The Black Gay Male in Visual Culture. An Impossible Juxtaposition of Conflicting Identity Politics

‘A dissertation submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of MA in Art History in the Faculty of Arts’

2005

Kevin. R. I. Dalton-Johnson

Art History and Archaeology

Contents

	Figures	3
	Abstract	6
	Declaration	8
	Acknowledgement	9
	Introduction	10
1	Colonialism and Visual Culture	17
2	Dialectics of Power Defined through the European/American Gaze	43
3	How does the Black Male Represent himself and what constitutes Black Masculinity?	64
4	The Black gay Male and the Modern diaspora	76
	Bibliography	88

Figures

Fig. 1 Stephen Lawrence
www.wiltsrec.org.uk/ legislation.shtml

Fig 2. Brian Williamson
http://outrage.nabumedia.com/imagezoom.asp?file=BrianWilliamsonVigil-BJA

Fig 3 Fig 3 Ten Little Niggers. 1920

Fig 4 Benin Mask. Nigeria. 16th Century.

Fig. 5 BNP Protest
www.blink.org.uk/pdescription. asp?key=2989&mi...

Fig. 6 Hogarth's *Four Times of Day Noon*
http://www.umich.edu/~ece/student_projects/slavery2/dangerous.jpg

Fig 7 Hogarth's *Wollaston Family*
http://hogarth.chez.tiscali.fr/gallery/wollaston_family.jpg

Fig 8 *Wheatley, Family Group*
http://www.umich.edu/~ece/student_projects/clothing_chronicles/frontpage1.jpg

Fig 9 *La Belle Hottentote*
http://lumen.georgetown.edu/vkp/posters/public/index.cfm?fuseaction=poster.display&posterID=48

Fig. 10 *The Illustrated London News* (Dec. 1. 1894)

Fig 11 *Oxfam* Africa Famine Poster, (2005)
http://vision.york.ac.uk/articles/141/politics/images/famine.jpeg

Fig. 12 *The Voice* article about Darcus Howe documentary.
Newspaper article, *The Voice* (August 16 2004), p. 4

Fig. 13 *The Nation*. The appropriation of Black identities at EMMA's Awards
Newspaper article, The Nation. 31. May. 2004

Fig. 14 Usher and Bobby Brown, Hip Hop artists.
Newspaper article, *The Nation* (May 24 2004), p. 1

Fig. 15. The Black gay plight in Jamaica
The Observer Article Newspaper article,(October 20 2004), p. 25

Fig 16. The Million Man March. October. 16th. 1995.
www.africawithin.com/ mmm/photographs_mmm.htm

Fig. 17 *Representation. Cultural Representations and signifying Practices*
Hall, Stuart (ed) (1997), London: Open University, p230.

Fig. 18 *The Orchid* – Robert Mapplethorpe
Marshall, Richard (1988) *Robert Mapplethorpe*, London: Secker & Warburg, p. 183

Fig. 19 *Self Portrait* – Robert Mapplethorpe
Marshall, Richard (1988) *Robert Mapplethorpe*, London: Secker & Warburg, p.75

Fig. 20 *The Man in the Polyester Suit* - Robert Mapplethorpe
Marshall, Richard (1988) *Robert Mapplethorpe*, London: Secker & Warburg, p.95

Fig. 21 Public Lynching
www.theblackmarket.com/ lynch.htm

Fig. 22 *The Hooded Black Man* - Robert Mapplethorpe
Shange, Ntozake (1999) *Black Book / Robert Mapplethorpe*, London: Schirmer/Mosel

Fig. 23 Jeffrey Dahmers photographs
http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~gavlees/horror.html

Fig. 24 Roger Sylvester found dead and stripped whilst in custody
The New Nation (November 15 2004), p.2

Fig. 25 Rotimi Fani-Kayode's Bronze Head
Mercer, Kobena (1994) *Welcome to the Jungle*, London: Routledge

Fig. 26 Black gay Porn Star
Attitude (April 2004) cover

Fig. 27 Justin Fashanu
www.bbc.co.uk/.../ archive/torquay_4.shtml

Fig. 28 Jean Michelle Basquiat (1960-1988)
http://railibro.lacab.it/archivio/2000/2000/2000/2007/image67%5B1%5D.jpg

Fig. 29 Julien Isaac *Young Soul Rebels*
http://www.dacre.org/flash/www/gbd00393.jpg

Fig. 30 Homophobic Dance Hall Sounds
Newspaper article, *Daily Star* (November 3 2004), p. 8

Fig. 31 Lyle Ashton Harris. Billie #11. (2002) Baldwin Gallery.

Fig. 32 Public Sculpture that sparked controversy in Jamaica.
Newspaper article, *The Guardian* (August 14 2003), p.17

Fig. 33 Isaac Julien, The Long Road to Mazatlan, 1999. Single screen video projection. Collaboration: Isaac Julien and Javier de Frutos. Director: Isaac Julien, Choreography and movement: Javier De Frutos

Abstract

For the past 25 years, in many fields across academia in Britain, the figure of the black 'Other' has been identified, discussed, theorised, and examined. Too, scholars in the humanities have written a great deal about gender and sexuality in the context of histories of colonialism and postcolonial studies. However the majority of these discussions have failed to include the 'black gay male', who is castigated because of a colonial legacy which has also indoctrinated the Black community such that it does not accept him.

In this dissertation I shall focus on the nature of the construction of racial, ethnic and sexual difference in Britain, and the ways in which these identities have lead to the black gay male being rejected by his community. I shall consider the way in which peoples and societies have often sought to define themselves in relation to what they perceive as their opposites. In Britain, these perceptions of difference are tied to imperial political identifications of nation and self, ideas of "Britishness" that involve relations of power and continue to have a profound effect on the self-image and social experience of the black gay male. For these reasons issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality will be dealt with together, as in this context they are inextricably linked.

In order to understand the extent to which the black gay male has been affected by such powerful constructs, it is important to firstly explore

the way in which black men (heterosexual and homosexual) have been used in British culture as a vehicle for many stereotypes, which are organised around the needs, demands and desires of the white male. These stereotypes have been proliferated by gay pornography, where images of black men reinforce the 'colonial fantasy', which follows the cultural legacies of slavery, empire and imperialism in producing black men as 'other' and as objects of white male desire.

The focus of the dissertation will be on American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe's images of black males, particularly those published in his 1988 Black Book. These images, which have only been discussed in depth by the art historian Kobena Mercer, are important to look at in the context of this dissertation, as they have been instrumental examples of the appropriation and abstraction of stereotypical conventions of racial representation in photography towards 'aesthetic' ends. In Mapplethorpe's images of naked black bodies the black subject is objectified into otherness, as the size of the penis both signifies a threat to the white male ego and, simultaneously, through its aesthetic domination reinforces the position of power which whiteness entails in colonial discourse. A close analysis of Mapplethorpe's project will show that black male identities have been culturally constructed through complex dialectics of power hinging on white male sexuality.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Acknowledgement

I owe enormous debt of gratitude to my tutors from whom I have learnt much, but I would like to extend a special thanks to Professor. Amelia Jones, who was inspirational and unstinting in her support and guidance. Amelia has also given me the confidence to pursue the answers to the questions I need to resolve.

This paper would not have been possible without the love of my partner and his mother Angela Dickinson who is no longer with us, to whom it is dedicated with all my affection.

> In a world in which everyone's identity has been thrown into question, there mixing and fusion of disparate elements to create new, hybridised identities point to way of surviving, and thriving in conditions of crisis and transition.
>
> -Kobena Mercer (1994, 5)

Introduction

Issues of identity are crucial in today's society. Thinking back over the past two decades, a few events stand out as crucially important. The first is the premature death of 18 year old Stephen Lawrence shown here (fig. 1), an A level student, who was stabbed to death in April 1993 in Eltham, South London. Five white men - Gary Dobson, David Norris, Luke Knight, Neil Acourt, and his brother Jamie – were arrested after Stephens's murder. However, all were acquitted of murder in 1996. However, in February 1997 an inquest jury found that Stephen had been 'unlawfully killed in a completely unprovoked racial attack by five white youths'.[1]

The second is the injustice surrounding the death of an ex paratrooper who choked on his own vomit, with his trousers around his knees whilst British police officers stood laughing and making 'monkey noises' as he died. Christopher Alder, 37, was admitted to hospital after being hit on the head during a nightclub brawl and arrested when he became aggressive. He died on April. 1, 1998 at Hull's Queens Gardens Police station. The five officers involved were cleared of neglect of duty last year at a criminal trial.[2]

The third is the beating of Rodney King that lead to fierce rioting in the streets of LA when hundreds of angry African Americans went through the neighbourhoods of South Central, destroying buildings and cars and beating

[1] New Nation. 10. May. 2004. p 10
[2] New Nation. 19. April. 2004. p. 4

white and Asian motorists, following a jury decision to clear the four officers caught beating motorist Rodney King. The entire Black community had seen all four of them on camera in March delivering more than 56 blows, kicks, and electric shocks to King after pulling him over for speeding. They reacted as they felt the system was broken down and had therefore failed them, leaving them with nowhere to go. [3]

Fig. 1 Stephen Lawrence. Murdered 22. April. 1993

Further to the events mentioned, more recently we also have the murder of David Morley, the bar manager of the Admiral Benbow pub in London's Soho gay area, which was blown up by the so-called 'Soho

[3] New Nation, 4 October 2004. p. 7

bomber', David Copeland. Morley, who was one of the survivors of the bomb blast, was murdered near Hungerford Bridge on London's South bank shortly after 3am on the 30th of October in a homophobic attack.[4] Finally, we have the barbaric murder of Jamaican gay rights activist Brian Williamson[5], which led the campaigners shown here, to urge the Jamaican Prime Minister PJ Patterson to repeal Jamaica's anti-gay laws that allows for up to ten years imprisonment of hard labour for men convicted of homosexual activity (fig. 2). Brian Williams's death was inevitable as he was leading the campaign for gay rights in a country bent on tolerating and legally sanctioning homophobia. Such homophobia has also greatly influence the Jamaican community in Britain and now further reinforces the white conception of Black.

