**[bell hooks on Beyoncé: She Is a ‘Terrorist’ Because of Her ‘Impact On Young Girls’](http://www.clutchmagonline.com/2014/05/bell-hooks-beyonce-terrorist-impact-young-girls/" \o "bell hooks on Beyoncé: She Is a ‘Terrorist’ Because of Her ‘Impact On Young Girls’)**

\* bell hooks has written more than 30 books about race and gender. Her first book was written when she was a 19-year-old undergraduate.

By [**Britni Danielle**](http://www.clutchmagonline.com/author/britni-danielle/), *Clutch Magazine*

Last night, The New School hosted a dynamic conversation between Black women activists and creatives titled “[Are You Still a Slave](http://new.livestream.com/TheNewSchool/Slave" \t "_blank)?”

The group, which included filmmaker Shola Lynch, author Marci Blackman, feminist icon and scholar bell hooks, and activist and author Janet Mock, focused on the images of women of color in the media and what types of messages are sent to the public at large.

At one point in the evening, the discussion turned to Beyoncé’s Time magazine cover, and hooks—who [once encouraged Bey’s budding feminism](http://thefeministwire.com/2014/03/feminists-love-dr-bell-hooks/" \t "_blank)—accused the singer of being a “terrorist” when it comes to the messages she projects to young girls.

Hooks argued Beyoncé’s recent partially-clothed Timecover did little to bolster her pro-woman bona fides.

“Let’s take the image of this super rich, very powerful Black female and let’s use it in the service of imperialist, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy because she probably had very little control over that cover — that image,“ the professor argued.

Mock and Blackman pushed back against the idea of Bey’s lack of control, questioning whether Beyoncé’s image is subversive, but hooks wasn’t having it.

**Mock:** “I think she had control over what she wore…I would argue that she has a power now that she has final-cut approval and she chose that image.”

**hooks:** “Then you’re saying then, from my deconstructive point of view, that she’s colluding the construction of herself as a slave. It’s not a libratory image.”

**Blackman:** “Or, she’s using the same images that were used against her, and us, for so many years and she’s taken control of it and saying, ‘If y’all are going to make money off it, so am I.’ There’s collusion, perhaps, but there’s also a bit of reclaiming if she’s the one in control.”

**hooks:** “Well, of course, I think that’s fantasy. I think it’s a fantasy that we can recoup the violating image and use it. I used to get so tired of people quoting Audre [Lorde], ‘The masters tools will never dismantle the master’s house.’ But that was exactly what she meant that you are not going to destroy this imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy by creating your own version of it. Even if it serves you to make lots and lots of money.

“I’ve really been challenging people to think about would we be at all interested in Beyoncé if she wasn’t so rich, because I don’t think you can separate her class power, and the wealth, from people’s fascination with her. That here is a young, Black woman who is so incredibly wealthy. And wealthy is what so many young people fantasize, dream about. And one could argue, even more than her body, it’s what that body stands for—the body of desire fulfilled that is wealth, fame, celebrity, all the things that so many people in our culture are lusting for, wanting.

“If Beyoncé was a homeless woman who looked the same way, or a poor, down and out woman who looked the same way, would people be enchanted by her? Or is it the combination of all of those things that are at the heart of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy?

“And I’ve been saying, people of color, we are so invested in white supremacy, it’s tragic. Lorraine Hansberry said it is the only form of extremism that should discredit us in the eyes of our children that we remain so invested.”

Although Mock agreed that certain aspects of Beyoncé’s public image deserved critique (like the unfortunate “eat the cake” line from Drunk In Love),she explained why she found Beyoncé’s music and persona empowering. Despite Mock’s defense of the singer, hooks contended that Beyoncé, and the media at large, levies the biggest attack against feminism today.

**hooks:** “I see a part of Beyoncé that is in fact anti-feminist — that is a terrorist, especially in terms of the impact on young girls. I actually feel like the major of assault on feminism in our society has come from visual media, and from television, and videos. Just think, do we know of any powerful man of any color who’s come out with some tirade against feminism? The tirades against feminism occur so much in the image-making business, and what we see.

What I’m concerned about constantly in my critical imagination is why don’t we have libratory images that are away from, not an inversion of, what society has told us?”



