

# Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction

Vivian M. May

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Vivian M. May explores the theoretical and political contributions of Anna Julia Cooper, a renowned Black feminist scholar, educator and activist whose ideas deserve far more attention than they have received. Drawing on Africana and feminist theory, May places Cooper's theorizing in its historical contexts and offers new ways to interpret the evolution of Cooper's visionary politics, subversive methodology, and defiant philosophical outlook. Rejecting notions that Cooper was an elitist duped by dominant ideologies, May contends that Cooper's ambiguity, code-switching, and irony should be understood as strategies of a radical methodology of dissent.

May shows how across six decades of work, Cooper traced history's silences and delineated the workings of power and inequality in an array of contexts, from science to literature, economics to popular culture, religion to the law, education to social work, and from the political to the personal. May emphasizes that Cooper eschewed all forms of mastery and called for critical consciousness and collective action on the part of marginalized people at home and abroad. She concludes that in using a border-crossing, intersectional approach, Cooper successfully argues for theorizing from experience, develops inclusive methods of liberation, and crafts a vision of a fundamentally egalitarian social imaginary.



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