Each of these men was slain for who he was perceived to be, for how society constructed them racially and sexually. These examples serve as reminders to our communities that hatred is still alive and well, and that the discourses of hatred have tremendous effects upon the living person. Whilst Essex Hemphill has argued that, these events have served to bring the African American and gay communities together, this notion that appears to be somewhat questionable when put along side a growing number of accounts of homophobia perpetrated within the Black community. Furthermore, each of these men were killed due to his perceived identities;

---

[4] Midlands Zone. December. 2004. p. 7
[5] The Voice, June 14, 2004. p. 11

they were chosen by their assailants for who they were, therefore identified and negated by their attackers as ‘other’.

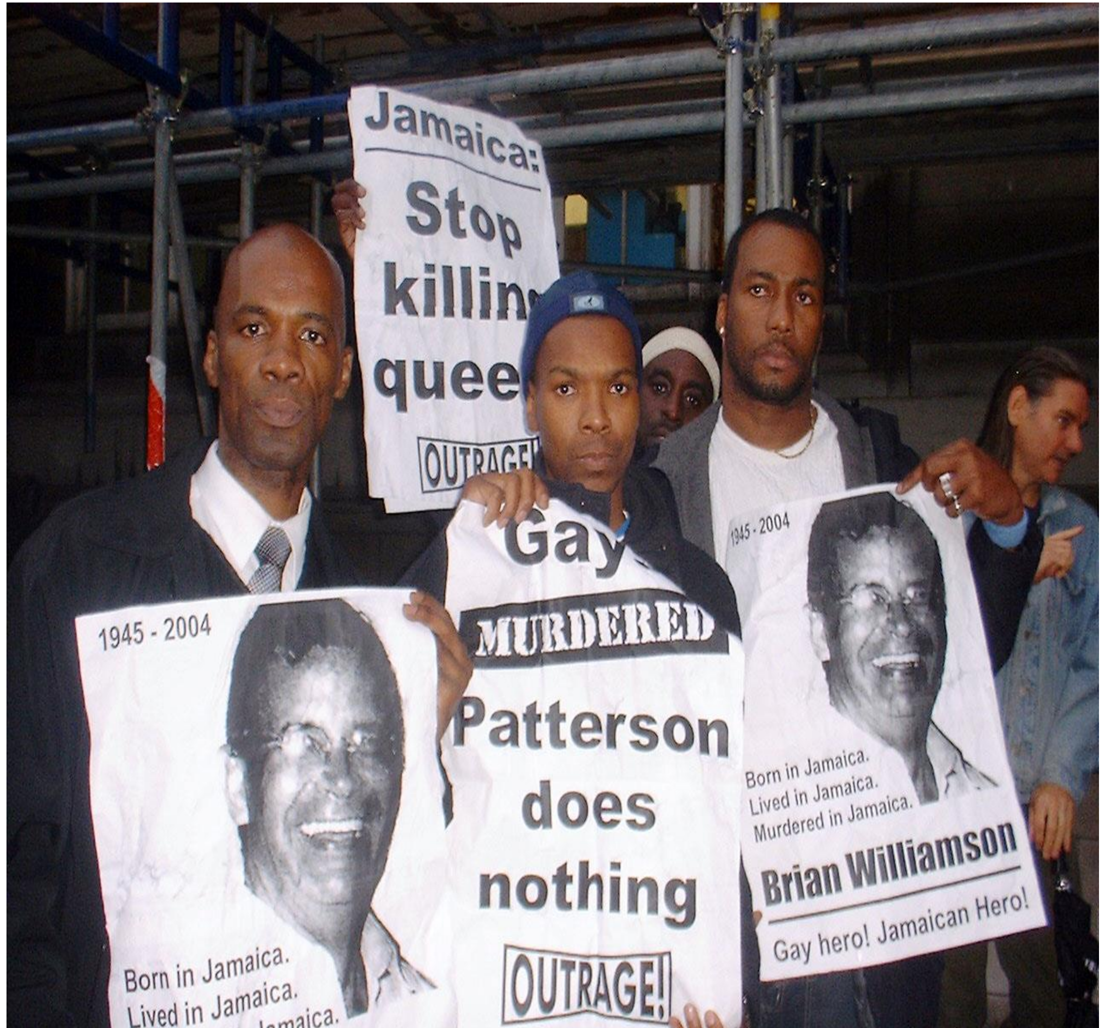


Fig 2. Brian Williamson

For a long time now, both Americans and Europeans in different ways have been obsessed with identity politics with both cultures deeply structured in relation to racial identity built primarily on fear. This fear is deeply rooted in primeval feelings about Black bodies and fuelled by sexual

myths of Black women and men. The myths offer distorted, dehumanized by images of blackness an early example being 'The Ten Little Niggers', of the 1920 shown below (fig 3).

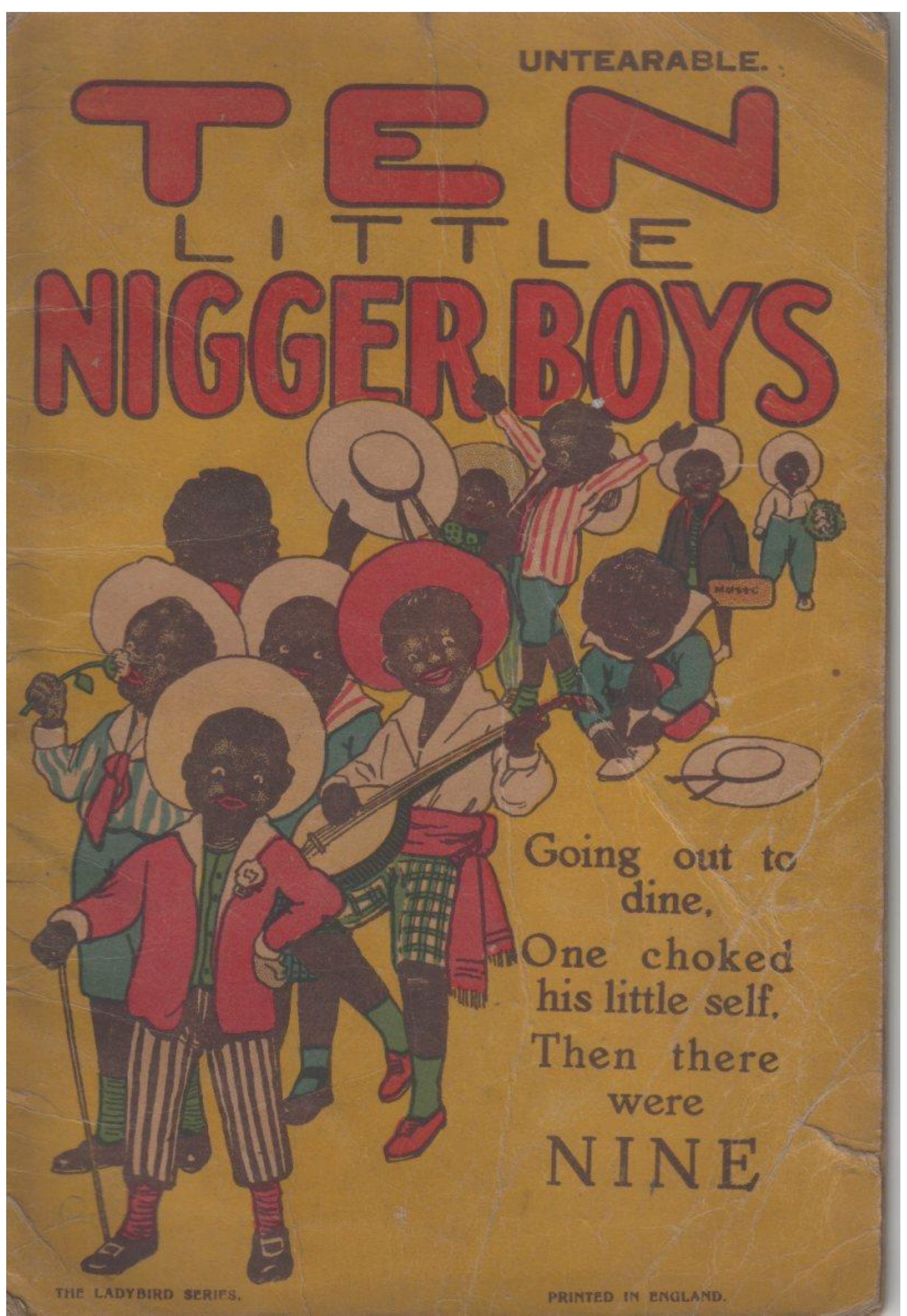


Fig 3 Ten Little Niggers. 1920

These images present the black as creatures whose bodies, colour of skin, shape of nose and lips, type of hair, size of hips as distinguished from the white norms of beauty and whose fearful sexual activities are deemed disgusting, dirty, or funky and considered less acceptable. Yet behind closed doors are perceived as interesting and intriguing. However, Black sexuality is not a matter for the public domain for it is one of the ultimate 'taboos'. Black sexuality is a taboo subject principally because it is a form of Black power over which Whites have little control, making it capable of evoking quite extreme responses on the part of whites, be it one of seductive obsession or downright disgust. Black sexuality puts Black agency centre stage with no white presence at all.[6]It has to be said however that many Black British and Black Americans view Black sexuality with the same disgust and contempt, but for many different reasons and with different results. Much of this none-acceptance of Black sexuality within the Black community has its roots in self-hatred and self-contempt. Many Black people, particularly those of the diaspora living in predominantly white areas, do not like the features that set them apart from their white counterparts, due to living in intolerant prejudiced societies. Slavery, lynching, and segregation have brought about this negative reaction. Such factors have etched their mark deeply into the Black psyche and sexuality. My thesis will inquire, through the investigation of visual cultures and specific artist's works, and theorists', why Black sexuality presents such a convoluted and complex conundrum within the context of identity politics and the problems it presents for present-day members of

[6] West, Cornel (1994*) Race Matters*, USA: First Vintage Books, p.125

diasporic communities. This investigation will possibly lead to a point of relocation of Black gay identity, or at least to a greater understanding of its volatile positioning in the realm of identity politics.

