

Thomas Sowell's quixotic quest to denigrate African American culture: a critique
James B. Stewart

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Sowell has been trumpeting versions of this same critique for over three decades. Selected precursors to Black Rednecks include Race and Economics, Ethnic America: A History, Markets, and Minorities, and Civil Rights: Rhetoric or Reality? (2) Despite this extensive track record, Sowell continues to explore ways to pour new wine into old bottles. Borrowing extensively from Grady McWhiney's Cracker Culture and David Hackett's Albion Seed, Sowell's latest brainstorm is the assertion that African American culture is primarily a variation of the "redneck" or "cracker culture" introduced into the South from Britain during the antebellum period. (3) Sowell maintains that values and behaviors associated with this cultural orientation are deeply entrenched among contemporary urban African Americans. Dysfunctional values and behaviors associated with "redneck culture" are said to include an aversion to work, proneness to violence, neglect of education, sexual promiscuity, lack of entrepreneurship, reckless searches for excitement, and lively music and dance. (4) Presumably, the various social policies introduced beginning in the 1960s have served as a major catalyst for what Sowell sees as the widespread rejection of fundamental values and beliefs required for the acceptance of African Americans as contributing members of society.

This "black redneck dysfunctional culture model" is simply a slight modification of the traditional neo-conservative "deficit" model that indicts African Americans for failing to conform to "mainstream" behavioral expectations. In the mind of black neo-conservatives, widespread dysfunctional behavioral patterns result from weak intermediary social institutions such as family and church, which are deemed to be the principal vehicles for the inculcation of core values. (5) Sowell castigates black leaders for propagating an element of redneck culture that involves a "style of religious oratory marked by strident rhetoric, unbridled emotions, and flamboyant imagery" that "carried over into the political oratory of the [southern] region in both the Jim Crow era and the civil rights era, and has continued on into our own times among black politicians, preachers, and activists." (6) Evidence of Sowell's retreading of old diatribes can be seen by comparing the preceding assertion with one advanced in 1975: "Leadership patterns among minorities tend to fit the rest of their social patterns. Groups given to excitement, violence and emotionalism in general tend to produce flamboyant leaders, great orators, and individuals with personal charisma. Both the Irish and the American Negroes have produced numerous men of this sort, over the years.... The charismatic leadership tends heavily toward politics and other grand designs as means of advancing the race." (7)

FROM THE MAGAZINE City Journal

How Hip-Hop Holds Blacks Back

Violence, misogyny, and lawlessness are nothing to sing about.

John H. McWhorter

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Not long ago, I was having lunch in a KFC in Harlem, sitting near eight African-American boys, aged about 14. Since 1) it was 1:30 on a school day, 2) they were carrying book bags, and 3) they seemed to be in no hurry, I assumed they were skipping school. They were extremely loud and unruly, tossing food at one another and leaving it on the floor.

Black people ran the restaurant and made up the bulk of the customers, but it was hard to see much healthy “black community” here. After repeatedly warning the boys to stop throwing food and keep quiet, the manager finally told them to leave. The kids ignored her. Only after she called a male security guard did they start slowly making their way out, tauntingly circling the restaurant before ambling off. These teens clearly weren’t monsters, but they seemed to consider themselves exempt from public norms of behavior—as if they had begun to check out of mainstream society.

What struck me most, though, was how fully the boys’ music—hard-edged rap, preaching bone-deep dislike of authority—provided them with a continuing soundtrack to their antisocial behavior. So completely was rap ingrained in their consciousness that every so often, one or another of them would break into cocky, expletive-laden rap lyrics, accompanied by the angular, bellicose gestures typical of rap performance. A couple of his buddies would then join him. Rap was a running decoration in their conversation.

Many writers and thinkers see a kind of informed political engagement, even a revolutionary potential, in rap and hip-hop. They couldn’t be more wrong. By reinforcing the stereotypes that long hindered blacks, and by teaching young blacks that a thuggish adversarial stance is the properly “authentic” response to a presumptively racist society, rap retards black success.

Extract from 1823AD book by J. Stewart

"A view of the past and present state of the island of Jamaica..."

THE PEOPLE OF COLOUR-THEIR CHARACTER, MANNERS,
AND AMUSEMENTS-THEIR POLITICAL SITUATION.

