

# NEH Application Cover sheet (FZ-292612)

## Public Scholars

### PROJECT DIRECTOR

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**Status:** Senior scholar  
**Field of expertise:** African American Studies

### INSTITUTION

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University of California  
Davis, CA 95616-5270

### APPLICATION INFORMATION

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**Title:** *Beyond the Kitchen: B. Smith and the Legacy of Black Women's Cultural Work*

**Grant period:** From 2023-09-01 to 2024-08-31  
**Project field(s):** African American Studies; Gender Studies

**Description of project:** This book project critically examines the long legacy of Black women's work in the culinary and hospitality arts, as illustrated by the 40-year career of Barbara Elaine Smith (b1950-d2020), a model, restaurateur, lifestyle television host, cookbook author, and all-around style maven. Rather than a traditional biography, this book works to build a portrait of B. Smith's public life as an influential Black woman in the food and lifestyle space from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. It does this by narrating through the archival gaps and the silences that often accompany the histories and voices of Black women in order to amplify and contextualize the significance of Black women's cultural work (Hartman 2008, Moody-Turner 2017).

### REFERENCE LETTERS

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Psyche Williams-Forson  
Professor and Chair  
American Studies  
University of Maryland, College Park  
pwforson@umd.edu

Courtney Thorsson  
Associate Professor  
Department of English  
University of Oregon  
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NARRATIVE—Beyond the Kitchen: B. Smith and the Legacy of Black Women's Cultural Work  
SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION

This book project critically examines the long legacy of **Black women's work in the culinary and hospitality arts**, as illustrated by the 40-year career of Barbara Elaine Smith (b1950-d2020), a model, restaurateur, lifestyle television host, cookbook author, and all-around style maven. Rather than a traditional biography, this book works to build a portrait of **B. Smith's** public life as an influential Black woman in the food and lifestyle space from the late 1970s to the early 2000s. It does this by narrating through the archival gaps and the silences that often accompany the histories and voices of Black women in order to amplify and contextualize **the significance of Black women's cultural work** (Hartman 2008, Moody-Turner 2017).

**B. Smith's variegated career serves as** an antidote to historical and modern-day Aunt Jemima-like iconography in mainstream media's branding of products and the media representations of **everyday Black people's lives** consumed for entertainment. Although popular media culture labeled her **the "Black Martha Stewart,"** Barbara Elaine Smith built consciously and expansively on a legacy of Black women cultural workers (Reagon 1986, Tipton-Martin 2015). She is part of a lineage of Black women who cooked professionally (or did other sorts of food work) in the public eye; as well as those who wrote about food, lifestyle and the cultures of Black folks with irreverence, grace, and love. Women like Lena Richard, Freda DeKnight, Edna Lewis, Leah Chase, and VertaMae Grosvenor form the context of **Barbara Smith's work.**

Barbara began as a model, working extensively in the U.S. and Europe throughout the 1970s. In 1986, Barbara, then known professionally as B. Smith, was the first Black woman to open a white-tablecloth restaurant in the Theater District of New York City. In the 1990s and early 2000s, she pioneered the media lifestyle format amongst African American tastemakers with the publication of her coffee-table entertaining book, her weekly half-hour syndicated television show, and her glossy *B Smith Style* magazine. B. Smith went on to open two additional restaurants (in Washington DC and Sag Harbor), write two more cooking/entertaining books, develop a sewing patterns line for *Vogue*, a furniture line for *La-Z-Boy*, and a best-selling home-goods line for the retailer *Bed, Bath & Beyond*. Her work as a Black woman cultural arbiter is foundational to the reimagining of African American people and Black style that continues to resonate today.

Sadly, on February 22, 2020 Barbara Elaine Smith passed away at 70 years old from complications with early **onset Alzheimer's disease.** When she passed away, her estate was valued at over \$20 million. At least 50 national and international media outlets aired tributes to her, remarking on the breadth, beauty and impact of **B. Smith's** cultural work. From food media (*Food and Wine* magazine and Eater.com), to Black press (*Essence Magazine* and BET.com), to business publications (Forbes.com and *Black Enterprise*), to fashion media (*W Magazine*) and mainstream press (NY Times, BBC, CNN) **stories detailing "Why B. Smith Always Mattered"**<sup>1</sup> circulated widely. She embodied a cultural confluence of the worlds of food, fashion, and hospitality in significant ways. Yet, to date, her work has not been the subject of any in depth examination within or outside of the academy. My book, *Beyond the Kitchen*, seeks to rectify this reality while exploring what her life and achievements tell us about the centrality of **Black women's work in the culinary and hospitality arts.** In so doing, it offers three important contributions:

- An interpretive **cultural history of B. Smith's public-facing work.** **Understanding B. Smith's role as a** restaurateur, food-lifestyle television host, and cookbook author now adds much needed depth and complexity to the recent reckoning in the culinary world with its erasure of the foundational thinking and innovation with food by Black American women, historically and in contemporary times. As we have seen with the removal of racist iconography from food brands like *Uncle Ben's Rice* and *Aunt Jemima Pancakes*, it is clear that representation matters.<sup>2</sup> However, altering or replacing racist imagery is just part of the work that needs to happen. By uncovering the behind-the-scenes feminist and anti-racist **efforts of B. Smith's entrepreneurial efforts,** *Beyond the Kitchen* positions her labors as akin to the work of Black women during the Civil Rights Movement. Activist women like Fannie Lou Hamer and

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<sup>1</sup> Ashtin Berry, "[Why B. Smith Has Always Mattered.](#)" *Food and Wine Magazine* February 26, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Alino Sekyukh, "[Aunt Jemima Will Change Name, Image as Brands Confront Racial Stereotypes.](#)" *NPR*, June 17, 2020. See also: Farai Chideya, "[B. Smith Becomes Face of Betty Crocker Cornbread](#)" (interview with B. Smith) and "[Revisiting Aunt Jemima: 'Slave in a Box.'](#)" (interview with Maurice Manning, author of *Slave in A Box*), *NPR News & Notes*, January 2, 2007.