Black in the context of this paper denotes those belonging to an African or Afro-Caribbean group, the American version being *people of colour*, as they have yet to reclaim that political title. For this reason, 'Black' is presented with capital 'B'. It is worth mentioning at this moment that Black in the British context is the site of many different diasporas, including the Indian, Pakistan, Bangladeshi and broader South Asian diasporas, as well as the diasporas of Islam. The down side of this plural distinction is a lack of identity and an inability to ascertain a political identity, be it left or right. However, it appears when the issue of sexuality are raised; the black community appear to take a very strong right wing stance. This is particularly evident with both the Jamaican and African communities, both of which also have a strong right wing 'Christian' out look. The reasons for this will form the basis for this paper and will be investigated further.

1

Colonialism and Visual Culture

In order to understand extreme reactions to Black sexuality and to ascertain why Black sexuality has become such a conundrum, we need first to investigate and understand how and why such identities have been constructed, asking how and why this has lead to Black people being degraded, dehumanised and negated through the colonisation of both Jamaica and Africa. Such issues of race and cultural differences that were developed by European colonisers have coloured and still colour the evaluations made by colonised people and their decedents. This is directly linked to the issues of Black sexuality; after all, we all know that you cannot talk about issues of race without also talking about issues of sex. This thesis will first look at issues of race to understand the agenda behind the constructs that were developed to amplify difference and effect change.

An interest in 'difference' allows us to consider the ways in which peoples and societies have often sought to defined European powers; for example, they often defined themselves as 'civilised' in relation to what they saw as their relatively 'uncivilised' colonial conquests. This perception of difference was tied to imperial political ambitions as it involved relations of power. Perceptions of similarity and difference may be a basic way of categorising the world. It is however one thing to recognise others

differences, it is another matter to label others as 'different,' and define them as inferior.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European colonisers treated colonised peoples' cultures and the people themselves not simply as different but as different and inferior. In his 1952 book, *Black Skin, white Masks*, the cultural theorist Frantz Fanon noted this effect:

> I meet a Russian, or a German, who speaks French badly. With gestures, I try to give him the information that he requests, but at the same time I can hardly forget that he has a language of his own, a country, and that perhaps he is a lawyer or an engineer there. In any case, he is foreign to my group and his standards must be different. When it comes to the Negro, nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilisation, and no long historical past.[7]

Fanon suggests that a colonised culture was not treated as an equal by Europeans, but as an inferior system. He implies that a person with Black skin was turned by the power of the person with white skin into a 'white mask'. Therefore, those designated as 'Black' were not recognised. They were not recognised or valued like people from other European nations. They were as what he termed silenced 'others'. As we shall see the concept of 'otherness' has become central to contemporary debates within postcolonial theory, (that is, the theory about the legacy of European

---

[7] Fanon, Franz (1986) *Black Skin, white Mask*, London: Pluto Press, p.34

colonialism, within which Fanons work has been highly influential) and present day identity politics.

Where does this term ‘other’ derive its source and why was it used in this context? The term ‘other’ derives ultimately from Hegel Lacan, is the model of the master/slave relationship. The term generally refers to everything that is different and opposite from the individual or group who is speaking. For Hegel, the master has to consciously experience his being a master in relation to his slave; the slave needs the master to experience his being as a slave. Their consciousness can exist only through being experienced through one another in a process of mutual recognition and definition. This is Hegel’s idealist dialectics at work. However, this notion of otherness is often used in a rather wooden undialectic way. Notions of fixed opposites are conceptualised, for example Black/white, female/male, a binary opposition. Jacque Lacan’s concept of the ‘other’, developed mid twentieth century refers to the symbolic order of language and speech. The ‘other’ (small o) refers to the other who resembles the self, when seen, but who never quite becomes one with the self. Jacque Lacan’s refinement of the Hegelian master/slave model thus provides a much more subtle way of understanding how we experience identity.

The more common usage of the ‘Other’ is seen in the following example from a book by Peter Rigby:

> ‘Furthermore, in current discussion of multi-culturalism in the United States and Europe, the

> dominant white, male culture is never placed as "the Other", whose peculiar "differences" need to be explained to everyone. It is only "minorities" (Africans, African Americans, Black Englishmen, Asians, and Native Americans) who constitute the 'Other.'[8]

It was during the late nineteenth century that scholars developed a language and particular academic disciplines that were to institutionalise the study of the art and cultures of colonised societies, particularly in what was first called ethnography and later anthropology as developed in Europe and North America.[9]Such disciplines only further entrenched colonial ideologies, including western ideas of non-European cultures as "other". For example, the art of colonised and formerly colonised areas were spoken of in terms of 'artefacts' and 'material culture' made by 'crafts workers', and not as 'works of art' made by artists. This Eurocentric worldview has always demanded that the rest of the world of art be explained by scientific means: anthropology, ethnography, and archaeology rather than aesthetics. The way the 'one' had 'art' and 'craft'; while the 'other' had only 'craft' had, the effect of associating the arts of colonised peoples and their colonised heirs with manual, non-intellectual, repetitive, and unimaginative ability. This has acted as an intellectual device used for trivialising, or denying the understanding of all artistic endeavours of the voiceless. The Benin mask shown here is a good example of this kind of misappropriation (fig. 4).

---

[8] Rigby, Peter (1996) *African Images. Racism and the end of anthropology*, London: Berg, Oxford. pp 1-2

[9] Further clarification later

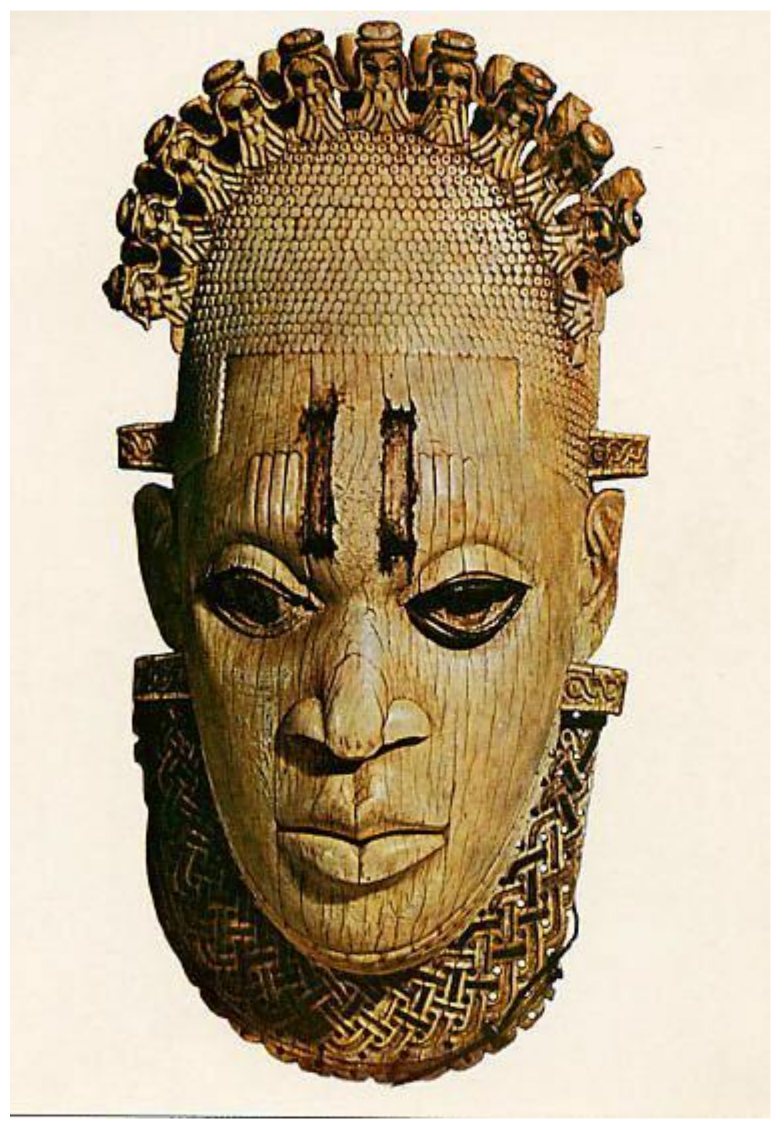


Fig 4 Benin Mask. Nigeria. 16th Century.

We have looked at some of the theories behind the construction of the 'other', but we have not established what necessitated its construction. Through the exploration of the Black presence and the investigation of the development of the other, it is evident that white supremacist ideology is based primarily on the degradation of Black bodies in order to control them. It is clear to see that the best ways to instil fear in people is to terrorize them

through lies and misinformation. This fear is best sustained by convincing them that their bodies are ugly, their intellect is inherently underdeveloped, their culture is less civilized, and their future warrants less concern than that of other peoples. It was the Black presence that brought about this negation.