BETWEEN the whites and the blacks, in the West Indies, a numerous race has sprung up, which goes by the general appellation of people of colour. These are subdivided into mulattoes, the offspring of a white and a black; samboes, the offspring of a black and a mulatto; quadroons, the offspring of a white and a mulatto; and mestees, the offspring of a white and a quadroon. Below this last-mentioned grade the distinction of colour is hardly perceptible; and those who are thus far removed from the original negro stock are considered in law as whites, on obtaining their manumission if born slaves, and competent of course to enjoy every privilege as such. Between these particular castes an endless variety of non-descript shades exist, descending from the deep jet to the faintest tinge of the olive, by gradations which it would be difficult to trace and designate.

The people of colour may be supposed to possess the mingled natures of the two original stocks from whence they spring; and the more or less they are removed from one or the other, they seem to be imbued in proportion with their particular qualities. The sambo differs little in manners, habits, &c. from the negro; while the mestee and his descendants approximate as near in these particulars to the white as it is possible for a mingled race to do; and when polished by a genteel education, that little distinction ceases to exist.

It is remarked of the people of colour, that they are peculiarly hardy, and far less subject to disease than either the whites or the negroes; of course a considerably less proportion of them are swept off by the general mortality of the country than of the two other classes. They feel a kind of pride in being removed some degrees from the negro race, and affect as much as possible the manners and customs of the whites. Few marriages take place among them. Most of the females of colour think it more genteel and reputable to be the kept mistress of a white man, if he is in opulent circumstances, and can afford to indulge their taste for finery and parade, than to be united in wedlock with the most respectable individual of their own class. They view marriage, indeed, as an unnecessary and unnatural restraint. On one occasion, a female of colour consented to be united to a person of her own class, a decent industrious man, but of limited means. For a few years she bore her fate without repining or regret; after which, however, she became uneasy and discontented, and often lamented the evil hour in which she had sacrificed at the altar of Hymen. Her husband, who gained an honest livelihood by the trade he professed, wished her to stay at home and attend to her children and household affairs; but the lady was of a pleasurable turn, and had, like most of her colour, a longing to enjoy a life of freedom and voluptuousness. She had been accustomed, prior to her marriage, to balls, parties, and jaunts, and she could therefore but ill brook this life of restraint and drudgery. She beheld with envy the gay, showy, and dissipated life which many of the companions of her youth led; who, being the housekeepers of men of fortune, were enabled to dress finely, and dash about in

style in their carriages, attended by servants in livery; while she, poor woman, was obliged to toil from morning to night in dirty drudging occupations, without one faint ray of hope that she would ever be liberated from this sad state of thralldom, and enjoy again the dear delights of freedom and variety.

These are the sentiments of nine-tenths of the females of colour in this island, and accordingly at least that proportion are in the situation of housekeepers, as they are here styled, to white men; while the males console themselves in the same way either with one of their own colour, or with a sable companion. Though some of the females of colour are possessed of considerable property, given them by their white parents, or amassed by their own industry, they never aspire to a conjugal union with a white man; nor, if such a union were sanctioned by the custom of the country, is it probable they would desire to enter into it. A white man, indeed, according to the ideas of distinction which here prevail, would be considered as degrading himself by a matrimonial alliance with a woman of colour, however favoured by fortune or accomplished by education. But the latter gives herself little concern about this, while the most distinguished and opulent of the whites pay an illicit homage to her charms, and even the man of family shall openly and unblushingly forsake his wife and abandon his children to hold dalliance in her company.

If the females of colour are asked, why they do not more generally intermarry with men of their own class, their reply is, that the greater number of the brown men are either too poor or too indolent to support a wife and family, and that, moreover, as husbands they are very prone to be jealous and tyrannical. But the truth is, it is not the custom of the country for these females to marry, and their own inclination and convenience are, as has been said, in unison with the prevailing usage.

Among the more favourable traits in the character of the women of colour are, their great attachment and devotedness to the white men who choose them as companions, their general fidelity in the discharge of any trust reposed in them, their extreme attention to cleanliness and neatness in their persons and houses, and their unwearied solicitude and usefulness in nursing the sick-an office in which they are frequently employed.