Hadley Freeman, *The Guardian*: “Beyonce, being photographed in your underwear doesn’t help feminism”

**Beyonce’s control of her own image belies the bell hooks ‘slave’ critique**

By Roxane Gay, *The Guardian*

Public intellectuals are often put in the position of having their words, no matter how off-the-cuff, treated as doctrine. Such was recently the case when, [during a panel discussion about liberating the black female body](http://new.livestream.com/TheNewSchool/Slave), bell hooks referred to Beyoncé as a terrorist and anti-feminist. She said, "I see a part of Beyoncé that is in fact, anti-feminist, that is a terrorist ... especially in terms of the impact on young girls."

hooks was, essentially, calling out Beyoncé as a "bad feminist" – [a popular feminist pastime](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/09/roxane-gay-bad-feminist-interview) during which we arbitrarily determine who is or isn't doing feminism right. The word "terrorist", too, is a strangely popular go-to in feminist discussions that are not so much "discussions" as they are provocations, lobbed indiscriminately.

hooks and co-panelists Janet Mock, Shola Lynch and Marci Blackman were discussing Beyoncé’s Time cover, on which the singer [is scantily clad and posing alluringly](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/apr/24/time-100-most-influential-beyonce-snowden) – as the hottest pop star in the world is wont to do when she has been named one of the 100 most influential people.

But there was more. hooks also said, "from my deconstructive point of view... she's colluding in the construction of herself as a slave ... it's not a liberatory image." This rhetoric of women "enslaving themselves," becoming ever more beholden to the patriarchy when they present themselves in that way, is common. It's quite the contradiction to want to overthrow the patriarchy but to also believe that, even now, the patriarchy is so omnipotent that women are incapable of making empowered decisions when they make decisions that don't toe the feminist party line.

hooks assumes Beyoncé had little control over her Time cover – but we're talking about *Beyoncé*. She upended the music industry when, last December, [she surprised fans with the midnight release of her new album](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/13/beyonce-album-flawless-feminism), recorded and mixed in utter secrecy and under her control. She has long acted as her own manager, produced and directed a documentary about her life and made many a lucrative business deal. If Beyoncé is, as bell hooks suggests, colluding in the exploitation of her own labor, it's unclear who hooks believes controls the means of production.

We don't need to be naïve, though: the entertainment industry all too often demands the sexualization of women as a precursor for their success. (My mother, for instance, likes to joke that [Beyoncé](http://www.theguardian.com/music/beyonce) and Rihanna both abandoned clothing at the same time.) hooks is absolutely correct that we need to critique and push back against gratuitous sexualization. Her concern that girls might singularly internalize the notion that their worth is intrinsically tied to their bodies is equally well placed.

At some point, though, we have to differentiate between concern and concern trolling. We have to trust that women can be feminists, good role models *and* embrace the way they look.

We have to believe that we can hold different points of view without labeling each other bad feminists.

[Feminism](http://www.theguardian.com/world/feminism) is not a free-for-all where anything goes, but I would like to think that feminism (in addition to helping women overcome oppression in all forms) allows for women to make choices – even choices with which other feminists would disagree. It allows for them to do with their bodies as they choose. Beyoncé, in her current incarnation, seems incredibly empowered. She looks the way she looks on her own terms.

Beyoncé is not above critique. As a feminist herself, I hope Beyoncé would welcome it. Unfortunately, hooks's statements provoke, without creating space for difference or substantive debate. She assumes the worst of people and the best of the oppressive patriarchy.

In referring to how Beyoncé looks on the cover of *Time,*hooks also says, "it's fantasy that we can recoup the violating image and use it...." It's a shame to see how an intellectual as illustrious as bell hooks has allowed the limits of the patriarchy's imagination of women – virgin or whore – to limit her own imagination of us.

**Excerpt: Beyonce’s Fierce Feminism**

By Janell Hobson, *MsMagazine*

“I think I am a feminist in a way,” Beyoncé once revealed in an interview with Jane Gordon of the U.K.’s Daily Mail. “It’s not something I consciously decided I was going to be; perhaps it’s because I grew up in a singing group [Destiny’s Child] with other women…I never want to betray that friendship because I love being a woman and I love being a friend to other women.” Beyoncé also identified as a “modern-day feminist” who believes in gender equality, in a recent interview with Jo Ellison for British Vogue.

However, not everyone acknowledges Beyoncé’s version of feminism. Danielle Belton of the blogs Black Snob and Clutch Magazine sees Beyoncé as “mere entertainment.” “Other pop icons like Madonna and Lady Gaga certainly seem more informed and more passionate about their gender politics,” Belton muses. “Whereas Beyoncé seems not as passionate. It seems more like marketing.”