The history of Black people in Britain goes back a long way. That is to say that there have been different Black communities here at specific points in time, from the movement of modern man out of Africa (approximately 50,000 years ago), the arrival of the requested labour force from Jamaica on the Windrush in the 1950's, to the recent arrival in Britain of people from East Africa in the 1990's. However, it was the influx of Black people in 1596, with the development of colonial contact with Africa that first brought about a high level of concern that there were too many Black people in the country. This influx initiated action, as it was perceived that they were taking food from the mouths of true British subjects as shown by this quote: "We must agree with those who have declared that the public good of this kingdom requires that some restraint should be laid on the unnatural increase of Blacks imported into it". This quote was synonymous of the feelings evoked by the emerging Black presence.[10].[11]This line of thought went all the way up to the highest level of the empire, namely Queen Elizabeth I when she ordered the deportation of "…A great number of Negroes and Blackamores which carried into the realm"[12]. Similarly on April 5th 1723, the 'London Daily

---

[10] Lone, Edward, *Candid Reflections*…. London, 1771, cited. James *Walvin The Black Presence* pg 7
[11] Walvin, James (1971) *The Black Presence*, London: Orbach & Chambres, p61
[12] Fryer, P – *'Staying Power – A History of Black People In Britain'*. Pluto Press 1984

Journal' reported on the influx of Black people in the country and the fear of being "swamped" by them:

" 'tis said there is a great number of Blacks come daily into the city, so that 'tis thought in a short time, if they not be suppress'd, the city will swarm with them".[13]

There is a legacy of English racial attitudes towards the Negro and the Black man that is also rooted deeply in the European age of expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and finds its origins in misunderstandings, fears, fantasies, and commercial exploitation of the colonies.

Fig. 5 BNP Protest

[13] Dabydene, David (1985) Hogarth's Blacks – Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art. London: Dongaroo Press

The fear of being swamped by a growing number of Black people has stayed with certain parts of the white community from the 1500s until the present day. This fear was expressed by the anti-Black-rioters in Liverpool in 1919 and 1948 and by right wing extremists in the 1950s and 60s; Margaret Thatcher reinforced it in the late 1970s, It has also been exploited to galvanise white support by Conservative Members of Parliament in the 1980s and the 1990s and of course more recently by more extremist groups like the BNP (fig. 5), the National Front and in general by right wing media propaganda. Countless examples thus shows how the Black man has always been a scapegoat for society's problems, both past and present. For, as we look at the Black presence from the slave trade to present day and the images that reflect their presence, we see whilst there has been some change in how Black people are perceived, the underlying constructs are still very strong highly prevalent. Perhaps in some ways, the present day popular urban youth culture perceptions, which will be looked at in depth further on, have precipitated a return to the entrenched perceptions and stereotypes of the past, some of which arose from the slave trade or the 'Triangular Trade'. It was at this point many stereotypes were constructed and maintained using an array of different strategies.

The development of British colonies in the 'New World' in the 17th century was to be the basis for the expanding Black population in Britain of that time and the further entrenchment of fears and fantasies after Britain's first encounters with these very different people and cultures. From 1655,

when the British secured Jamaica as a colony and it became a major clearinghouse for slaves, the Black population in Britain began to grow.[14] By 1760, Britain's Black population was estimated at between 20,000 and 40,000 and their presence was fully evident in the visual culture of the time.[15] The Englishman could neither deny nor ignore the Black presence, for wherever he went there would be an image of Blacks on signboards, trade signs. In addition, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Black people were a common feature of British society, and were chronicled in the work of Hogarth and in that of other eighteenth century painters. His work showed a true awareness of the Black presence as he had the foresight to show their existence in his work.[16]

In the visual culture of this time, Black people, or the 'other', were depicted as footmen, coachmen, pageboys, soldiers, sailors, and musicians, actors, prostitutes, beggars, prisoners, pimps, highway robbers, street sellers, and other negative characters (fig. 6). This is evident in *Hogarth's Four Times of Day Noon*, shows a potentially dangerous and highly inflammatory scene. The Black man is groping the white female in public. Such open sexual advances were considered crude, dangerous, and somewhat animalistic. The fact that a black man is touching a white woman would be seen as highly dangerous since it not only defies sexual norms, but

---

[14] Walvin, James (1971) Walvin *The Black Presence,* London: Orbach & Chambres, p62
[15] white, Lenford Anthony (1997) *Slavery: An Introduction to The African Holocaust*, Liverpool: Grovsvenor Print, p62
[16] Dabydeen, David (1985) *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art,* Manchester: Dangaroo Press, p11

it also crosses the racial divide and on another level was symbolic of an overt attack on empire and the foundations of imperialism. [17]

Fig. 6 William *Hogarth's Four Times of Day Noon* (1738)

[17] Dabydeen, David (1985) *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art,* Manchester: Dangaroo Press, p. 51

Such images only served to reinforce negative stereotypes of the Black and further heighten the endemic fear that is still so prevalent. Such works reflected this mentality and acted as a means to keep Blacks in bondage. These misconceptions lead to the Black being regarded as being, violent, animalistic, inhuman, and therefore separate from white society, thus enabling further denigration of the Black and reinforcement of colonial ideologies of control.

As mentioned earlier, Blacks were present in every facet of British life, and their presence and profile were very much raised by the visual culture of the time. In this context, the Black was shown at both ends of the society's spectrum. They were often portrayed as alien figures of solitude in an aristocratic environment. Hogarth's *Wollaston Family* (fig. 7) shows this quite clearly with the Black presented as a silent background figure with no voice and essentially as having no place in society, essentially unnoticed. For this reason, Blacks became a part of their owner's property, an accessory, giving them the rights to enslave them and to do as they wished. This was partly due to the rapid rise of the middle class. Members of the middle class sought to emulate the aristocracy and having a Black slave rapidly became the symbol of their elevated place in society, which would also in turn reflect the colonial business interests of that person.

In the *Wheatley Family Group* (fig. 8), we see yet another negative representation of the Black, where once again, the Black is separate from the white elite. Here the Black is placed to the far left of the picture as

opposed to being relegated to the background. It is interesting to note at this point that the Black is placed on the same level as the dog in the foreground of the painting.

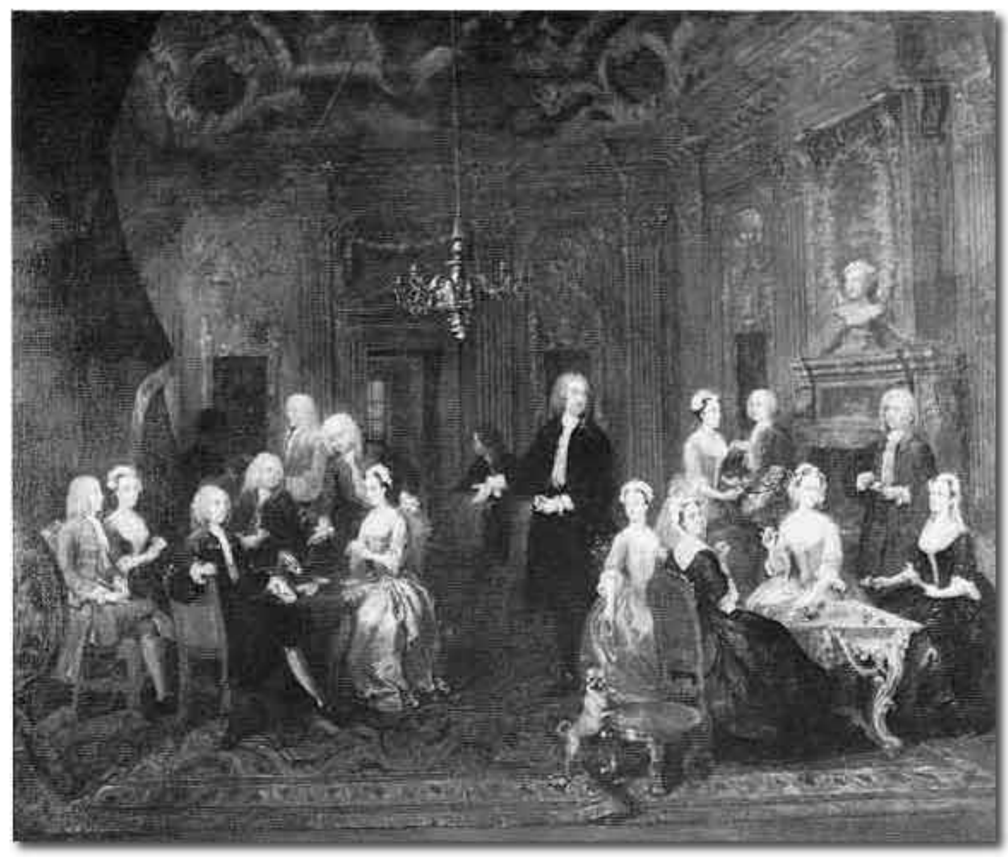


Fig 7 William Hogarth's *Wollaston Family* (1730)

In fact, on closer inspection, it becomes apparent that the dog has a greater importance in the scheme of the picture. The dog is depicted with more detail and is shown as socialising with the white family members. The Black is presented as mute, with features that are blurred and almost indistinguishable. This was quite a common construct that sent out a very powerful message about the social hierarchy, with the white person being superior and the Black man being relegated to being an inferior creature,

further negating the Black as the ‘other’, hoping for and demanding his master’s attention and acceptance.