The brown children of the more opulent of the whites are either educated in the island, or sent to Great Britain for that purpose. Such as have received a liberal education, and do not follow the immoral examples around them, are for the most part well-behaved, respectable people. Notwithstanding which, they are excluded the society of the whites, and exposed to many other mortifications, in consequence of the line of distinction which custom and the laws draw between the whites and the browns. A white man, though he lives on a footing of the most perfect familiarity with his brown housekeeper, never sets her down at his table, nor introduces either her or his children to his respectable acquaintance. If a white and a brown child should be sent to Europe at the same time, and educated together at the same school, though they may be in habits of the greatest intimacy while there, they discontinue that intimacy on their return to the West Indies, however much on a footing on the score of accomplishments and mental

culture. The white Miss no longer recognises her quondam companion and schoolfellow as an equal, because born with a darker tinge of skin, and the customs and distinctions of the country forbid her cultivating such acquaintance. Some such distinctions are doubtless necessary, constituted as society is in the West Indies. It is, therefore, a pity that a parent, after having bestowed on his offspring a genteel and liberal education, in a country where at least they experience a respect and attention equivalent to their merits, should suffer them to be brought back to one where their feelings-of which it must be supposed they have acquired a suitable portion along with their mental culture -are perpetually liable to be wounded by contumely and neglect.

The more independent people of colour, shut out from the general society of the whites, form a separate society of themselves. They have their own amusements, their parties, their visitings, and their balls. The latter are fully as gay and as expensive as those of the whites; and as the brown females are the chief planners and supporters of these, the young and dissipated of the white men, their admirers, form a distinguished part of those meetings of pleasure. On these occasions the men of colour-the brothers, uncles, cousins, and other relations of the women, are excluded; though sometimes the brown ladies condescend to attend a ball given by the men of their own colour. The practice of white men giving dances to the women of colour is thought a matter of little consequence, except by the brown men, who, being contemptuously excluded from these entertainments, must feel the indignity; in fact, it is calculated to excite feelings not the most amicable between the two classes. The white gentleman, who to-night leads out the fair creole as a partner in the dance, may tomorrow give his hand, on a similar occasion, to the beauty of a darker shade, who dresses as well, and thinks herself as lovely and attractive as the other. The white ladies sometimes resent this behaviour in their male acquaintance with a becoming spirit; but in general it is not thought of much consequence.

The females of colour emulate, and even strive to excel, the white ladies in splendour, taste, and expensiveness of dress, equipage, and entertainment. At races, and on other public occasions, they spare no pains or expense to make an imposing display, as if anxious to outstrip the whites in the race of fashion, gayety, and pleasure. The latter are often outdone in gaudy exhibition by these extravagant females ; but the truth is, they do not aim at a competition with them ; to be surpassed in costly finery by a woman of colour excites no uneasiness in a white female, though she would not wish to be eclipsed by one of her own class.

Many of the quadroon and mestee females are comely, if not beautiful, as they partake chiefly of the European features; but the mulattoes and samboes, being less removed from the negro stock, retain more or less of their thick lips and flat noses. Many of them, however, as well as of the negroes, have agreeable features. As for the Africans, their ideas of beauty in the human countenance are almost the reverse of those of an European. They have no idea that the finest Grecian contour is more beautiful than their large and gross features, and the jet-black Venus from the banks of the Bonni or of the Rio Grande prefers her sooty Adonis to the handsomest European.

The people of colour in general are not so mild towards their slaves as the white people; indeed, too many of them are exceedingly harsh and tyrannical ; and the negroes, aware of this, are wont to say, " If me, for have massa or misses,give me Buckra one-no give me mulatto, dem no use neega well." Such of the brown people as receive European educations are however more humane and considerate.

The free people of colour are excluded from many of the privileges of the whites; they are not competent to serve as jurors, and they are excluded from all offices, civil, military, and ecclesiastical. These disqualifications are thought necessary for political purposes. About ten years ago they were in a much worse state than they are at present ; their testimony, on oath, was not then admissible in the courts of law, and they were not permitted to inherit property beyond a limited amount. Awakened at length to a sense of these unjust grievances, they petitioned the legislature for redress, and accordingly the right of giving evidence, and of inheriting property, was acceded to them.* A few years afterwards they again petitioned the legislature for a removal of the remaining disqualifications under which they lay ; but their petition was rejected, with an admonition as to the unreasonableness of their demand.