Amelia Boynton<sup>3</sup> knew, as B. Smith did, that food work could be a conduit for greater self-sufficiency, personal and communal care/comfort, as well as an avenue through which critical conversations for change happen.

- A critique of the mainstream media and market as sites of reparation. In the recent moment of racial-reckoning when many industries have sought (or have been pushed) to align their missions within a stated support of Black Lives Matter, we saw the naming of two Black women to editor-in-chief roles at *Bon Appetit* and *Cook's Country* – both influential food media conglomerates.<sup>4</sup> Notably, **B. Smith's attempts** to launch her own lifestyle magazine over 20 years ago were thwarted by concerns of unsustainability and lack of crossover appeal. Publishers like Hearst Publications and advertisers like American Express considered her brand too Black to garner the necessary advertising support to make the magazine profitable in the long term. The desire for crossover appeal by publishers **and advertisers failed to both acknowledge B. Smith's influence across racialized boundaries and to recognize the power of the Black consumer market.** B. Smith's tag line, "Whatever you do, do it with style!" served as **a way to elevate Black women's connection to elegance, femininity, and beauty often denied us in mainstream U.S. culture.** Her example also speaks to the limitations of relying on dominant-owned media and marketplaces to advance and support Black cultural, political, economic and social uplift.

- **A documentation and critical assessment of Black women's engagement with B. Smith's cultural work.** B. Smith's most ardent admirers and supporters have long spoken to the significance of B. Smith's life work on their own burgeoning sense of themselves as Black women in the middle or aspiring to be middle class. Black Club women (like my mother's Los Angeles Eastern Star<sup>5</sup> group) made B. Smith's restaurants in New York City and Washington D.C. destinations for club outings. Black women of every type would be front and center at B. Smith's book signings and appearances at the retailer Bed, Bath and Beyond, which sold her products. Indeed, one of their biggest selling items was B. Smith's white serveware. It sold because Black women who aspired to entertain "with style" in their homes did not have to own a matched set of floral patterned anything to serve their food – allowing for elegance on a budget.<sup>6</sup> Centering Black women as consumers and interpreters of culture moves the needle beyond reactions to dominant portrayals towards the elevation of Black-centered narratives and illuminates our power to create and sustain the well-being (culturally, politically, economically) of Black people and communities.

## SOURCES AND ORGANIZATION

Introduction—Who was B. Smith? This chapter situates Barbara Elaine Smith within the social and historical context of her time. While B. Smith was a well-known public figure, she was also a private person who left us with few sustained recollections of her past or her path to becoming B. Smith. Constructing a narrative of her early life requires exploratory archival research that seeks to uncover and illuminate the personal and public faces of B. Smith within the plethora of newspaper articles and magazine stories written about her (Hartman 2008).

1. Modelling Blackness. This chapter explores how the burgeoning practice of displaying Black cover models within mainstream fashion media offered new avenues of community building and networking opportunities while also displacing the development of Black-focused beauty and fashion brands. This work, often begun abroad on the runways in Paris and Milan, brought Black models like B. Smith into new conversations about Black women's cultural work and status as artists. Taking her place among a small group of Black women models who graced the covers of mainstream fashion/women's magazines, Barbara was the second Black model on the cover of *Mademoiselle* in 1976.<sup>7</sup> These images were a part of the mainstreaming of the "Black is Beautiful" mantra of the 1960s and 1970s and served to capitalize on the political moment and to bring Black consumers to those publications. This chapter draws on close readings of the Black fashion and beauty industry outputs (magazines, make-up, hair care products) in

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<sup>3</sup> [Amelia Boynton \(1911-2015\)](#) and [Fannie Lou Hamer \(1920-1999\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> [Toni Tipton Martin at Cook's Country Magazine](#) and [Dawn Davis at Food & Wine](#)

<sup>5</sup> The Eastern Stars is the women's auxiliary of the Masons. The Black Masons first women's auxiliary began in 1874 with the Queen Esther Chapter in Washington, DC. See: African American Registry, "Tue, 12.01.1874-The Order of the Eastern Star begins" (<https://aaregisry.org/>).

<sup>6</sup> Robin Caldwell, "[Repast for B. Smith: A Gathering of Black Women Who Loved Her](#)" *Fresh and Fried Hard* Blog, February 23, 2020; and personal conversation with Caldwell December 11, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> B. Smith joined an elite group of Black models who were the first to grace the covers of fashion magazines in the 1960s and 1970s: Donyale Luna (*Harper's Bazaar* in 1965 and *British Vogue* in 1966), Naomi Simms (*Ladies Home Journal* in 1968), Katiiti Kironde (*Glamour* in 1968), and Beverly Johnson (*American Vogue* in 1974). See also: Reynolds, 2019.

tension or collaboration with those circulating from mainstream efforts to include “blackness” during the 1960s through 1980s.

2. Creating a Black Aesthetic: Restaurants as Cultural Performance and Spaces of Change. This chapter links Black women’s cultural work with food to Black and feminist social and political movements for change. B. Smith was the first Black woman to open a white-tablecloth restaurant in the Theater District of New York City. It reportedly became a popular space for gathering, to see and be seen. B. Smith did not inhabit the space as cook/chef, but rather as glamorous host and party-thriller. The imprint of her style was on the food served, but perhaps more importantly on the atmosphere created and the styling of the space itself. B. Smith conceptualized a Black aesthetic that took its inspiration from an amalgamation of Africa, the Black Caribbean, African America (inclusive of Creole/Cajun Louisiana and Black Southern), and Asia. B. Smith knew that all of the style and the beauty served to bring folks of different backgrounds together to create spaces for transformative conversations. Drawing on menus, media reviews of the restaurants, and first-person remembrances of folks who ate/gathered at them, this chapter works to uncover, document and assess the ways B. Smith’s restaurants created spaces of change.