Fig 8 *Wheatley, Family Group* (1775)

As mentioned earlier, in the nineteenth century the work of anthropologist and ethnologists in particular the pseudo-sciences and a particular one known as physiognomy, which involves using the facial features to judge somebody’s character or temperament, further reinforced the notion of Blacks as inferior. Physiognomy was very much linked to the work of the ‘race scientists’ who made associations between the Black and animals, a construct that was devised to justify the cruel treatment of fellow human beings, therefore attributing inferiority or superiority to people on the

basis of their racial characteristics and biological traits.[18] Anthropologists of the time redefined the meaning of ‘savagery’ during colonialism, by defining it as one of the stages of evolution: primitivism – savagery – barbarism – civilisation. Savages in this scheme were just a little higher than primates and of course, it was the Blacks who were categorised as being ‘savages’.[19]

The Theorists served as a way of serving imperial management of such societies at different stages of development. Primitive was equated with being childlike and the mentally ill, leading to the emergence of primitivism and subsequent representations of the Black presence. Such perceptions were reinforced by the accounts from travellers who reported sightings of chimpanzees and gorillas in the early 1700s. These comparisons formed part of the changing climate of opinions, with these frequent representations of Africans as being like animals.[20] There can be no doubt that slavery as an institution would not have been possible without the ideologies that justified such inhumane actions and the visual culture that presented these ideas as fact. It would have been impossible for Europeans to enslave so many Africans and maintain public support, unless there was a way of sanctioning what was a brutal and murderous trade in human lives. Slavery was essentially made workable by first reducing those who were to be enslaved to a subspecies, to something less than human. This was important to increase imperialistic power and colonial domination. Therefore, the visual

---

[18] For further background information on Pieter Camper see Bindman, David (2002) *Ape to Apollo*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, pp202-209
[19] Bindman, David (2002) *Ape to Apollo*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, p. 12
[20] Long, Edward (1774) *The History of Jamaica*, London, II, p336 cited in Bindman, David (2002) *Ape to Apollo*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, pp152, 168

representation of the Black presence in this manner and context became of imperative importance to the survival of colonial rule and the affirmation of its implicit constructs.

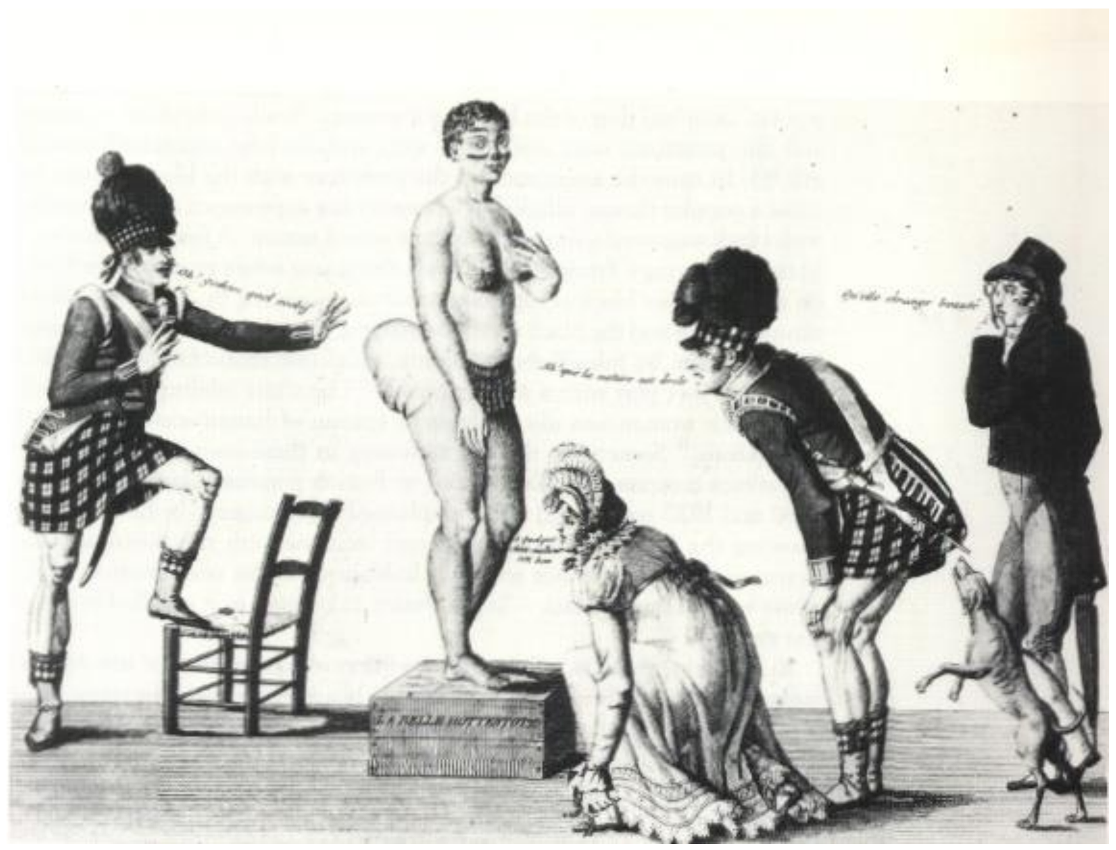


Fig 9 Illustrated Post card *La Belle Hottentote* (1800)

A prime example of the effects and how such ideologies were enforced by the visual representation of the time, can be seen in prints dating from the early nineteenth century that depict a Khoisan Woman named Sarah Baartman from South Africa (fig. 9). Sarah Baartman was born in 1789. She was working as a slave in Cape Town when she was "discovered" by British ship's doctor William Dunlop, who persuaded her to travel with him to England. We'll never know what she had in mind when she

stepped on board of her own free will on a ship for London. Nevertheless, it is clear what Dunlop had in mind, to display her as a "freak", a "scientific curiosity", and make money from these shows, some of which he promised to give to her. Sarah Baartman had unusually large buttocks and genitals, and in the early 1800s, Europeans were arrogantly obsessed with their own superiority, and with proving that others, particularly Blacks, were inferior and oversexed. Sarah Baartman's physical characteristics, not unusual for Khoisan women, although her features were larger than normal, were "evidence" of this prejudice, and she was treated like a freak exhibit in London.

Racism gained a firm foothold in the 1600s with the birth of such European sciences mentioned earlier. For it made it possible to prove scientifically that Black people were both different and inferior. This point was later argued in the work of natural scientists and philosophers such as Edmund Kant, David Hume, John Locke, and Edward Long. Hume argued in 1800s that Black people were "naturally inferior to Whites…",[21] with Whites having the monopoly on civilisation, art, science, and talent. After all, African society was perceived, as a non-society not having its own history and culture, for it was certainly not theirs after colonisation.

The visual culture was therefore a perfect vehicle to peddle such powerful propaganda and ideologies that are still very active today as explained later in this paper. Images of Black people have been employed by every type of advertisement to increase the appeal of their products.

[21] Bindman, David (2002) *Ape to Apollo*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, pp11, 28-46

These advertisements directed primarily at the white consumer have been born out of a definite history of enslavement and colonisation...[22]

Enslavement and colonialism had ensured the subjugation of African and Asian people. Advertisers, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have pictured this as willing servitude. The culturally accepted hierarchy of white over Black legitimised the exploitation of one for the benefit of the 'other'. Advertising images tried to sanitise the pain and suffering of Black people by presenting them as happy in their servitude, both in the fields and in the home. Colonialism is recalled in the PG Tips image of the Indian tea picker. A similar image is seen in an Empire Marketing Board poster of the late 1920's and newspaper advertisements like this one below (fig 10).

Fig 10 *The Illustrated London News* (Dec. 1. 1894)

[22] Bindman, David (2002) *Ape to Apollo*, London: Reaktion Books Ltd, pp212-213

Fig 11 Oxfam Africa Famine Poster (2005)

Africans were degraded even more than other subjugated people were. They were seen as inferior to both the Arab and the Indian, Africans were cast in the position of children. Colonial power relations appeared legitimate when reflected in the accepted hierarchy of the British family. The African face was not only represented as child-like, but also often distorted beyond all reality and once again dehumanised to form logos. In the social

sphere, these images emerged through the construction of the happy dancing minstrel and the ‘Golly Wog’ with deliberately Blackened skin and enlarged mouths.[23] The Golliwog is the least known of the major anti-Black caricatures in the United States from the early 1900’s. It was also popular in England, and is found on a variety of items including postcards, jam jars, paperweights, brooches, and wallets. For the past four decades, Europeans have debated whether the Golliwog is a lovable icon or a racist symbol.

Sadly, this is still very much a recurrent theme that still prevails today through the subservient representations and ideas of the ‘Third World’, waiting for help from the dynamic West. Designed to raise money many of these advertisements deny their subject any dignity. Helpless eyes stare out at us, underlined by text that suggests the ‘Victims’ are not just powerless but inactive in their situation as shown in this Oxfam poster (fig 11). Each famine is described as a ‘natural disaster’ and the poverty of Africa and Asia is legitimised by an image of them as infertile while not fully addressing the real cause. Advertising has also exploited different markets and racist representations as simply new lifestyles.