But it is in vain that such laws and provisions are thrown in the way of this people's acquiring an ascendancy in the country, while other productive causes exist for bringing this about. While the number of the whites remain stationary or nearly so, the people of colour are rapidly increasing. In 1788 it was computed that there were 10,000 free people of colour in the island; there are now upwards of three times that number.** That a population should be trebled in thirty-four years, by natural increase within itself, were physically impossible; but this vast increase arises out of the whole mass of the population, white, black, and brown. It is probable that nineteen-twentieths of the white males have their brown or black mistresses, either free or otherwise, by whom they generally have children, who, if born slaves, are often manumitted. This will account for the vast increase above stated. A respectable clergyman in the island assured the author, some years ago, that he usually had occasion to baptize about fifteen brown children for one white child. The male part of this population may be divided into three classes-namely, the offspring of men of fortune and station (some of the most distinguished in the island have families of this class), who are sent to Great Britain to be liberally educated, and are destined to inherit independent fortunes- the offspring of men in moderate circumstances, who generally give them a plain education, and leave the bulk of their property among them at their death-and, lastly, the offspring of men who either have not the means or the inclination to provide for them. This last is probably the most numerous class: many of them live in idleness and vice, a burden to themselves and to the community. Into the hands of the first and second class much of the property of the country is fast falling.-So that there can be little doubt that the time is not far distant when the free people of colour, feeling their own weight in numbers, property, and information, will not rest content with any qualifications short of what the whites enjoy; nor will the latter be in a condition to refuse this boon. Though this equalization, and blending as it were, of the two classes, be regarded by the whites as a great political evil, it will nevertheless unquestionably be brought about, at no distant period, through their own agency.

Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia

"The Sapphire Caricature" By: Dr. David Pilgrim, Professor of Sociology Ferris State University
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The Sapphire Caricature portrays black women as rude, loud, malicious, stubborn, and overbearing.¹ This is the Angry Black Woman (ABW) popularized in the cinema and on television. She is tart-tongued and emasculating, one hand on a hip and the other pointing and jabbing (or arms akimbo), violently and rhythmically rocking her head, mocking African American men for offenses ranging from being unemployed to sexually pursuing white women. She is a shrill nagger with irrational states of anger and indignation and is often mean-spirited and abusive. Although African American men are her primary targets, she has venom for anyone who insults or disrespects her. The Sapphire's desire to dominate and her hyper-sensitivity to injustices make her a perpetual complainer, but she does not criticize to improve things; rather, she criticizes because she is unendingly bitter and wishes that unhappiness on others. The Sapphire Caricature is a harsh portrayal of African American women, but it is more than that; it is a social control mechanism that is employed to punish black women who violate the societal norms that encourage them to be passive, servile, non-threatening, and unseen.

From the 1800s through the mid-1900s, black women were often portrayed in popular culture as "Sassy Mammies" who ran their own homes with iron fists, including berating black husbands and children. These women were allowed, at least symbolically, to defy some racial norms. During the Jim Crow period, when real blacks were often beaten, jailed, or killed for arguing with whites, fictional Mammies were allowed to pretend-chastise whites, including men. Their sassiness was supposed to indicate that they were accepted as members of the white family, and acceptance of that sassiness implied that slavery and segregation were not overly oppressive. A well-known example of a Sassy Mammy was Hattie McDaniel, a black actress who played feisty, quick-tempered mammies in many movies, including *Judge Priest* (Wurtzel & Ford, 1934), *Music is Magic* (Stone & Marshall, 1935), *The Little Colonel* (DeSylva & Butler, 1935), *Alice Adams* (Berman & Stevens, 1935), *Saratoga* (Hyman & Conway, 1937), *The Mad Miss Manton* (Wolfson & Jason, 1938), and *Gone With the Wind* (Selznick & Fleming, 1939). In these roles she was sassy (borderline impertinent) but always loyal. She was not a threat to the existing social order.

Sue Jewell (1993), a sociologist, opined that the Sapphire image necessitates the presence of an African American man; "It is the African American male that represents the point of contention, in an ongoing verbal dual between Sapphire and the African American male ... (His) lack of integrity and use of cunning and trickery provides her with an opportunity to emasculate him through her use of verbal put downs" (p. 45). In the all-black or mostly-black situational comedies that have appeared on television from the 1970s to the present, the Sapphire is a stock character. Like Sapphire Stevens, she demeans and belittles lazy, ignorant, or otherwise flawed black male characters.

