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# The Sisters Are Alright: Changing The Broken Narrative Of Black Women In America



## Synopsis

GOLD MEDALIST OF FOREWORD REVIEWS' 2015 INDIEFAB AWARDS IN WOMEN'S

STUDIES What's wrong with black women? Not a damned thing! *The Sisters Are Alright* exposes anti- "black-woman propaganda and shows how real black women are pushing back against distorted cartoon versions of themselves. When African women arrived on American shores, the three-headed hydra- "servile Mammy, angry Sapphire, and lascivious Jezebel- "followed close behind. In the '60s, the Matriarch, the willfully unmarried baby machine leeching off the state, joined them. These stereotypes persist to this day through newspaper headlines, Sunday sermons, social media memes, cable punditry, government policies, and hit song lyrics. Emancipation may have happened more than 150 years ago, but America still won't let a sister be free from this coven of caricatures. Tamara Winfrey Harris delves into marriage, motherhood, health, sexuality, beauty, and more, taking sharp aim at pervasive stereotypes about black women. She counters warped prejudices with the straight-up truth about being a black woman in America. "We have facets like diamonds," she writes. "The trouble is the people who refuse to see us sparkling."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book is very powerful and very inviting. Tamara Winfrey Harris systematically delineates and debunks every major historical and current-day stereotype about Black women. She pulls no punches and draws a clear and direct timeline of how these stereotypes came about, how they hurt, how they're wrong, and what story should replace them. I'm sure this book is going to be a cool

drink of water to Black women who have been living under and around and through these stereotypes their whole lives, but it was really healing and freeing for me as a white woman to read it listed out so directly and clearly. Especially important were the consistent reminders that we live in a system that is constantly pitting white women and Black women against each other to the detriment of both. I think it's easy as a white woman to feel like we want to be friends with Black women but know we don't really get what's essentially different for them just in daily living. And how can you be a true friend if you don't understand someone else's core experiences? Reading this book means you don't have to be playing catch-up on all the basic stereotypes that fuel the big hurts and little microaggressions that happen to Black women every day, and it can help you avoid hurtful things when you're not trying to be hurtful. Winfrey Harris did a brilliant, quixotic thing, by making her conclusion (spoiler alert, #sorrynotsorry) about the strength of Black women in community supporting each other, while making that the foundation of the book. She found other women who were doing work in the various areas she was exploring, and let them tell their stories and use their own work to prove her theories. She gave them a platform that strengthened hers at the same time. This book is sobering but hopeful, academic and personal, and just a delight. The mechanics of the book: Winfrey Harris has a confident, easy writing style and a clear way of explaining complex concepts in a way that people new to the concepts and people immersed in them can understand. She wrote exactly what she needed to say, so the book is shorter than it would have been had she padded it out into a bunch of repetition, and I really appreciated that it was all signal and no noise. It's really accessible but not simplistic or patronizing, so it's a perfect book to teach in women's studies, American studies, sociology, and African-American studies courses. I'm not sure kids below high school age would get it, but for 10th grade and up it's totally appropriate and important.

I found this book to be absolute confirmation for what I have always known...even before I became a full grown woman. Nothing is wrong with me. Nothing is wrong with my friends. Harris's outlining of the historical context in which the notion that something is inherently wrong with me and my friends is rooted was well done. My only complaint is there was not enough display of women who were alright in the midst of the social science nature of the text to educate the reader on the American demonization of Black women. I was irritated and angered as I read Harris's dead on analyses of the perceptions of black women and the underlying racist and sexist messages those perceptions highlighted. However, the title promised me a heavy dose of black women who were doing just fine, if not better. I didn't see these portrayals as much and except for the end of the epilogue, the

dominant thesis seemed to be: there is an intense campaign to paint the black woman as a problem. Not a bad thesis (and obviously one that can be easily proven), but I wanted snapshots of black women being great as the thesis and don't feel like I got that. Still worth a read, though.

I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is not well-versed in the (contemporary) issues Black women face in the U.S. Namely, if you are familiar with the works of Black feminist scholars (e.g. Crenshaw and Collins), this book won't provide you with new information, save for topical media/pop culture analysis and personal interviews with Black women. However, if your feminist scope is limited to the experiences of privileged white women, this book will be quite informative, giving you a broad overview of stereotypes of and societal judgements upon Black women. The author writes in a conversational style that makes complex issues very accessible to the reader. Also, as a replacement for (or supplement to) this book - for anybody who wants more historical background on this subject matter, and/or is more comfortable with academic writing - I would recommend Angela Davis' *Women, Race & Class* and bell hooks' *Ain't I a Woman?*.

I was taking a social media break after the deaths of Sandra Bland, Kindra Chapman, Samuel DuBose, and the others we know nothing about. The disregard for human life is/was too much on my psyche. Their deaths combined with Walter Scott, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, hurt my spirit something fierce. I took a break because my soul was shattering. Before my break, I came across an article that mentioned Ms. Harris' novel and I immediately purchased it. Reading has always been therapy for me. I needed to reaffirm why as a Black woman; I'm a force to be reckoned with. I needed something to get me back into the right frame of mind, and this book was it for me. Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel will always be figureheads of black womanhood that we may never be able to shake but every day, we try, and we'll never stop trying. The information Ms. Harris presented wasn't anything new to me however, it's what I needed to read at the moment. Black women need to be constantly reminded that we are not broken. We are not one dimensional. We may be perceived as the mule of the world, but we are fierce, fabulous, and worth a damn. Ms. Harris, thank you for contributing to the conversation in a positive light. I've recommended this book to other women who may need to "keep it real" during a turbulent time. It was a pleasure to read and I look forward to reading more of your work in the future.

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