

# Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair

By Lisa Jones

In *Bulletproof Diva*, Lisa Jones brings the wit and candor of her infamous *Village Voice* column, "Skin Trade," to a much larger audience. Chock full of the "fierce black girl humor" that has made her column so popular, this provocative collection of essays and observations on race, sex, identity, and the politics of style speaks to a young generation of blacks who were raised in an integrated society and are now waiting for America to deliver on its promises of equality. The thirty-seven short pieces and six long essays in *Bulletproof Diva* cover a wide range of topics, many of them extremely controversial. Jones moves smoothly from issues of ethnicity in a changing America, challenging viewpoints on African-American and mixed race identity, to "butt theory" and the roller-coaster politics of black hair. Written in a style that is as appealing as it is unapologetic, *Bulletproof Diva* marks the debut of a genuinely gifted young writer with a distinctive voice and a fresh perspective on the black cultural scene.

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## **Bulletproof Diva: Tales of Race, Sex, and Hair Summary Details**

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editorial:

From Publishers Weekly

"Style is political, of course," remarks Jones in one of the essays of this volume; and she proves her point through a series of impressionistic tales of the lives of African American women that demonstrates that the politics of style are linked integrally with the politics of race and gender. "For black women without access to the room of one's own to make leisure-time art," Jones explains, "our bodies, our style, became the canvas of our cultural yearning." Accordingly, the essays, culled mainly from Jones's "Skin Trade" column in the *Village Voice*, uncover layers of signification behind everything from lifestyles to hairstyles--she reads "the hair trade as American social text." The insights yielded by these vignettes are particularly noteworthy because of the gap, explored by Jones adroitly, between the lives, ambitions and desires of the real women she writes of and the reductive, often negative iconography of black women in mainstream American culture. The *Bulletproof Diva*, a woman who cuts her own trail through the complex terrain of American culture without internalizing the repressive stereotypes this culture offers her as prefabricated forms of self-knowledge, comes to life repeatedly in these pages, yet is all but invisible elsewhere in the American media. Jones argues that it's time we recognize and celebrate her existence. Wickedly witty, savvy and on occasion breathtakingly insightful, these essays turn style into substance.

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From Library Journal

Jones covers the politics of style in a regular column, "Skin Trade," for the *Village Voice*, and this collection offers a sampling of her perspective on the contemporary black cultural experience. In essays ranging from an analysis of "supermama" roles for black women in films to the politics of hair care products, she explores what it means to be black in America today. Considering subjects that are seldom treated in the mainstream press, her distinctive voice offers new ways of seeing issues of gender, sex, and ethnicity. Jones, the daughter of writers Amiri Baraka and Hettie Jones, struggles with her own identity as a multicultural woman of the 1990s, weaving personal experiences with her reflections on the world she finds. The resulting essays are sometimes funny, often provocative, and always thought-provoking. Having coauthored three books with filmmaker Spike Lee, this is Jones's first solo effort and should be considered for purchase by most libraries. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 12/93.

- *Judy Solberg, Univ. of Maryland Libs., College Park*

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From [Booklist](#)

Jones is hot. Her seismic *Village Voice* column, "Skin Trade," prods readers into thinking about her three favorite subjects: race, gender, and style, topics explored with vim and verve in this dynamic collection's more than 40 essays. Jones' take on racial matters is inspired in great part by her being the daughter of a white mother and a black father, the daughter, that is, of the writers Hettie Jones and Amiri Baraka. Immensely talented and audacious, Jones seems destined to "rock the racial boat" and expose all the riches and perplexities, contradictions and hostilities of multiculturalism in the nineties. But she is also a woman, and much of what she has to say about race is intimately connected to what she has to say about the lives of women of color. Indeed, some of her best essays are tributes to her favorite heroines, or "bulletproof divas," whose "sense of dignity and self cannot be denied." Jones is also adept at critiquing pop culture: her analyses of films and the politics of hair and fashion scorch the page. If writers earned black belts for accuracy, intelligence, speed, and fluency, Jones would be cinching hers up right now, ready for the next round. *Donna Seaman*

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