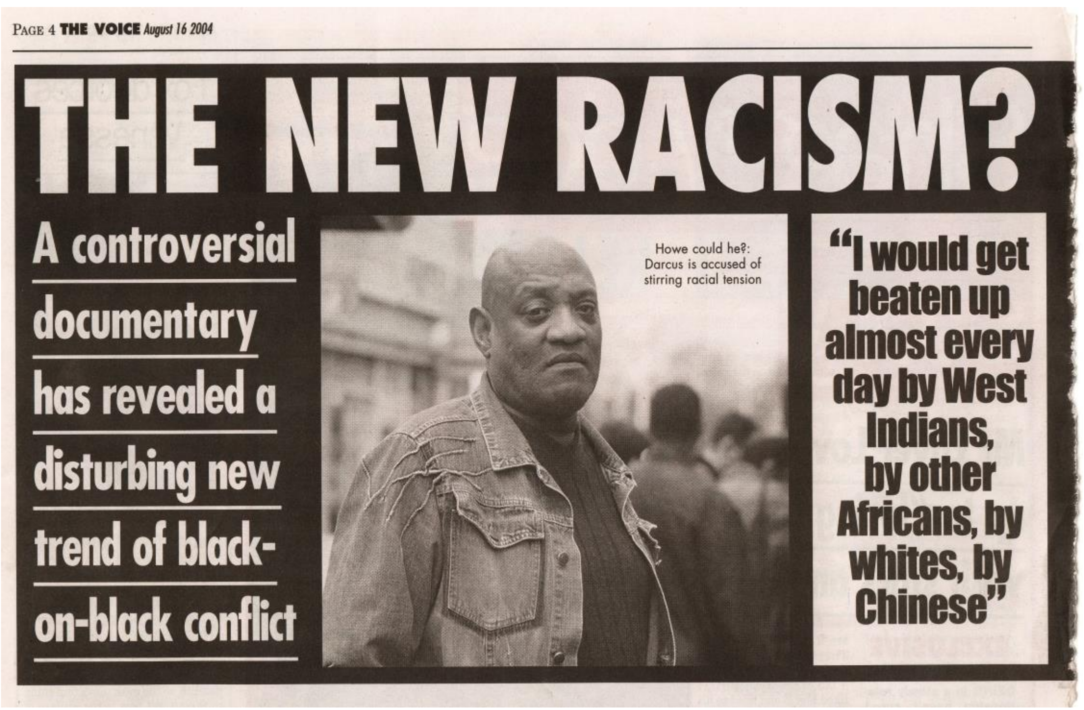
Many of the dominant stereotypes mentioned appear amplified in images of the Black male presented as a violent, dangerous threat to white society (law and moral order). The contradiction lies in the way in which mythology of "Black macho" has developed in response to the fact that Black men have had to resort to certain forms of force in order to defend

---

[23] white, Lenford Anthony (1997) *Slavery: An Introduction to The African Holocaust,* Liverpool: Grovsvenor Print, p135

themselves and their communities, a point raised by a documentary by Darcus Howe, which highlights this type of behavior (fig 12).

Racism has defined African peoples as having only bodies and no minds: Black men and women exist as muscle-machines and thus the super-exploitation of slavery could be justified. The logic of this is alive today in schools where teachers encourage Black kids to take up sports, assuming that they are academic underachievers.



PAGE 4 THE VOICE August 16 2004

THE NEW RACISM?

A controversial documentary has revealed a disturbing new trend of black-on-black conflict

Howe could he?: Darcus is accused of stirring racial tension

"I would get beaten up almost every day by West Indians, by other Africans, by whites, by Chinese"

Fig. 12 *The Voice* article about Darcus Howe documentary (August. 16. 2004)

However, Black people have also entered sport in order to make economic gains and move out of the ghetto: a figure like Mohammed Ali subverted the image of the "all brawn, no brains" Black boxer to become an ambassador of Black pride. For most young Black men, power is acquired by stylising their bodies over space and time in such a way that their bodies

reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others. To be 'bad' is good, not simply because it subverts the language of the dominant white culture, but also because it imposes a unique kind of order for young Black men on their own distinctive chaos and solicits an attention that makes others pull back with some trepidation. This young Black male style is a form of self-identification and resistance in a hostile culture; it also is an instance of machismo identity ready for violent encounters.[24]"

New Nation

MEET THE ETHNIC MINORITY MEDIA AWARD WINNERS

All white on the night: EMMA winners included (from l): Vanessa Feltz, David Beckham, Tom Cruise and Greg Dyke

Glam glam glam show has turned into sham sham sham say critics

Angela Foster

THE ETHNIC Multicultural Media Awards have been branded a 'joke' after David Beckham, Tom Cruise, Vanessa Feltz and Greg Dyke all picked up gongs.

Beckham was named joint Sporting Personality of the Year with Thierry Henry at the star-studded event, set up seven years ago to celebrate multicultural talent.

Beckham's award comes after last year's documentary *Black Like Beckham*, which controversially claimed the footballer was an icon to black youngsters.

Cruise won Best Film Actor, Feltz was named Best Radio News Journalist and former BBC Director General Dyke was Media Personality of the Year.

There was shock as the winners were announced at the glitzy ceremony, hosted by journalist Rageh Omaar at London's Grosvenor House Hotel last Monday.

Collecting her award Feltz said: 'I don't know if I've got this because I am Jewish or because I am going out with a lovely black man,' before lapsing into a replay of a conversation with her partner who she said had told her: 'Don't worry Vanessa, it's a black ting. Fix up!'

As she presented an award, Asian writer/actress Meera Syal remarked: 'I hope the BAFTAs and Comedy Awards return the favour.'

And *Bend It Like Beckham* director Gurinder Chadha, who presented the Best Film Actor Award, said: 'I'm sorry but where are all the brothers? Where is the black and Asian talent?'

Afterwards, many criticised the small number of black and Asian winners.

Simon Woolley of Operation Black Vote told *New Nation*: 'The inclusion of David Beckham, Tom Cruise and Greg Dyke as winners has ensured the ceremony has now become a joke.

'Bowing down to pressure from TV producers and sponsors for glam, glam, glam has turned the event into a sham, sham, sham!'

He added: 'The EMMAs came about because mainstream award ceremonies ignored black people. Now we can't even win our own awards. It's an insult to black talent.'

Piara Powar, director of football anti-racism campaign Kick It Out, slammed the decision to award Beckham, calling it an 'insult' to ethnic minorities.

He added: 'I can see how it gives the awards publicity but I don't see how it helps encourage youngsters from ethnic minorities. I don't think he'll understand why he got it.'

Broadcaster Henry Bonsu, a two-time EMMA winner, said: 'People wouldn't have had such a problem if the vast majority of awards had gone to black and Asian recipients.

'On the one hand, it's a fantastic event that gets bigger and bigger. But a lot of people are worried that while getting bigger it might lose touch with the original *raison d'être*.'

But organiser Bobby Syed defended the show, telling *New Nation*: 'EMMA is about promoting multicultural excellence and if you can only win an award based on the colour of your skin that's inverse racism.

'Tom Cruise is a very talented actor who went out of his way to make a film about Japanese culture. We are talking about promoting British multicultural society and David Beckham reflects that.

'All that EMMA is doing is evolving with regards to multicultural Britain. The EMMA finalists and winners have always been determined by the public.'

Less controversial winners included Lemar (Best British Music Act) and Sir Bill Morris, who picked up a Lifetime Achievement Award.

BBC documentary, *The Secret Policeman*, which exposed racism at a police training school, also picked up an award.

Fig 13 *The Nation*. The appropriation of Black identities at EMMA's Awards (31, May, 2004)

[24] West, Cornel (2001) Race Matters, London: Beacon Press, pp.120-122

The 1980s and 90s have been an intense period of contestation for Black popular cultural production in the US and Britain. In the wake of the collapse of mass 'Black Nationalist' politics and an increasing sophistication of white-supremacist economics, cultural and political assault, Black cultural work has undergone complex political economic transformations. Rapid and contradictory transformation in the political economy and cultural operations of Black artists has at once decimated and facilitated diversity and creativity of work.

Central to these transformations is an appropriation of certain currents of Black culture by mainstream corporate media, particularly currents of underground hip-hop culture as shown in this article for *The Nation*, White mainstream celebrities are eager to assume a pseudo-Black identity to increase both popularity and financial gain. Because of this major minority events like the MOBO's and the EMMA's have been appropriated and no longer serve the minority communities they were developed to serve, a point made in this article(fig 13). A specific variety of malicious, misogynistic, and homophobic rap has been successfully marketed to young, white audiences, producing lucrative profits for a handful of Black artists and white music company investors. This current of mass-marketed rap often presents a narrow and homogenizing understanding of the Black experience, as we can see from this front page spread (fig. 14)

In addition, another negative strand in the process is comprised of homophobic and anti-gay attitudes, which allows us to examine the ways

that such definitions of Black manhood have limited the agenda of Black politics at a collective level. During the "Black Power", revolution in the 1960s slogans of "Black is Beautiful" and "Black Power" sought to reject the inheritance of the "inferiority complex" and clear the ground for the cultural reconstruction of a positive Black self-image, to a point of being successful.

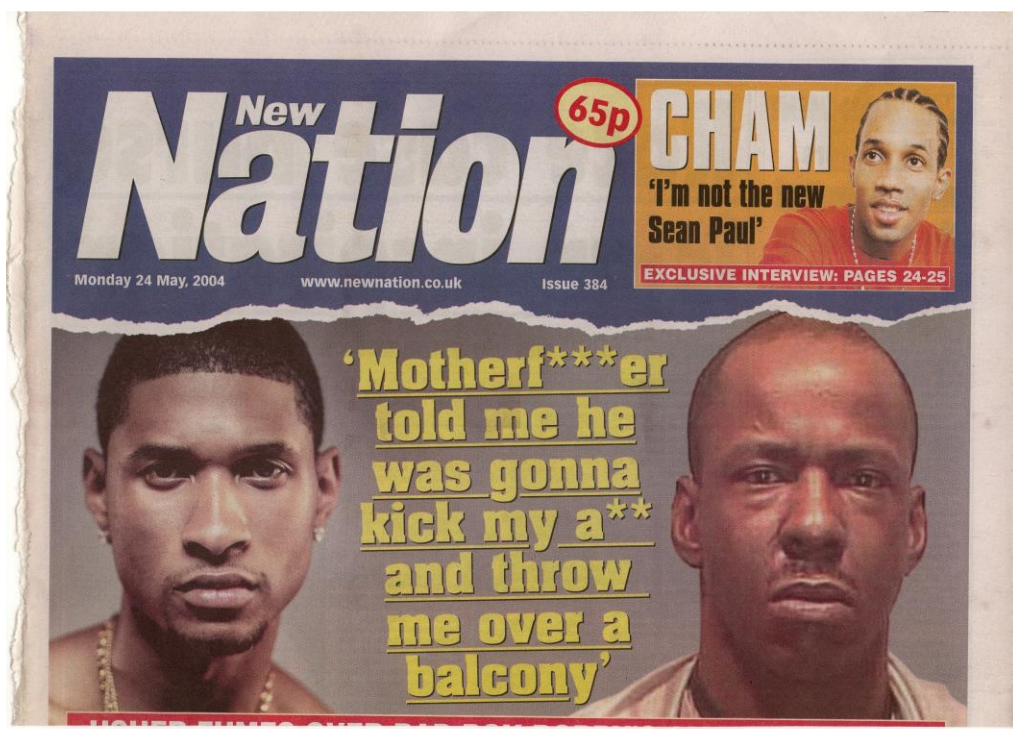

New Nation
65p
Monday 24 May, 2004
www.newnation.co.uk
Issue 384
CHAM
'I'm not the new Sean Paul'
EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: PAGES 24-25
'Motherf***er told me he was gonna kick my a** and throw me over a balcony'