Blacks on television have been overrepresented in situational comedies and underrepresented in dramatic series; one problem with this imbalance is that blacks in situational comedies are portrayed in racially stereotypical ways in order to get laughs. Canned laughter prompts the television audience to laugh as the angry black woman, the Sapphire, insults and mocks black males.

Aunt Esther (also called Aunt Anderson) was a Sapphire character on the television situational comedy *Sanford and Son*, which premiered on NBC in 1972, with a final episode in 1977, and is still running in syndication. She was the Bible-swinging, angry nemesis and sister-in-law of the main character, Fred. Theirs was a love-mostly hate relationship. Fred would call Aunt Esther ugly and she would call him a "fish-eyed fool," an "old sucka," or a "beady-eyed heathen." Then, they would threaten to hit each other. Aunt Esther dominated her husband Woodrow, a mild-mannered alcoholic. In this latter relationship, you have the idea of the aggressive black woman dominating a weak, morally defective black man.

The situational comedy *Good Times* aired between 1974 and 1979 on the CBS television network. The show followed the life of the Evans family in a Chicago housing project modeled on the infamous Cabrini-Green projects. This was one of the first times that a poor family had been highlighted in a weekly television series. Episodes of *Good Times* dealt with the Evans' attempts to survive despite living in suffocating poverty. There were several racial caricatures on the show, most notably the son, James Evans Jr. (also called J.J.), who devolved into a Coon-like minstrel. After the first season the episodes increasingly focused on J.J.'s stereotypically buffoonish behavior. Esther Rolle, the actress who played the role of Florida Evans, the mother, expressed her dislike for J.J.'s character in a 1975 interview with *Ebony* magazine: "He's eighteen and he doesn't work. He can't read or write. He doesn't think. The show didn't start out to be that...Little by little-with the help of the artist, I suppose, because they couldn't do that to me -- they have made J.J. more stupid and enlarged the role. Negative images have been slipped in on us through the character of the oldest child." ("Bad Times" 1975) In black-themed situational comedies when there is a Coon character there is often a Sapphire character to mock him. In *Good Times* a character that bantered with and mocked J.J. was his sister, Thelma. A clearer example of a Sapphire, however, was the neighbor, Willona Woods, though she rarely targeted J.J. Instead, Willona belittled Nathan Bookman, the overweight superintendent, and she put down a series of worthless boyfriends, an ex-husband, politicians, and other men with questionable morals and work ethics.

In situational comedies with a primarily black cast, the black male does not have to be lazy, thick-witted, or financially unsuccessful for him to be taunted by a Sapphire character. The *Jeffersons*, which aired from 1975 to 1985, focused on an upper-middle class family that had climbed up from the working class -- in the show's theme song there is the line, "We finally got a piece of the pie." George and Louise Jefferson were making so much money from their dry-cleaning businesses that they hired a housekeeper, Florence Johnston. Her relationship with George was often antagonistic and the back-talking, wisecracking, housekeeper approximated a Sapphire. She often teased George about his short stature, balding head, and decisions.

Another example of a Sapphire was the character Pamela (Pam) James, who appeared on *Martin*, a situational comedy that aired from 1992 to 1997 on Fox. Pam was a badmouthed, wisecracking friend/foe of the lead character, Martin. Tichina Arnold, the actress who played Pam, plays Rochelle, a dominating, aggressive matriarch in the situational comedy, *Everybody Hates Chris*, which ran from 2005 to 2009, and is still aired on cable television. Arnold has mastered the role of the angry, black woman.

Today, the Sapphire is one of the dominant portrayals of black woman. This is evident by the words of Cal Thomas, a commentator for FOX Television: "Look at the image of angry black women on television. Politically you have Maxine Waters of California, liberal Democrat. She's always angry every time she gets on television. Cynthia McKinney, another angry black woman. And who are the black women you see on the local news at night in cities all over the country. They're usually angry about something. They've had a son who has been shot in a drive-by shooting. They are angry at Bush. So you don't really have a profile of non-angry black women, of whom there are quite a few." ("Transcript: Fox", 2008) Thomas, admittedly an untrained sociologist, expressed what many Americans see and internalize, namely, images of Sapphires: angry at black men, white men, white women, the federal government, racism, maybe life itself. Thomas, shortly after making his statements about black women, agreed with a co-panelist that Oprah Winfrey is not angry.