3. Becoming B. Smith: A Brand and an Icon. This chapter explores the expansion and commodification of lifestyle and media products as a process that simultaneously propels Black-identified cultural arbiters into iconic status and waters down their potential political resonance. While many would deem these products as markers of success, I argue that the creation of the “B. Smith With Style” brand into these areas of enterprise served to co-opt the cutting edge and quietly subversive nature of her aesthetic work. When B. Smith became the new face of Betty Crocker cornbread, it “revived old ideas about racial nostalgia” (Farai, 2007) and comparisons to Aunt Jemima, thus illuminating the tension between the various B. Smith images – upscale entertainer, home cooking wife and stepmother, glamorous jet-setting restaurateur, and Black woman cook/chef. In close readings of B. Smith’s nationally syndicated television show, eponymous magazine, coffee table entertaining book, and cookbooks, as well as the roll out of her home goods, furniture and sewing patterns line, I think through the commercialization of B. Smith that situates her uneasily as icon within Black community as well as a popular brand in the mainstream market.

Conclusion—Legacy and Loss: (Not) B. Smith’s Last Act. This concluding essay grapples with the afterlife of Black women’s cultural work in a time where ownership of one’s brand/product is at the root of cultural production, building wealth, and creating legacy. It speaks provocatively about the intimacy of commodification and the use of Black women to sell products and create capital—for others and (often) not for themselves or the communities they sought to empower. Most importantly, this chapter centers the narratives of Black women who followed and engaged with B. Smith’s at multiple levels. They reflected deeply in social media about the significance of her work on the screen, in print, and in the larger cultural landscape of African America.

#### COMPETENCIES, SKILLS, ACCESS, AND DISSEMINATION

I am an Associate Professor in the Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies program at UC Davis. I hold academic degrees in journalism, sociology, and a certificate in professional baking. I am a qualitative researcher and interdisciplinary scholar with a writer’s heart. In my first book, *Guyana Diaries: Women’s Lives Across Difference* (Left Coast Press, 2008), I recast the life history data I gathered coupled with my ethnographic experience into a narrative meditation on race, gender, class and nation. Since then, I have become a writer and thinker around representations of Black women and food production. I have written alone and collaboratively about media portrayals of Black women’s food work, critical analyses of film, food television, and about the popular linking of Black American “soul food” and obesity. All of my article-length publications on Black women, food, food media and popular representations gesture toward an educated general audience. I believe that *Beyond the Kitchen* will be a book read widely by food writers, chefs/bakers, scholars of food studies, feminist, and Black studies, as well as everyday women who loved B. Smith and invited her into their homes via her media and lifestyle products. I can imagine the book assigned in a college course or chosen for a national book club. In addition, I hope also to connect the work to a potential National Museum of African American History and Culture exhibit of B. Smith’s work. The University of North Carolina Press has expressed interest in *Beyond the Kitchen* for its renowned Food Studies list.

### Work Plan—*Beyond the Kitchen: B. Smith and the Legacy of Black Women's Cultural Work*

I have been gathering materials for this project for over five years. I have given papers at several conferences on this topic in the summers of 2018 and 2019, as well as the fall of 2018 and 2021 (see resume). I have published one essay on B. Smith in the leading food studies journal – *Gastronomica* (see writing sample); and this fall I was invited to submit a chapter based on my B. Smith research for a forthcoming edited volume.<sup>1</sup>

If awarded the NEH Public Scholars Award, I will utilize the monies to offset a complete course buyout from my academic department for the 2023-2024 academic year. The four-course buyout will enable me to devote my energies to completing the book project by working full-time on it for 12 months (September 2023-August 2024) without also juggling teaching duties. This teaching relief is critical in a small ethnic studies department where we have a great deal of writing and reading within our courses – ranging from 50-150 students per class – as well as individualized work with undergraduate students writing theses (divided amongst teaching faculty).

### TIMELINE

Timeline leading up to commencement of funding, present to Sept. 2023

- January–June 2023: Complete book introduction draft; continue developing research notes on media materials in preparation for drafting book chapters during fellowship year.
- July–August 2023: Research travel; access archival resources: National Museum of African American History and Culture (DC); Museum of Food and Drink (New York); interviews with key individuals who worked with B. Smith; ethnographic work at the sites of the original restaurants. Submit B. Smith essay (book introduction) to editors of the *Transnational Culinarians* volume. Submit book proposal and sample chapter (Introduction) to Catherine Hodorowicz, University of North Carolina Press, to send out for review.

Timeline of funding period, 2023–24

- September 1, 2023–June 30, 2024: Full time writing to complete manuscript draft.
- July 1–August 31, 2024: Prepare book proposal and manuscript for submission to press. Initial interest expressed by University of North Carolina Press. See Publisher's Support Letter.

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<sup>1</sup> *Transnational Culinarians: Women of Color and Food Studies* seeks to create an interdisciplinary dialogue that bridges gaps between academic researchers, chefs and food industry workers, agriculture scholars, environmentalists, and health educators. This new volume seeks to center voices that have been marginalized in food studies, to include positionality as a valuable perspective, to advance discussions about decolonizing food studies, and to amplify perspectives that focus on historical wellness in global women's foodways. Co-editors of this volume, Farha Ternikar (an interdisciplinary sociologist) and Stephanie Y. Evans (an interdisciplinary historian), engage intersectional and Black feminism in research. Accordingly, this volume seeks to fill a gap in Food Studies literature.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY—Beyond the Kitchen: B. Smith and the Legacy of Black Women's Cultural Work

