

## Commissioner's Book Club:

# Eloquent Rage

### Discussion guide

### Introduction

The prompts and questions that follow are meant to encourage discussion and support reflection. Human rights-related books highlight challenging issues and topics—take care of yourself in the ways that you need while you dig in.

For more suggestions, including different ways to reflect and share, check out [the Book Club How-to resource](#).

### Author Bio

[Brittney Cooper](#) writes a popular monthly column on race, gender and politics for *Cosmopolitan*. A professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Africana Studies at Rutgers University, she co-founded the Crunk Feminist Collective, and her work has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Ebony.com*, and *The Root.com*, among many others. In 2017, she was named to The Root 100 List, and in 2018, to the *Essence Woke* 100 List.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

*Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower* is a 2018 collection of essays by cultural critic, scholar and activist Brittney Cooper, that explores Black women's anger as a site of power, clarity and political force. Written in a blend of memoir, cultural critique and personal reflection, the book reclaims rage as a legitimate emotional and political response to interlocking systems of racism, sexism and class oppression that have historically marginalized Black women. Cooper situates her voice in a continuum of Black feminist thought, standing on the shoulders

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<sup>1</sup> "Brittney Cooper," Macmillan Publishers, accessed February 2026, <https://us.macmillan.com/author/brittneycooper>.

of giants like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw and James Baldwin, among others, to argue that anger is not only understandable but necessary for survival and transformation.

Cooper deconstructs stereotypes such as the “Angry Black Woman” and the “Sassy Black Woman”, observing how Black women’s anger has been caricatured or dismissed rather than taken seriously as a response to ongoing injustice. She examines cultural icons like Serena Williams, Beyoncé and Michelle Obama, and personal memories to show how rage can be a force that refuses to let injustice go unnamed.

## Linking the book to human rights in B.C.

Equality and dignity are foundational human rights. In Canada and British Columbia, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and B.C.’s *Human Rights Code* protect people from discrimination based on race, sex, gender identity or expression and other intersecting grounds. *Eloquent Rage* brings these protections into sharp relief by centring the lived experiences of Black women, whose voices and emotions, particularly anger, have often been dismissed, disciplined or misunderstood rather than recognized as legitimate responses to systemic injustice.

**We all have rights related to freedom of expression and participation in public life.** While these freedoms are protected under the Charter, the social consequences of speaking with anger—especially for Black women—can include stereotyping, exclusion or retaliation. *Eloquent Rage* invites readers to consider whose emotions are seen as reasonable, whose voices are taken seriously and how power shapes which forms of expression are welcomed or punished.

**The book also engages deeply with intersectionality,** a concept essential to understanding human rights impacts in practice. While B.C.’s *Human Rights Code* lists prohibited individual grounds of discrimination, **many people experience overlapping and compounding forms of marginalization.** Cooper illustrates how racism, sexism and economic inequality converge in ways that are not adequately addressed when these factors are considered in isolation. Her work echoes long-standing calls within justice and advocacy spaces to move beyond single-issue approaches and to better reflect lived realities.

Finally, *Eloquent Rage* raises questions about **responsibility and transformation within movements for social change.** Cooper critiques feminist and liberation movements that fail to centre Black women’s experiences, and reminds readers that equity requires more than inclusion: it requires structural change. **In Canada, government agencies have a duty to prevent discrimination and to create**



**conditions where all people can participate fully and safely in civic, cultural and political life.** Cooper's writing challenges us to reflect on how institutions, communities and movements can better uphold these obligations.

Together, these themes remind us that advancing human rights in B.C. requires not only legal protections, **but a willingness to listen to uncomfortable truths**, and to build systems, communities and interpersonal practices that honour dignity, difference and collective accountability.

## Discussion guide questions and prompts

Here are some questions to ignite discussion or thought on the connections between the book and human rights. The provided prompts are not the only or complete answers, but some ideas you might want to incorporate into your conversation:

### 1. Race, gender, rage and clarity

Cooper writes about eloquent rage as a form of clarity and a political force that tells us about what kind of world we want to see, not just what we oppose.

- As you reflect on the book, can you identify times when your own rage has stemmed from political or social forces?
- Do you think rage has the potential to play a role in political and social change?
- Not everyone is worth your rage—how do you know when rage serves you and when it harms you?



Some folks feel rageful when they have experienced discrimination themselves or have witnessed it happening to people that they love. Rage and anger can be a signal that something isn't fair or right.