Fig. 14 Usher and Bobby Brown, Hip Hop artists. Nation article

This was however at the expense of Black women, gay men and Lesbians, who are often ostracized and sometimes forced out of their homes. This article highlights the plight of those who have had to seek asylum here in the UK (fig. 15). It was because of the hidden sexism and implicit homophobia of the agenda of revolutionary Nationalism, as defined by key figures like Eldrige Cleaver that Black women organised

autonomously in the 1970, who said the followings: '….masculinity, castrated him in the centre of his burning, skull, and when he submits to this change and takes the white man for his lover…he turns the razor edge of hatred against 'blackness' – upon himself, what he is and all those who look like him, remind him of himself.' Revolutionary Black Nationalism implied a very male-oriented 'macho' notion of struggle.[25]

The Observer 20 October 2002

Jamaican gays flee to save their lives

Homophobia runs so deep in society that asylum can be the only chance of survival

Fig. 15 The Black gay plight in Jamaica

Another example of Black Nationalism's castigation of the Black gay man arrives in the form of the 'Million Mile March', orchestrated overwhelmingly by Louis Farrakhan who expressed the most despicable, anti Semitic, racist, sexist and homophobic attitudes. On this momentous occasion, that would have projected a stronger message of unity if 'all black men came together'; gay men were segregated and now allowed to attend (fig. 16).

[25] Cleaver, Eldrige (1969) Soul on Ice. London: Granada, pp100-101

This emphasis on open ‘racial’ confrontation not only ignores the more subtle forms of resistance Black people have forged in the African diaspora, but also de-politicises the conflicts and contradictions, especially around sexuality and gender, internal to the community. Like the Black man, gay men are presented as embodying threat and eliciting desire. Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien both argue that such representations have been developed as a direct consequence of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.[26]

Fig. 16 The Million Man March. October. 16th. 1995

[26] Mercer, Kobena (1994) *Welcome To The Jungle*, London: Routledge, pp101-103

Black people are partly responsible for the persistence of prejudice and racism, as some have chosen to conform or play up to the stereotypes projected onto them. As a result, the Black sector of the population is daily confronted by the negative consequences of these images, which are partly of their own making. The stereotypes presented in such images shows very clearly that the balance of power has not shifted since their inception during colonial dominance. So when will the representation of the Black presence change to show the Black people in a way that does not emphasise the colonially constructed idea of difference? A question many of the colonial diasporas seek to answer, as they try to claim back their identities, whatever they may be.

2

Dialectics of Power Defined through the European/American Gaze

Minority groups, that is, people who are in any way different from the norm, are frequently exposed to what Stuart Hall calls "binary forms of representation", invoking categories of them/us, Black/white, good/bad, ugly/attractive, and are often required to be both things at the same time.[27] This can be seen as a continuation of the traditional sense of representation as symbolising an abstract idea; for example, the representations of Black people, can be viewed as the representation of white people's ideas about them, or as objects of a normative white gaze.

For example, this picture of Linford Christie holding a Union Jack, having won the men's 100 metres Olympic gold medal, Barcelona 1992 (fig. 17). The picture for *The Sun* newspaper shows the athlete at the peak of his career doing a lap of honour, but it also represents a myth about nationality, race, and otherness. Thus, Linford Christie the person is also Linford Christie the 'symbol.' Which one dominates and which one is submissive depends upon the point of view/gaze of the spectator. Christie's image came to be associated with a sexual connotation, another form of racial stereotyping (his tight-fitting Lycra shorts were said to reveal the size and shape of his genitals — his "lunchbox"). *The Sun* newspaper focused, the morning after Christie won a gold medal at the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 on this detail.

---

[27] Hall, Stuart (ed) (1997) *Representation. Cultural Representations and signifying Practices*, London: Open University, p230.

Asked about his reaction to the headline Christie said: “I felt humiliated. My first instinct was that it was racist, the stereotyping of a Black man. I can take a good joke, but it happened the day after I won the greatest accolade an athlete can win. I do not want to be known for what I have got in my shorts I am a serious person.”[28]

Fig. 17 Representation. Cultural Representations and signifying Practices

[28] Hall, Stuart (ed) (1997) *Representation. Cultural Representations and signifying Practices*, London: Open University, p, 230.

Enacted in this picture of Linford Christie are dialectics of fear and fascination in colonial fantasy. Similar dialectics are evident in Robert Mapplethorpe's *Man in a Polyester Suit*, where such fantasies are re-inscribed by the centrality of the Black man's "monstrous" phallus. Both images objectify the Black subject into "otherness" by the size of his penis as it symbolises a threat to the secure identity of the white male ego. However the Mapplethorpe image is slightly different as it has a two-dimensional frame of the photo that contains the phobic object, thus making safe the homosexual male viewer in his desire but has at the same time been able to indulge that commonplace white curiosity about the nature of Black sexuality, in particular Black male sexuality.

Kobena Mercer's essay about the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe further explored the sexual aspect of the representation of Black males. He begins to answer some of the questions raised by the conundrum of Black sexuality.

For this reason, the work of Kobena Mercer and other theorists and artists will form a central role in understanding the hidden meanings behind the work of Robert Mapplethorpe and representations of the Black gay male that have hindered our perception of Black sexuality in the context of identity politics. Mapplethorpe's works may appear simple and easy to read at a first glance, but further investigation reveals them to be complex.

Robert Mapplethorpe was at first a photographer who mostly took photos of himself and his friends, especially singer Patti Smith, with whom

the bisexual Mapplethorpe also had a sexual relationship. He became friends with queer pop art phenomenon Andy Warhol, who introduced him to Manhattan's gay underground and urged him to further his career by finding a mentor from the city's elite. Throughout the 1970s, he photographed socialites and artists, porn stars and gay activists. Other favourite subjects included children, the male body, and flowers and example being *The Orchid* (fig. 18). By the end of the decade his interests were becoming more sharply focused on subjects that aroused both his aesthetic and more importantly in the context of this paper, his sexual predilections including nude Black men, sadomasochism, or both.The gay content of Mapplethorpe's art was overtly political. By shocking the public with photographs like his Self Portrait shown here, he thought, he could sensitise them to gay issues. In this photograph, he presents himself in both a dominant and submissive role. This is in stark contrast to the images of black models, who are often placed in the submissive context, which reveals more about the active power dialectics in his work (fig. 19).

The artist said his point was "to transcend the subject" to a point of perfection, no matter where he aimed his camera: "Whether it's a cock or a flower, I'm looking at it in the same way".[29] But this begs the question; If he was looking at all subjects in the same way, with equal objectivity, why was the Black male subject singled out as an object of perfection and not the white male subject? For this reason, Mercer's discussed Mapplethorpe's Black males, not as the product of the artist's authorship, but as artefacts

[29] Kobena Mercer (1994) *Welcome to the Jungle*, London: Routledge, p. 17

that said something about how white people look at Black people, and how Black sexuality is perceived as something different and excessive.[30]

