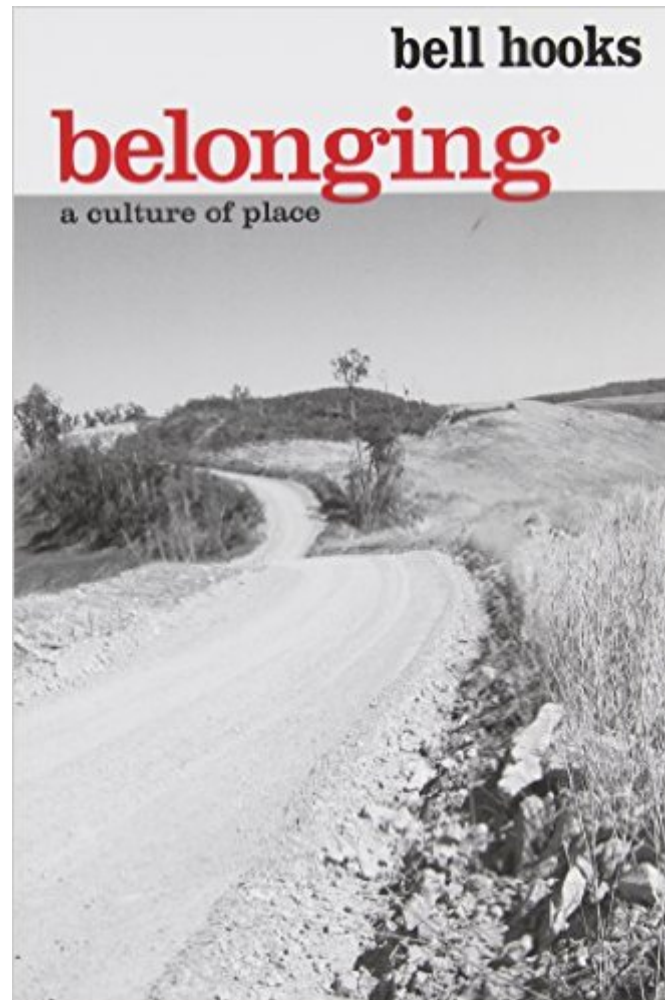


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# Belonging: A Culture Of Place



## Synopsis

What does it mean to call a place home? Who is allowed to become a member of a community? When can we say that we truly belong? These are some of the questions of place and belonging that renowned cultural critic bell hooks examines in her new book, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. Traversing past and present, *Belonging* charts a cyclical journey in which hooks moves from place to place, from country to city and back again, only to end where she began--her old Kentucky home. hooks has written provocatively about race, gender, and class; and in this book she turns her attention to focus on issues of land and land ownership. Reflecting on the fact that 90% of all black people lived in the agrarian South before mass migration to northern cities in the early 1900s, she writes about black farmers, about black folks who have been committed both in the past and in the present to local food production, to being organic, and to finding solace in nature. Naturally, it would be impossible to contemplate these issues without thinking about the politics of race and class. Reflecting on the racism that continues to find expression in the world of real estate, she writes about segregation in housing and economic racialized zoning. In these critical essays, hooks finds surprising connections that link of the environment and sustainability to the politics of race and class that reach far beyond Kentucky. With characteristic insight and honesty, *Belonging* offers a remarkable vision of a world where all people--wherever they may call home--can live fully and well, where everyone can belong.

## Book Information

Paperback: 240 pages

Publisher: Routledge; 1 edition (October 22, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 041596816X

ISBN-13: 978-0415968164

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.5 x 8.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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## Customer Reviews

I don't normally post reviews like this, but I felt I had to say that Routledge should be ashamed of the editorial job done with this publication. It was obviously rushed through production and, judging on the three to five typographical errors appearing on each page, was barely skimmed in the galley stage. And these are not simple spelling errors either. For example, on page 183, the text mentions "potential community that will simply be there when all that white and black folks know of one another is what they find in the media." It can be gathered from context that it should read "that will simply NOT be there..." This is a serious omission, and similar ones pepper the entire book. Dr. hooks certainly deserves much more respect than this, as do her readers. I am also disappointed to say that this is not the first Routledge publication I could have made similar remarks about.

