New York: Henry Holt, 277 pages, \$20.00)

REVIEWED BY NELL IRVIN PAINTER

Killing Rage: *Ending Racism*, a collection of 23 essays, resembles bell hooks' earlier collections. It offers jewels of insight that make you want to applaud alongside self-righteousness and surrounded by repetition. The first several pieces are on anger, a fruitful topic usually obscured in American thought. Rage is a good thing for black people, hooks contends, and she opens her introduction with an anecdote that lends the book the first two words of its title. She links an absence of anger with economic privilege, which, I think is right — among African Americans as among nonblacks. White America withholds economic success from angry blacks, she says, convincingly.

As ever, hooks' eye on gender relations is sharp. In "Black Beauty and Black Power: Internalized Racism" she notes

that ". . . color-caste hierarchies detrimentally affect the lives of black females differently than they do black males." She analyzes the contrasting stereotypes of light- and dark-skinned African-American women, finding that dark-skinned women are masculinized and stigmatized as evil, treacherous, and bitchy. Nation-of-Islam-like dreams of black patriarchy come in for scathing criticism, as the downfall of black liberation rather than its precondition, which many black nationalists believe.

Positioning herself simultaneously as underdog and wise woman, hooks joins her erstwhile collaborator, Cornel West, in condemning other black intellectuals as shallow, integration-minded materialists whose anger, mere "narcissistic rage" is not a good thing. Like West, hooks sees herself as a revolutionary, Gramscian organic intellectual at war on two fronts: against the "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (the powers that be) and against the black self-appointed gatekeepers of privilege who inhabit the academy.

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