



Voices from the Gaps

Audre Lorde

“*As I have said elsewhere, it is not the destiny of black America to repeat white America’s mistakes. But we will, if we mistake the trappings of success in a sick society for the signs of a meaningful life. If black men continue to do so, defining ‘femininity’ in its archaic European terms, this augurs ill for our survival as a people, let alone our survival as individuals. Freedom and future for blacks do not mean absorbing the dominant white male disease. . . As black people, we cannot begin our dialogue by denying the oppressive nature of male privilege. And if black males choose to assume that privilege, for whatever reason, raping, brutalizing, and killing women, then we cannot ignore black male oppression. One oppression does not justify another.*”

— Black Women Writers at Work



Quick Facts

- * 1934-1992
- * Described herself as a “black-lesbian feminist mother lover poet”

Biography

Audre Geraldine Lorde was born in New York City of West Indian parents. She also wrote under the name of Rey Domini. She grew up in Manhattan and attended Roman Catholic schools. Lorde attended Hunter College in New York City from 1951 to 1959. She continued her education at Columbia University in 1961, where she earned her master’s degree in library science. Lorde also worked as a librarian and married Edward Ashley Rollins with whom she had two children, Elizabeth and Johnathon; she and Rollins divorced in 1970.

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Audre Lorde

Biography continued

Lorde considered 1968 to be the turning point of her life. She left her job as head librarian at the University of New York to become a lecturer and creative writer. That year, her first volume of poetry, *The First Cities*, was published by The Poets Press. She also received a National Endowment for the Arts grant, and accepted the poet-in-residence at Tougaloo College in Mississippi.

The First Cities was considered innovative and refreshing. Critics also described it as a quiet introspective book. Another book of poetry written by Lorde, *Coal*, was the first of her volumes to be released by a major publisher. In *Coal*, Lorde expresses her feelings of love and appreciation for her blackness. Lorde's *The Black Unicorn*, written in 1978, is considered her most complex and successful work. In *The Black Unicorn*, she uses symbols and mythologies of African goddesses. Another important work of Lorde is her first book of non-fiction, *The Cancer Journals*, written in 1980. This work is about herself, her struggle with breast cancer and her mastectomy. In *The Cancer Journals* Lorde explores the feeling of hopelessness and despair as she faces death itself. She felt that this book gave her strength and power to explore her experience with cancer and to share it with other women.

Lorde described herself as “a black-lesbian feminist mother lover poet” (*Black Literature* Vol. 2). Claudia Tate says of Lorde that she “derives the impetus of her poetry’s force, tone, and vision from her identity as a black woman who is both a radical feminist and an outspoken lesbian, and as a visionary of a better world. In stunning figurative language she outlines the progress of her unyielding struggle for the human rights of all people” (*Women Writers at Work*, p 113) She wrote about her anger toward racial oppression, and personal hardship. She wrote many essays about being a black woman in the feminist movement, including the compilations *Sister Outsider* and *Uses of the Erotic*. One of the most widely used quotes in the feminist movement today comes from the title of one essay in *Sister Outsider* entitled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”

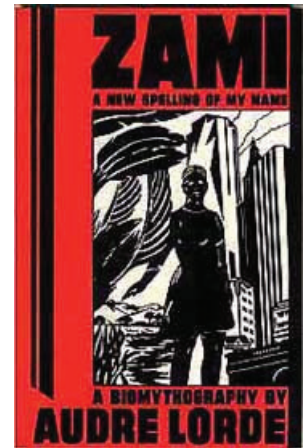


Audre Lorde

Biography continued

Lorde wrote from her heart. She loved writing poems. She was an articulate person who could read poems and memorize them. However, when she was younger she was inarticulate, and she did not speak until the age of five. She started to speak when she began to read and write poetry at the age of about twelve. Her parents did not encourage her to write poetry. She learned, rather, from her mother's strangeness and her father's silences. Lorde published her first poem at the age of fifteen. She had written of her first love affair with a boy in Hunter High School, but her teacher told her it was too romantic. On her own, Lorde sent the poem to *Seventeen* magazine because the school would not print it.

Lorde wrote of racism in the feminist movement, sexism among African Americans, and of lesbians and love. She not only wrote for herself, but for her children and women as well. She wrote for people who could read her, who would be able to hear what she had to say. She wrote for women who had no voice of their own. She particularly wrote for black women because she felt there were very few voices for black women out there. She wrote for the women terrified to speak because they are taught to respect fear more than themselves. Lorde wrote particularly for women of color in many countries. She was one of the founding members of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, which published the works of women of color. She felt it was her responsibility to speak the truth with as much beauty and precision as possible. She felt her responsibility was in writing for and of women because there are many voices for men and not enough for women. Lorde died of liver cancer in 1992 at the age of 58. She was a talented woman who touched the lives of many through her writing, and her teachings will live on.





Audre Lorde

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