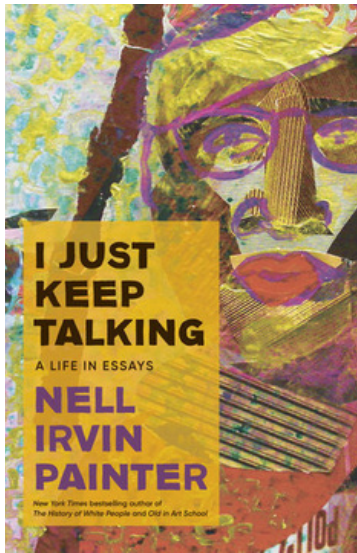


Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards*



I Just Keep Talking

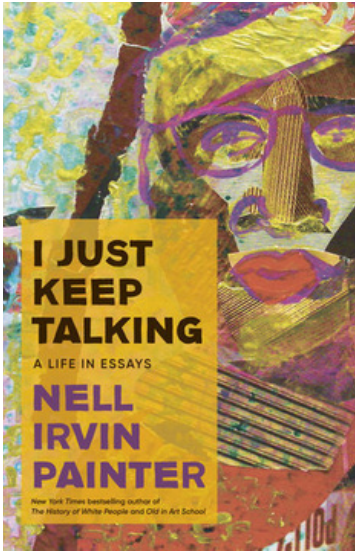
Nell Irvin Painter

2026 AWBA Lifetime Achievement Winner

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In one of Nell Irvin Painter's most critically acclaimed books, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*, Painter insists on crafting a full picture of Sojourner Truth—the woman's rights advocate and black abolitionist. One of the hallmarks of Nell Irvin Painter's work as a historian is to refuse the flattening of history. As you learn that Truth did not in fact speak those iconic words attributed to her “Ain't I a woman,” how does Painter's biography alter your perspective on Sojourner Truth and the iconization of historical figures.
2. Painter's 2010 title, *The History of White People*, became a *New York Times* bestselling book. In this 400-page seminal text, Painter documents the history of whiteness guiding the reader through more than 200 years of Western civilization. The text illuminates that whiteness was never a fixed identity but rather an evolving concept used for social, political, and economic ends. As Painter grapples with the invention of race and the realities of racism, how does reading this text shape your understanding of the future of race relations?
3. After teaching at Princeton for over 16 years, Painter decided to reinvent her life and go to art school at the age of 64. She would go on to receive her BFA from Mason Gross and her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Her 2018 memoir, *Old in Art School: A Memoir of Starting Over*, opens with a harrowing scene of one of her teachers exclaiming that Painter “will never be an artist.” This unconventional coming-of-age story is full of persistence and determination, as is Painter's life. When you read this text, how does Painter's insistence on pursuing what she loves inspire you in your own life? Reflect on the ways you've had to persist and how you would like to begin again, no matter your age.

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4. One thread running throughout Painter's entire oeuvre is her sense of humor. In a review on *The History of White People*, Kate Tuttle—the book editor at the *Boston Globe*—writes, "It's shocking that a book about such ugliness should be such fun to read. Painter maintains a calm, ironic, almost bemused tone—a wise choice, when the material speaks for itself in such bizarre voices." When documenting the often absurdity of race in America, Painter's dry wit is a tool to draw the reader in and resee the world. How does Painter's tone influence your reading of her work?
5. *I Just Keep Talking: A Life in Essays* covers a wide range of topics that reflect the scope of Painter's scholarly interests. From Black Nationalism and reparations to whiteness in today's political climate and police brutality in visual culture, each essay serves as a window to Painter's original mind. As you're exploring this essay collection, what themes do you notice running throughout the collection? What surprises do you find along the way?