### Primary Texts:

- o Media products—B. Smith Style television show (1999-2007) and B. Smith Style Magazine (1999-2000) o Material culture analysis of available Bed, Bath & Beyond products, Vogue **sewing patterns** o Restaurants – menus, press, and photographic record of guests
- o *B. Smith's Entertaining and Cooking for Friends* (1995), *B. Smith's Rituals & Celebrations* (1999), and *B. Smith Cooks Southern Style* (2009), B. Smith and Dan Gasby, *Before I Forget: Love, Hope, and Acceptance in Our Fight Against Alzheimer's* (2016)
- o Modeling Career – Photographic archive; place in context of the times—1960s-70s Black models featured on runways and in print media
- o Social media output of Black women during B. Smith's final years; virtual focus groups with Black women identified through these venue
- o Interviews with friends/co-workers and others who knew B. Smith (snowball sampling)
- o Taking inspiration from Hartman's (2008) "critical fabulation" method as a way of telling Black women's lives within historiographies of slavery, I also narrate B. Smith's foundational years through the absence of primary texts and archival silences.

### Key Secondary Texts:

- o *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, edited by Appiah and Gates (Basic Civitas Books, 1999)
- o **Bailey, Moya.** *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. (New York University Press, 2021)
- o Bobo, Jacqueline. *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism* (Blackwell Publishers, 2001)
- o \_\_\_\_\_. *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (Columbia University Press, 1995)
- o **Brock, Andre.** *Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures*. (New York University Press, 2020)
- o Chatelain, Marcia. "Black Women's Food Writing and the Archive of Black Women's History." *Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from Slavery to Obama*. (University of Arkansas Press, 2015)
- o Collins, Patricia Hill. "Mammies, Matriarchs, and other Controlling Images." Pages 69-96 in her *Black Feminist Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Routledge, 2000).
- o Deck, Alice A. "Now Then-Who Said Biscuits?: The Black Woman Cook as Fetish in American Advertising, 1905-1953." Chapter 3 in *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race* edited by Sherrie A. Innes. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).
- o DeKnight, Freda. *A Date With a Dish: Classic African-American Recipes*. (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2014)
- o **Fleetwood, Nicole R.** *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination*. (Rutgers University Press, 2015)
- o **Gough-Yates, Anna.** *Understanding Women's Magazines: Publishing, Markets and Readerships* (Routledge, 2003)
- o Grosvenor, VertaMae Smart. *Vibration Cooking: Or the Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl* (University of Georgia Press, 2011)
- o **Hall, Stuart.** "What is the 'Black' In Black Popular Culture?" *Black Popular Culture* edited by Gina Dent (Bay Press, 1992)
- o Harris, Jessica B. *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (Bloomsbury, 2011).
- o Hartman, Saidiya. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe*, Number 26, Volume 12:2 (2008); pages 1-14
- o hooks, b. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. (South End Press, 1992)
- o \_\_\_\_\_. *Cultural Criticism & Transformation*. (Media Education Foundation, 1997)
- o Jewell, K. Sue. *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy*. (Routledge, 1993)
- o Johnson, Lakesia D. *Iconic: Decoding Images of the Revolutionary Black Woman* (Baylor University Press, 2012)
- o Lam, Francis. "What Edna Lewis Knew: The Chef and Author Made the Case for Black Southern Cooking as the Foundation of our National Cuisine. Does She Get the Credit She Deserves?" *The New York Times Magazine*, October 28, 2015; 44-75.
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- o \_\_\_\_\_. "What is Southern?" *Gourmet Magazine*, January 2008; pages 24-43.
- o Manring, Marable.M. *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima*. (University of Virginia Press, 1998)
- o **Moody-Turner, Shirley.** *Black Folklore and the Politics of Radical Representation*. (University Press of Mississippi, 2017)
- o Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "African Diaspora Women: The Making of Cultural Workers." *Feminist Studies* 12:1, (1986); 77-90.
- o **Rooks, Noliwe M.** *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2005)
- o Reynolds, Marcellas. *Supreme Models: Iconic Black Women Who Revolutionized Fashion* (Abrams Books, 2019)
- o **Tipton-Martin, Toni.** *The Jemima Code* (University of Texas Press, 2015)
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- o **Williams-Forsen, Psyche.** "Hot Biscuits and Coffee: Bertha Holly as Cultural Worker." *Next Stage Resource Guide: Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (December 2007): 11-12.
- o \_\_\_\_\_. *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food and Power* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006)
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- o Witt, Doris. "'My Kitchen Was the World': Vertamae Smart Grosvenor's Geechee Diaspora." Chapter 10 in *Kitchen Culture in America: Popular Representations of Food, Gender, and Race* edited by Sherrie A. Innes. (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001)
- o **Wynn Greer, Brenna.** *Represented: The Black Imagemakers Who Reimagined African American Citizenship* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019)
- o **Zafar, Rafia.** *Recipes for Respect: African American Meals and Meaning*. (University of Georgia Press, 2019)

KIMBERLY D. NETTLES-BARCELÓN

EDUCATION

Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles (Sociology)

M.A. University of California, Los Angeles (Sociology)

B.A. University of Southern California (Broadcast Journalism/Study of Women and Men in Society)

POSITIONS HELD

- 2022- Associate Professor, African American and African Studies, University of California, Davis
- 2020-2022 Principle Investigator. Advancing Faculty Diversity Grant (UCOP) \$225,000. Professors Leveraging a Community of Engagement (PLACE) with CAMPSSAH. August 2020-September 2022
- 2019-2022 Faculty Director. Center for the Advancement of Multicultural Perspectives in the Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities (CAMPSSAH/OAD/DEI) (50% Appointment) July 2019-July 2022
- 2008-2022 **Associate Professor. Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies**, University of California, Davis.
- 2001-2008 Assistant Professor. Women and Gender Studies, University of California, Davis.
- 1999-2001 Assistant Professor. Department of Sociology and Center for Research on Women, The University of Memphis.
- 1998-1999 Carolina Minority Postdoctoral Fellow (Sociology). The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

PUBLICATIONS (Selected, post-tenure)

BOOKS

In Progress: *Beyond the Kitchen: B. Smith and the Legacy of Black Women's Cultural Work*.

