Barbara Smith is an author, activist, and independent scholar who has played a groundbreaking role in opening up a national cultural and political dialogue about the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and gender. She was among the first to define an African American women's literacy tradition and to build Black women's studies and Black feminism in the United States.

She was a co-founder of the Combahee River Collective and of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, the first U.S. publisher for women of color to reach a wide national audience. She served to terms on the Albany Common Council (2006-13). In 2005, she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.