Expressing anger and rage has a place in our lives—by finding communities and people who can understand where our anger is coming from, we don't need to live with rage in isolation. We can choose to act and live in solidarity with communities, and to make meaning and purpose out of the rage that is ignited.

### 2. Rage and respectability

Cooper critiques respectability politics, especially how society expects marginalized people to walk softly and talk quietly to be accepted, and notes that rage and respectability rarely coexist.

- When have you tried to advocate for change and felt pressure to be respectable rather than forceful?
- Do you see these two things in opposition?
- How have you balanced them?





Sometimes, we might ask for small favours and accommodations. While these might help at first, they may or may not succeed in achieving transformative change.

Some people are not safe expressing their rage, even in the face of injustice – for risk of reprimand, isolation, or disciplinary action being taken against them.

### 3. Power vs. empowerment

Cooper defines empowerment as “cultivating the wisdom to make the best choices we can, out of what are customarily piss-poor options.” Power, on the other hand, is defined as “the ability to create better options.”

Reflect on a time when your sense of empowerment protected or sustained you.

- How did it act as a survival tactic?
- Can you identify a moment when you held power, not just empowerment?
- How did that feel different in terms of agency and autonomy?



Empowerment can look like setting boundaries, finding supportive communities or cultivating resiliency. Power can and does feel different. It can involve the ability to change the conditions themselves—to expand choices, rather than simply navigating them. Reflecting on the difference between power and empowerment can help folks understand when change is happening at an individual level—and whether it is supported or blocked by broader structures. When people and organizations are in a position of power to change conditions, they can consider how changing conditions might impact equity-denied groups, communities and individuals specifically.

### 4. Love, community and the practice of loving Black women

Cooper invites readers to consider how we practice love, not just romantically but in friendship, community and activism. She writes about the “soul-inspiring” ways thoughtful care feels romantic.

- What expressions of love come naturally to you?
- How might you intentionally show love to your communities through daily actions, support and solidarity?
- How can love become a practice rather than a feeling?



Love is something that we **do**. For many of us, expressions of love might show up in small, everyday actions: checking in, celebrating one another and showing up consistently. At a community-level, practicing love might look like resource-sharing—books and food, beautifying natural space for yours and others’ enjoyment or acting in solidarity at gatherings and events.



## 5. Intersectionality and visibility

Cooper writes about “feeling jammed up at the crossroads of our intersections while the world pretends not to see us”, capturing how multiple dimensions of identity (race, gender, class) shape experiences of marginalization.

- Think about communities you belong to and consider ways those same communities may exclude people.
- How might you challenge harmful practices while honouring a sense of belonging and love?
- How do we hold both connection and critique simultaneously?



Intersectionality helps us understand how people experience forms of marginalization at the same time, and how these experiences can be minimized or rendered invisible when we focus on only one issue or identity at a time.

Many of us belong to communities that offer us pride, connection and care—while also excluding others. This can be difficult to reconcile. In those spaces, we might look for a trusted elder or confidante in which we can express our struggles or challenges within the community, and talk about ways to address it among the broader community—for example, by setting up meetings with individuals, or running a film screening or hosting a book club that highlights some of these topics, in a way that generates dialogue among the community.

## 6. Reimagined masculinities

Cooper argues: “It’s not enough to teach women how not to attract violent men. We have to teach our men how not to be violent men and partners.”

- Reflect on your understanding of masculinity: where did you learn it, and what messages did you absorb about what it means to be a man?
- Which aspects feel empowering and which feel limiting or harmful?



Ideas about masculinity are often learned early through family, culture, media, peer groups or religion. These ideas can get reinforced over time. Some aspects might feel grounding, affirming or liberating. Other ideas and expectations of masculinity may feel restrictive, emotionally limited or tied to expectations of dominance and control.

## 7. Stereotypes and structural harm

Cooper confronts stereotypes like the “Angry Black Woman” and the “Sassy Black Woman”, showing how they have been used to dismiss Black women’s anger rather than hear it as legitimate critique rooted in racism and sexism.



- How have stereotypes about your own or others' identities shaped what voices are heard and what voices get dismissed?
- How can we challenge stereotypes in our own environments?



Cooper shows how stereotypes like “Angry Black Woman” function to undermine legitimate critique, reframing resistance as a personal flaw rather than a response to injustice.

Many people can recall moments where assumptions about identities influenced whose emotions were taken seriously. Challenging stereotypes often requires attention at both personal and structural levels: noticing everyday language and behaviour and questioning the systems and norms that reward some expressions while punishing others.

