

Ida B. Wells, James Baldwin, and Octavia Butler imagine a new future

Who I'd invite to my writers' dinner party

by [Brittney Cooper](#) in the [May 10, 2017](#) issue

I would invite Ida B. Wells, James Baldwin, and Octavia Butler to my dinner table and treat them to the best southern feast I could cook. Ida B. Wells was a 19th-century journalist and antilynching crusader who wrote pamphlets like *Southern Horrors* to expose the racial terror of the South. James Baldwin, a master novelist and essayist, wrote about black queer life, black religious life, and racial politics at the height of the civil rights era. His book *The Fire Next Time* remains one of my favorites. Octavia Butler, a science fiction writer, wrote about slavery, racial dystopia, and black survival in the late 20th century. Her novel *Parable of the Talents* is especially relevant in this moment.

Each of these writers cared deeply about the relationship between power, religious ideology, and racism. They also cared about what it would take to shape a different future, one amenable to black lives. None of them minced words about Christian complicity in white supremacy and black suffering. Around the dinner table, I hope they could offer a long view of black possibility, ideas about what it would take to upend damaging theological positions, and arguments for the importance of an expansive imagination in a world of narrowing ideological positions.