I am currently taking an elective, looking at comparative inequities in cultures, races, gender and LGBTQ matters. My professor is a bell hooks fan, and I wanted to understand his passion for her work. I also wanted a better sense of her experience, as native Kentuckian, transplant to California, New York, and Arizona (to name a few places), and how she reclaims her roots in her native state of Kentucky. I like the idea of examining place, belonging and how we go about reclaiming our healing space after we've been injured by our own native identity. Let's start with the positive attributes, here - great passages, like recounting sharecropper's experiences in Kentucky, the culture of quilting and reconnecting with seven generations of legacy and anguish. What doesn't work is that the editing, here, is deplorable. I even caught typos. It was embarrassing, at times. Also, the last portion of this book scraped the enamel off of my teeth, my patience was tried so much. It became preachy and even annoying. If this book stopped at the halfway mark, it would have been a hit. A pity!

I'm afraid that the poor editing that another reviewer described extended beyond the numerous typos he cited. The book is a series of essays that rehash the same themes repeatedly, in what seems to me to be a fairly deadly combination of academic jargon and solipsism: She (bell) moved back to her roots in Kentucky, to her (somewhat idealized?) black country roots, where she extolls the virtues of country life without actually practicing it. The reason she doesn't is that she doesn't have a green thumb.... People who live from the land, including her ancestors, don't have the luxury of such thumbs--it's get one or starve! Dare I suggest that her own privilege is (as privilege tends to be) not quite visible to her? I don't begrudge bell hooks these lifestyle choices, and agree with a great deal of what she says about the importance of place and belonging. I even share her longings for a place and time that no longer exist. But in spite of her rhetoric, hers is far from a political

solution, as many--most?--Americans, black, many-colored and white, have few if any roots to return to. And I found myself thinking, okay, bell, you've got a hundred well-repeated rationales for your choices, but most of us don't have a Kentucky to go home to, or the means to live there if we did. And just try peddling your theories to gang bangers in the ghetto. I work with their female relatives every day, and it's just not gonna wash! And by the way, most of them couldn't, or wouldn't, read your book. Even with a grounding in the lingo, I found it heavy going. And by the way, did I mention that the book is repetitive? It wants some serious parsing.

I bought this book with great enthusiasm. As a visual artist and woman of color working on issues of belonging, I felt for sure this work would help me structure my ideas. I could not have been more wrong! To begin with, this book has so many grammar, punctuation and spelling errors that I remain astonished that it made it to press. Did anyone at all look at this book before it made it to print? My word. I have never seen anything like this under two covers before. There is NOT ONE page that does not have some kind of problem. That alone is a complete turn off. You cannot read the book but for the errors! In addition, if you have read any of hooks's other books, like I have done, there is literally nothing new here. A rehashing of the same ideas, which are important, but just feel really used up and tired in this book. Indeed, the best part of this book is the cover image "This is Appalachia" by Priya Thoresen.

This kind of book is worth 50 books. Fans of bell hooks might prefer other volumes of hers (she spoils her readers), but I immensely enjoyed reading this book and feel it is essential to her oeuvre, because it talks about where she is from, and what the people were like there. She writes about her love and respect for "backwoods" people, who in her experience lacked the racism wrongly ascribed to them by many cityfolk, who callously disregard anything nonurban and themselves often lack open-mindedness toward race. She writes about what it means to describe yourself as being from a certain place, and to call a place home. Very enlightening. Strangely, there are occasional minor misedits, but nothing to do with her writing, which is intensely accomplished and eminently human, as always.

bell hooks is perhaps the BEST person to right about a culture of place. She uses her personal story as a way to ground the essays, and she relates it to a broader community that includes what we all grapple with: class, race, and gender among others. I particularly loved her writing on nature as a healing force.

Insightful. Heartfelt. Expands my perspective. Thank you!

Love anything written by bell hooks

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