2008 *Guyana Diaries: Women's Lives Across Difference*. (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, "Writing Lives: Ethnographic Narratives" series.)

EDITED VOLUMES

2017 **Guest Editor. "Food Entrepreneurship: Politics, Passion, and Necessity,"** Special issue of *Food & Foodways* Volume 25, Number 4. Introduction Essay: **"Women and Entrepreneurial Food-work: Second Acts, 'New Domesticity,' and the Continuing Significance of Racialized Difference."** Pages 251-262.

BOOK CHAPTERS and ESSAYS (peer-reviewed)

- 2022 "[Whose Farm? Which Fork? – An Assemblage of Critical Observations on Sacramento's Farm-to-Fork Campaign.](#)" *BOOM California*. Published Online, 2/10/2022.
- 2022 **"In Memoriam: B. Smith."** *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies*, 22:2 (summer), 75-80. WRITING SAMPLE
- 2021 Book Review: *Recipes for Respect: African American Meals and Meaning* by Rafia Zafar for *Winterthur Portfolio*, Volume 55, Number 2/3, summer.
- 2020 **"Open Letter to the (Light) Brown-Skinned Woman in my Neighborhood."** (Pandemic reflections) *Gender, Work & Organization* (October).
- 2020 **"Free Yourself."** (A personal essay about growing up with Prince's music.) *Spectrum: A Journal of Black Men*, Volume 7, Number 2, pages 163-182 (spring). Guest Editors: Shannon Cochran and Judson Jeffries.
- 2015 **"Black Women's Food Work as Critical Space."** *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, 15:4 (winter), 34-49. First author with: Gillian Clark, Courtney Thorsson, Jessica Kenyatta Walker, and Psyche Williams-Forson
- 2015 "The Sassy Black Cook and the Return of the Magical Negress: Popular Representations of Black Women's Foodwork." Pages 107-120 in *Dethroning the Deceitful Pork Chop: Rethinking African American Foodways from Slavery to Obama* edited by Jennifer Jensen Wallach (University of Arkansas Press, 2015)
- 2012 **"California Soul: Stories of food and place from Oakland's Brown Sugar Kitchen."** *Boom: A Journal of California*, 2:3, pp.18-24.
- 2007 **"Saving Soul Food"** *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, 7:3 (summer), 106-113.

BLOG POSTS and MEDIA

- 2023 Podcast with Chef-**Entrepreneur N'Gina Guytan**. *Cultivation: Food, Farming, and Heritage in the Sacramento Valley*. A Davis Humanities Institute Public Humanities Initiative 2022-2023.
- 2020 Cited in Emily Heil, **"For female politicians, talking about cooking can be fraught. Kamala Harris is breaking that mold too."** *Washington Post*, August 26.
- 2017 "BTB Entrepreneur Showcase: Cristina Arantes of **Kika's Treats**." *Cuisine Noir's Behind the Business Blog*, 9/13/2017. <http://www.behindthebusinessblog.com/>

COMPETITIVE FELLOWSHIPS and GRANTS for Research/Writing (Selected, post-tenure)

- 2021 Davis Humanities Institute, Campus Nominee for NEH Summer Grant Application Submission (*Beyond the Kitchen*)
- 2021 Small Grant in Aid for Research. UC Davis. \$2,000 research support (*Beyond the Kitchen*)
- 2020 Faculty Research Fellowship. Davis Humanities Institute. \$12K course buyout and DHI residency, spring (*But Some of Us Are Brave* → *Beyond the Kitchen*)
- 2018 Faculty Research Grant. UC Consortium for Black Studies. \$5K research support
- 2017 Small Grant in Aid for Research. UC Davis. \$3K research support
- 2017 Fellowship and Workshop Participation. Food Studies @ University of the Pacific, "A Place at the Table." San Francisco Op-Ed Project. (*Whose Farm? Which Fork?*)
- 2016 Davis Humanities Institute, Campus Nominee for NEH Summer Grant Application Submission (*But Some of Us Are Brave* → *Beyond the Kitchen*)
- 2013 UCHRI, The Humanities and Changing Conceptions of Work (Mellon Foundation). \$7K summer research support (*Cooking Up A Second Act*)
- 2012 California Cultures Initiative Summer Research Grant, Davis Humanities Institute. \$5K research support (*California Soul*)
- 2010 Faculty Fellow and Convener, Davis Humanities Institute (Theme: California Cultures) \$6K research support (*California Soul*)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & PUBLIC LECTURES (Selected, post-tenure)