The portrayal of black women as angry Sapphires permeates this culture. A Google search of Angry Black Women or ABW will demonstrate how pervasive this caricature has become. She lives in most movies with an all-black or predominantly black cast. For example, there is Terri, cussing and insulting the "manhood" of black men in *Barbershop* (Brown, Teitel, Tillman & Story, 2002) and its sequel, *Barbershop 2* (Gartner, Teitel, Tillman & Sullivan, 2004). There is the augmentative Angela in *Why Did I Get Married* (Cannon & Perry, 2007). There is clip art of an angry black woman at www.clipartof.com/details/clipart/16467.html. The clip art description reads, "Royalty-free people clipart picture image of an angry african american woman in a purple dress and heels, standing with her arms crossed and tapping her foot with a stern expression on her face. She could be mad at her child, a colleague or husband." There are stock pictures of angry black women, such as those at www.inmagine.com/bld108/bld108498-photo. There are books devoted to angry black women, for example, *The Angry Black Woman's Guide to Life* (Millner, Burt-Murray, & Miller, 2004), and Web sites such as <http://angryblackbitch.blogspot.com/> where you can buy Angry Black Bitch cups, shirts, pillows, tile coasters, aprons, mouse pads, and Teddy Bears. There is even a pseudo-malady called, "Angry Black Woman Syndrome."

The tabloid talk shows that became popular in the 1990s: *The Jerry Springer Show*, *The Jenny Jones Show*, *The Maury Povich Show*, and *The Ricki Lake Show*, helped reinforce the racial stereotypes of African Americans, including the stereotype of black women as angry, castrating shrews. By the early 2000s, the "Trash Talk" shows had receded in popularity, in part because of the emergence of so-called "Reality Shows." Again, these shows served as vehicles for African American women to be portrayed as Sapphires. Vanessa E. Jones, from the *Boston Globe*, wrote of the Sapphire: "You see elements of her in Alicia Calaway of *Survivor*:"

All-Stars," who indulged in a temperamental bout of finger wagging during an argument in 2001's "Survivor: The Australian Outback." Coral Smith, who rules with an iron tongue on MTV's "Real World/Road Rules Challenge: The Inferno," browbeat one female cast mate so badly a week ago that she challenged Smith to a fight. Then there's Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth of "The Apprentice," who rode the angry-black-woman stereotype to the covers of People and TV Guide magazines even as she made fellow African-American businesswomen wince."(Jones, 2004) Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth gained a great deal of national disdain and celebrity as a contestant on The Apprentice, Donald Trump's reality show. Manigault-Stallworth, who is almost always referred to by the single name Omarosa, was portrayed (and intentionally acted) as a cross between a Jezebel -- a hypersexual flirt and seductress -- and a bitter, aggressive Sapphire. Lorien Olive (2008), a political blogger, theorized on how white people saw Omarosa: "At least among white people, she was interpreted in various ways as conniving, lazy, selfish, a sham, overly-ambitious, uppity, ungrateful, and paranoid. I guess I was always less interested in whether Omarosa was actually any of those things or whether it was simply an effect of the distortion of the editing of reality television. I was more interested in the fact that Omarosa seemed to stand for something bigger in the eyes of many white people. Her constant accusations of racism directed toward her fellow contestants and the fact that she wore her alienation and distrust of her team-mates on her sleeve opened up a whole world of racial speculation and ridicule. I would say debate, but in all of my internet travels, I haven't found much of anyone who wanted to go out on a limb for Omarosa. The fact that so many white people felt justified in their hatred for Omarosa (a hatred that could be passed off as a benign over-investment in a guilty pleasure: a reality TV series) is telling. She became the symbol of everything that went wrong in the post-Civil Rights Era: paranoid "reverse racism"; the ungrateful and undeserving product of affirmative action; the "uppity" Black person who puts on airs; the beautiful, hyper-sexualized Black woman who pulled the wool over the powerful white man's eyes."