- 2023 **Invited Talk: "Becoming B Smith."** AOKI CENTER Interdisciplinary Research Seminar Series (March 21)
- 2023 Public Panel. SAVOR: Black Women Food Matters. With Psyche Williams-Forsen and Chef Tanya Holland (February 1)
- 2021 **Conference Presentation. "Becoming B. Smith: A Brand and an Icon."** *Critical Food Studies: South Africa and Beyond. A Virtual Humanities Conference*, November 17-19, 2021.
- 2021 **Invited Talk. "Critical Food Writing as a Window to the World."** *Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism*, University of Southern California (May).
- 2021 Organizer. "*I Am More Than My Hair*" Film screening and conversation featuring filmmakers Alyscia Cunningham and Chara Andrews, with Branwen Okpako as discussant. The Manetti Shrem Gallery, UC Davis. <https://arts.ucdavis.edu/seasonal-event/screeningdiscussion-i-am-more-my-hair>
- 2019 **Invited Presentation & Participation. "Reading Narratives of Women's Food Work: Negotiating dissonances between intersectionality as identity and intersectionality as method/theory" and "Whatever you do, do it with style!': B. Smith's Black Woman Aesthetic."** *Making a Mess: Intersectional Food Studies and Interdisciplinary Collaborative Symposium and Workshop*. University of Minnesota (August 1-3).
- 2018 **Invited Workshop-Seminar Participation. "Whatever you do, do it with style!': Food Entrepreneur B. Smith's Black Woman Aesthetic."** UC Consortium for Black Studies Convening. UC Los Angeles, November 29-30.
- 2018 **Conference Presentation. "Whatever you do, do it with style!': B. Smith's Black Woman Aesthetic."** *Critical Race and Feminist Studies of Food Work and Organizing Stream at the Gender, Work & Organization 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Interdisciplinary Conference*. Sydney, Australia
- 2017 **Invited Lecture: "Cooking Up A Second Act: Narratives and Images of Women's Transformation through Food Work."** Food Studies @ University of the Pacific, San Francisco–Saturday Seminar
- 2016 **Invited Lecture. "Whose Farm? Which Fork? – Media Representations of Sacramento as The Farm-to-Fork Capital."** UC Irvine *Food Matters* series.
- 2013 Roundtable Organizer/Presenter. "The Good, The Bad, The Unforgivable: **Black Women's Food Work as Creative Spaces of Dissent and Strategic Acquiescence.**" Co-Organized with Psyche Williams-Forsen, University of Maryland. Other participants: Chef Gillian Clark; Tracye Lynne McQuirter, MPH; Courtney Thorsson; Jessica Walker. *American Studies Association Annual Conference*, Washington, DC.
- 2012 **"Cooking Up A Second Act: Women's Narratives of Transformation and Change Through Food Work."** *National Women's Studies Association*, Oakland, CA.
- 2012 **"Cooking Up A Second Act: Narratives of Women's Transformation through Food Work."** *Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association*. Seattle University.
- 2012 **"All the Chefs are Men, All the Women are Cooks: But Some Of Us Are Brave – Black Women Chefs as Culinary Professionals."** *Foodways: Diasporic Diners, Transnational Tables and Culinary Connections*. Center for Diaspora and Transnational Studies, University of Toronto.
- 2012 **"Cooking Up A Second Act: Narratives of Women Food Entrepreneurs."** *Food Networks: Gender and Foodways*, An Interdisciplinary Conference. University of Notre Dame, McKenna Hall Conference Center.



# B. Smith (1949–2020) — In Memoriam

AS A DAUGHTER OF a Black woman who could virtually do it all (sew everything from wedding dresses to formal drapery, make slipcovers for furniture, bake her signature 7-Up pound cake, and create a beautiful home space), B. Smith was a familiar figure in my house. We watched her television shows, used her patterns for making outfits, and read about her and her work in magazines like *Essence* and *Ebony*. When my mother traveled with the women in her Order of the Eastern Star<sup>1</sup> chapter to New York City in the 1990s, a planned stop on their journey was B. Smith's restaurant. B. Smith, like my mom and the Eastern Star women, exuded the grace and style of a Black middle class — or those who aspired to become members of that tenuous socioeconomic group in post-1960s America (Clergé 2019).

Barbara Elaine Smith began as a model, working extensively in the United States and Europe before becoming the second Black model on the cover of *Mademoiselle* in 1976.<sup>2</sup> In 1986 Barbara, then known professionally as B. Smith, was the first Black woman to open a white-tablecloth restaurant in the theater district of New York City.<sup>3</sup> She pioneered the media lifestyle format amongst African American tastemakers with the publication of her coffee-table book *B. Smith's Entertaining and Cooking for Friends* (1995), and when her weekly half-hour syndicated television show, *B. Smith with Style*, debuted in 1997 on NBC-owned stations,<sup>4</sup> along with the publication of the glossy *B. Smith Style* magazine in 1999. B. Smith went on to open two additional restaurants (in Washington, DC, and Sag Harbor), develop a sewing patterns line for *Vogue*, a furniture line for La-Z-Boy, and a best-selling home-goods line for the retailer Bed, Bath & Beyond. Her work as a Black woman cultural arbiter is foundational to the reimagining of African American people and Black style that continues to resonate today.

Sadly, on February 22, 2020, Barbara Elaine Smith passed away from complications with early onset Alzheimer's disease.<sup>5</sup> She was 70 years old. At the time of her death, B. Smith was reportedly worth about \$20 million, tangible evidence of the significance of her more than 40-year career. When she passed away, at least 50 national and international media outlets published tributes to her, remarking on the breadth,

beauty, and impact of B. Smith's cultural work. From food media (*Food and Wine* and Eater.com), to Black press (*Essence Magazine* and BET.com), to business publications (Forbes.com and *Black Enterprise*), to fashion media (*W Magazine*), and mainstream press (the *New York Times*, BBC, CNN), stories detailing "Why B. Smith Always Mattered" circulated widely (Berry 2020).

B. Smith was an original, of course, but like my mom and the other Black women I grew up knowing, she was forged within the crucible of Black womanhood — reaching toward a dignity and beauty not allowed for us in the pits of slavery, Jim Crow, and continued racist-sexist assumptions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. B. Smith's work is foundational to the current concerns about racist iconography in mainstream media's branding of products and the representation of everyday Black people's lives in the news and social media. Barbara was perceptive in her critique of popular media culture's labeling her the "Black Martha Stewart" when she opined, "Martha Stewart has presented herself doing the things domestics and African Americans have done for years. We were always expected to redo the chairs and use everything in the garden. This is the legacy that I was left. But Martha just got there first" (Musto 1997)

**"I'm not really thinking about firsts," Smith said in 2012. "It's 'Can I do this?' or 'Can I do that?' I want to try something new. I'm just thinking about what's next — always evolving."**<sup>7</sup>

Martha Stewart notwithstanding, Barbara Elaine Smith built expansively on a legacy and is part of a lineage of Black women who cooked professionally (or did other sorts of food work) in the public eye, such as Lena Richard,<sup>8</sup> Leah Chase, and Edna Lewis, as well as Black women who wrote and spoke about food, lifestyle, and the cultures of Black folks with irreverence, grace, and love, such as VertaMae Grosvenor, Jessica B. Harris, Freda DeKnight, and, again, Edna Lewis. We must also trace the lines of influence and space-making to those Black women who were voiceless and



FIGURE 1: *Portrait of B. Smith for profile in Long Island Pulse in 2011. Photo taken by Max Flatow in B. Smith's Manhattan residence.*<sup>6</sup>  
PHOTOGRAPH © MAX FLATOW / WWW.MAXFLATOW.COM



FIGURE 2: B. Smith's Bed, Bath & Beyond product samples (comforter set and bamboo plates), magazine, Vogue patterns, cooking and design books, and video cookbooks.

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

faceless within the flattening “Aunt Jemima”/“Mammy” imagery prevalent in the racist Jim Crow South and broader United States of America. Black women whose enterprising work with food was illuminated when scholar Psyche Williams-Forsen’s foundational volume for critical food studies *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food and Power* and Toni Tipton-Martin’s groundbreaking volume *The Jemima Code* were published. Barbara Elaine Smith was in the company of these women when she charted a path to create the B. Smith restaurants and other enterprises, even if that community was not visible (Caldwell 2020).

In honor of her life and legacy, I want to remember some of the ways B. Smith was in the thick of deepening a particular Black cultural work—one that centers commensality and hospitality as key humanizing elements in our long slow trek toward freedom (Reagon 1986; Williams-Forsen 2006, 2007; Zafar 2019). In the language of today, Barbara Elaine Smith created a distinct brand that centered on a middle- and upper-middle-class Black aesthetic that was accessible. The mainstream media’s comparison to Martha Stewart is a shallow one, of course, which fails to understand B. Smith’s work within the context of Black people’s lives in the United States, historically and contemporarily. Her rise from humble beginnings is etched into a common Black American narrative, making her the relatable personality that she was and endeavored to be.<sup>9</sup>

Barbara Smith was born in Western Pennsylvania in 1949 to a domestic worker mother and a steelworker father. Her

father, who had been in the Army, would regale a young Barbara with tales of life outside their small, semi-rural town. Soon after graduation from high school, Barbara moved to New York City determined to see the world. She signed with the Wilhelmina Modeling Agency and traveled throughout Europe as a model. When she appeared on the cover of *Mademoiselle* magazine, she was among a small group of Black women models who graced covers of mainstream fashion/women’s magazines during that time.<sup>10</sup>

When she finished her modeling career, B. Smith utilized her appeal to build a diversified set of enterprises. Starting with a small café in New York, her empire grew to include three upscale restaurants in Manhattan, Washington, DC, and Sag Harbor, a table-top entertainment/design book, two glossy cookbooks, a nationally syndicated television show, a *Vogue* pattern collection, and in 2001, a home-goods line with her signature “African” design concept available at Bed, Bath & Beyond.

**“Barbara Smith is one of America’s most influential taste-makers. Her unique, ‘transcultural’ approach to fashion, food and décor merges cultures through style, elevating and transforming individual cultural contributions even as we absorb them into increasingly diverse lifestyles.”<sup>11</sup>**

As an African American model in the 1970s, B. Smith was likely a significant figure of uplift in the racially charged



FIGURE 3: Congressman Charles Rangel attends B. Smith's party at her restaurant to celebrate her new Discovery Channel TV show.

PHOTO BY COREY SIPKIN/NY DAILY NEWS ARCHIVE VIA GETTY IMAGES

America of the 1960s and '70s. However, it is through her creative food and lifestyle work that I believe Smith's impact on the cultural landscape of the United States was at its peak. Indeed, as B. Smith said, she started to learn about the hospitality business while still working as a model. "I followed my heart. I worked nights for over a year at a restaurant. All my model friends were like, 'Is your booker not getting you enough work?'" (Evans 2010). But Smith had a clear vision and a plan. She conceptualized a Black aesthetic that took its inspiration from an amalgamation of Africa, the Black Caribbean, African American, and Asia. Obviously, her restaurants were sites of food consumption, but they were also places to see, be seen, and take refuge. An article in the *Herald-Standard*<sup>12</sup> described her DC location:

B. Smith's at Union Station features a combination of cajun, creole and southern cuisine [sic]. Located in Washington, DC's Historic Union Station, B. Smith's grand beaux arts-style dining room with its 30-foot ceilings, period chandeliers and turn-of-the-century elegance, is a national landmark and has been called one of the most beautiful dining rooms in America. . . . The bar at B. Smith's serves as a gathering place for Washington's political movers and shakers, celebrities and people who just want to have a good time. (Zajac 2012)

Her New York City location—often noted to be the first white-tablecloth restaurant opened by a Black American woman in the Times Square Theater District—was described in various guides to the city's restaurants in this way:

B. Smith's on Restaurant Row serves an American menu with Southern influences. The bar is always bustling for happy hour with a hip multi-ethnic clientele, including the theater crowd, business and entertainment executives, tourists and viewers familiar with B. from her TV show and publications. This list also includes everyone from heads of state and captains of industry to artists, celebrities and the guy and gal next door.<sup>13</sup>

However, B. Smith knew that all the style and beauty served to bring folks of different backgrounds together to create spaces for transformative conversations.


In fact, beyond the PR-laden description above, renowned literary agent Marie Dutton Brown remembers the original restaurant as a gathering space for key figures in the Black arts community, such as Douglas Turner Ward (1930–2021), founder and director of the Negro Ensemble Company, as well as the progressive feminist community, such as Florence Howe (1929–2020), founder of *The Feminist Press*.<sup>14</sup> It was also a space, Brown recalls, that was used by countless Black women's organizations, clubs, and sororities as well as other Black charitable organizations for fundraisers. Indeed, when B. Smith commented later on the opening of her first restaurant in New York in 1986, she said, "I used it as my platform, a place for fund-raisers, for dances, to promote feminist press" (Evans 2010).

This part of B. Smith's legacy is less known and makes clear that recounting her richly varied career is to remember her not simply as an icon, but rather to uncover and document the less visible parts of her work that pushed the culture



FIGURE 4: (L-R) President and CEO Muriel Siebert & Company, Muriel Siebert; restaurateur and event emcee Barbara Smith; and executive director of the Feminist Press at City University of New York, Gloria Jacobs, attend the 38th Feminist Press “Women Write The World” gala at the Grand Hyatt on October 27, 2008 in New York City.

PHOTO BY GARY GERSHOFF/GETTY IMAGES

forward in significant ways. To pay homage to B. Smith is also to pay homage to her mother and my own. Thinking deeply and critically about B. Smith within a context that allows for an expansive appreciation of what she has meant in the cultural landscape illuminates her legacy and helps us to continue to build on it in significant ways. 

#### NOTES

1. The Order of the Eastern Star is a Black sorority-type organization within the Masons, originated in 1874 with the Queen Esther Chapter in Washington, DC. See African American Registry (2021).
2. Though it is commonly reported that B. Smith was the first Black model on the cover of *Mademoiselle*, the first Black model on the cover may have been in 1969, when teenager Jolie Jones (daughter of famed music producer Quincy Jones and his first wife, actor Jerri Caldwell) appeared. See *MMM60s/70s: A Walk through Model History* (2015).
3. In 1983, Alberta Wright opened the soul food restaurant *Jezebel* in the Theatre District. Slotnik writes that *Jezebel* “brought soul food with panache to Manhattan’s Theater District and helped make sophisticated variations of Southern dishes a culinary trend.” With funding from Black Hollywood celebrity friends and family, Wright

also opened restaurants in Paris and on the Upper Westside of Manhattan, though they did not last long. The original *Jezebel* stayed open until she closed it in 2007. See Slotnik, 2015 and Johnson, 2019.

4. *B. Smith with Style* joined the Food Network in 2007.

5. In 2014, B. Smith and her husband/manager Dan Gasby announced to the world that she had been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s at 64 years old. The announcement came on CBS News *Sunday Morning* on June 15, 2014. [www.cbsnews.com/video/b-smiths-alzheimers-battle](http://www.cbsnews.com/video/b-smiths-alzheimers-battle). Also see Bates (2014).

6. Photographer Max Flatow remembers the context of taking this photo of B. Smith: “In 2011, I had been photographing for a New York-based publication, *Long Island Pulse Magazine*. The editors wanted to do a profile on B. Smith and asked that I set up a shoot at her home in Manhattan. I remember showing up to her stunning high-rise apartment overlooking Central Park. It was quite a few years ago, so my memory is a little foggy, but I recall her home being filled with so many gorgeous works of art. She had a story about every piece, and I could tell she was proud of it all. We photographed in her living room for 30 minutes or so, then went downstairs, where she owned another apartment that she used exclusively as an office. We wanted to capture photos in her element—both at home and in the office, as she was immersed in so many enterprises, and was constantly bouncing back and forth between the two locations. After shooting at the office, we hopped in a taxi and went to her restaurant in midtown, where a large group of elementary school kids were being treated to lunch. One of

the students had chosen B. as her African American hero during the school's celebration of Black History Month. Incredibly humbled, B. invited the entire class into the city for a meal." Personal correspondence with Flatow, March 10, 2022.

7. *Herald-Standard* obituary (2020).

8. Lena Richard (1892–1950) was a renowned chef, caterer, restaurateur, frozen-food entrepreneur, television host, and cookbook author in Boston (where she trained at Fannie Farmer Cooking School), New York City, and New Orleans. Her biggest mark was in her native New Orleans where she opened two restaurants and a cooking school, along with catering and creating a line of frozen foods. Significantly, Lena Richard's popular television show, "Lena Richard's New Orleans Cook Book," launched in October 1949 on the new WDSU-TV (NBC) and ran until November 1950, when she passed away unexpectedly due to a heart attack (Daley 2015; Katzman, 2020).

9. In addition to the accolades B. Smith received throughout her life, Black women's remembrances of her life's work were often very personal (Caldwell 2020).

10. Donyale Luna (*Harper's Bazaar* in 1965; *British Vogue* in 1966), Naomi Simms (*Ladies Home Journal* in 1968), Katiti Kironde (*Glamour* in 1968), and Beverly Johnson (*American Vogue* in 1974).

11. Donna Trinkoff, on the occasion of the AMAS Musical Theatre in New York honoring B. Smith with its Rosie Award (*Times Square Gossip* 2012).

12. The *Herald-Standard* is the newspaper that serves B. Smith's hometown Everson, Pennsylvania.

13. See *NY Waterway* (2022). This description also appeared on the B. Smith website before her death in 2020.

14. Personal conversation with Marie Dutton Brown on September 20, 2021.

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1922  
2022



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PUBLISHING

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS

November 18, 2022

Dear National Endowment for the Humanities Public Scholars Program:

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(b) (6)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cate Hodorowicz".

Cate Hodorowicz  
Editor  
University of North Carolina Press



January 12, 2023

Dear NEH Public Scholars Award Committee,

(b) (6)  
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(b) (6) [Redacted text block]

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Sincerely,



Courtney Thorsson  
Associate Professor, Department of English  
thorsson@uoregon.edu



# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Department of American Studies, 1328 Tawes Hall, College Park, MD 20740

January 20, 2023

NEH Public Scholars Program  
400 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20506

Dear NEH Public Scholars Application Committee:

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Respectfully,



Psyche Williams-Forsion, PhD.  
Professor and Chair