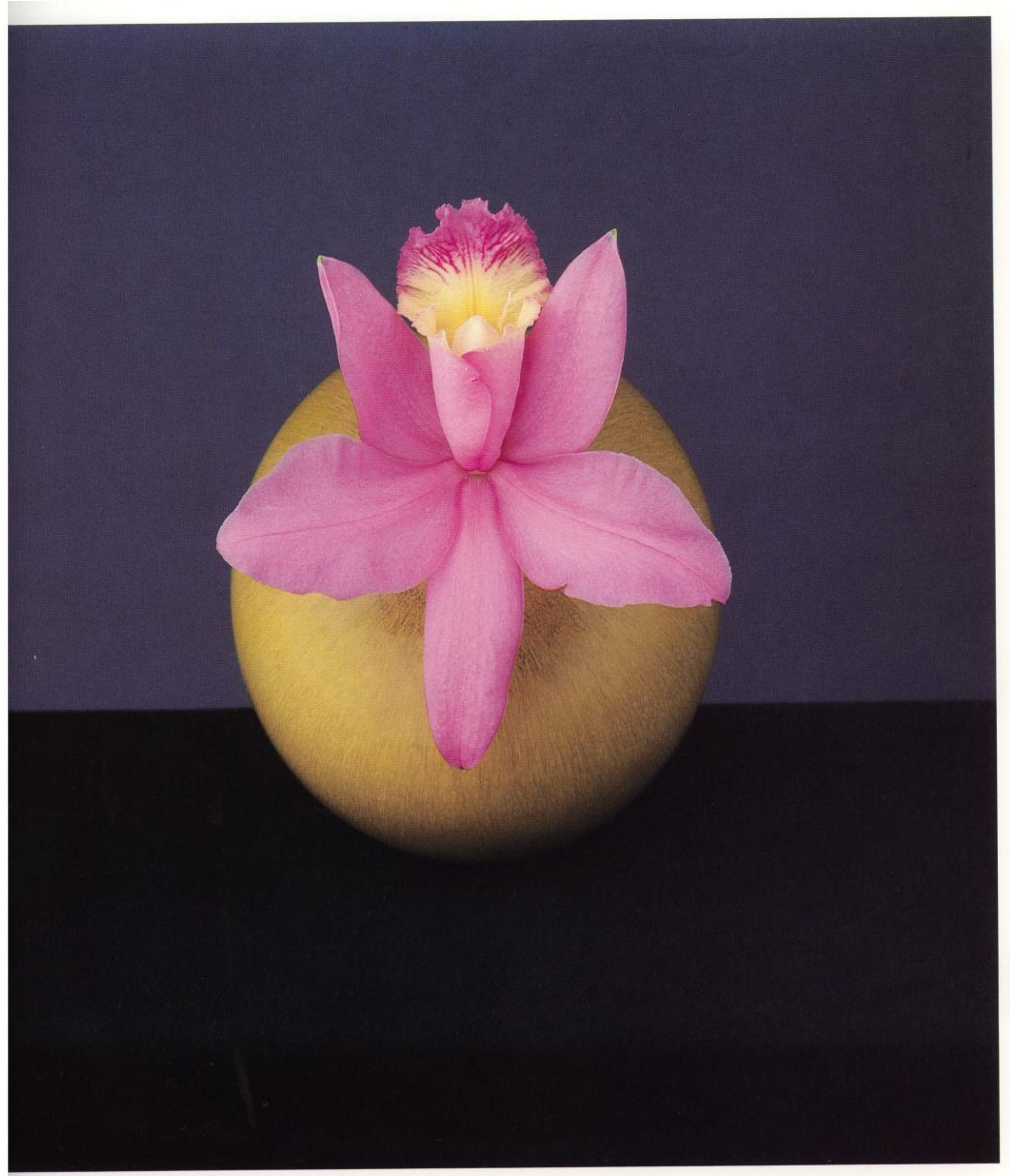


Fig. 18 Robert Mapplethorpe. The Orchid (1988)

He argued that photography is primarily about the act of looking and quotes Laura Mulvey's observation, that men are the bearers of the "look" whilst

---

29 Mercer, Kobena (1994) Welcome to the Jungle, London: Routledge, p. 176

women are its passive object.[31] Mercer observes that Mapplethorpe substitutes the socially "inferior" Black male for the woman as the passive object of the 'look' and draws upon the tradition of the nude in Western art, whose conventional subject is the naked female body, to further emasculate his Black subjects.[32] In substituting the naked Black male body for the woman Mercer argues that Mapplethorpe is serving a colonial fantasy, the sexual objectification of the ‘racial other,’ but taming the threat Black sexuality poses to the white male ego by presenting it through the codes of the Western nude tradition.[33]

Mapplethorpe's photographs blatantly reinforce the stereotype that the 'essence' of the Black man is his sexuality, which makes him a direct threat to the male ego and therefore a source of great fear. Stuart Hall quotes Franz Fanon’s observation that white people's obsession with the sexuality of Black people "fixates the Black man at the level of his genitals", so that one is "no longer a Negro but a penis".[34] This observation is present in Mapplethorpe’s *Man in a Polyester Suit* photograph (fig. 20). Mapplethorpe's gaze is particularly noteworthy for its cool detachment even when recording scenes of intense sexual activity. Scenes of intense sado-masochistic content show no facial expression or emotion. Likewise, his depictions of the Black male nudes are also devoid of any emotional content, objectified and subjugated. This technique greatly assists with the dehumanization of the

---

[31] Ibid. pp201/2
[32] Ibid, p. 176
[33] Ibid, p. 176
[34] Hall, Stuart (ed) (1997) *Representation. Cultural Representations and signifying Practices*, London: Open University, p230.

Black subject. The artist typically presents masculine bodies as objectified icons of desire. Mapplethorpe's objectification of the Black male body has been particularly controversial, especially since the publication of *The Black Book* in 1986.

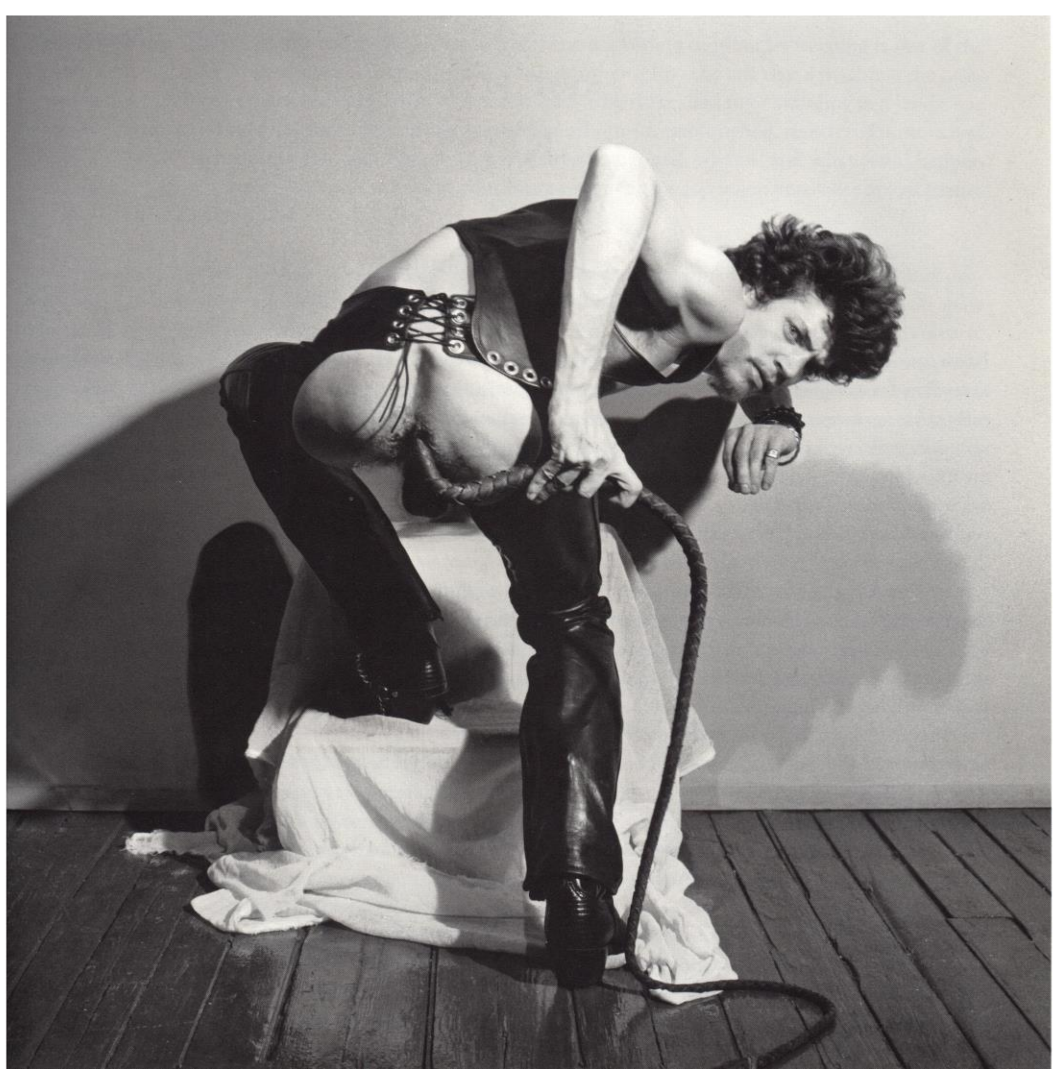


Fig. 19 Robert Mapplethorpe. Self Portrait. (1988)

The controversial photograph *Man in a Polyester Suit* (1980), features a Black man in a slightly wrinkled three-piece suit. The image is cropped both at the chest and above the knees. Hanging from the suit's fly is a large, semi-erect, uncircumcised penis.

Here, apart from the models hands, the penis alone identifies the man as Black.[35] Two photographic codes, cropping, and lighting, along with the subject matter create the meaning in this photograph. The cropping code robs the subject of his identity, so that he becomes a stereotype exemplifying white people's unwholesome interest in Black male sexuality. The polyester material of the suit emphasised in the title connotes cheapness, signifying availability.[36] Unlike the Christie photograph, there is no way we can separate the presence of the person from the symbol here. The visual codes have denied us access to the person, whose image is purely mythological and whose body is a mere personification of an idea. The racial dimension to the photographs is unacceptable as the aesthetic objectification reduces the Black male bodies to just visual things and in my opinion serves no other purpose than to further exploit the Black male, whilst enhancing the name of the white gay male artist in the privileged world of photography. In this respect, we should acknowledge the collaborative relationship between the privileged white male artist on the margins of the avant-garde and the anonymous Black male models on the margins of the

---

[35] Mercer, Kobena (1994) Welcome to the Jungle, London: Routledge, p. 185

[36]Mercer, Kobena (1994) Welcome to the Jungle, London: Routledge, p. 185

late modern underclass. It may not have been equal, but in the specific historical context of the "imagined community" created by the new social movements over the past twenty years, the photographs can be read as a document of relations of mutuality under shared conditions of marginality.

Fig. 20 The Man in the Polyester Suit. (1980)

This is something Mapplethorpe alluded to when he remarked, "Most of the Blacks don't have health insurance and therefore can't afford AZT. They all died quickly, the Blacks. If I go through my Black Book, half of them are dead."[37] Knowing that his models were soon to become statistical victims of AIDS, put a new perspective on the photographs taken, as it makes them similar to a detactched and devouring record of a public lynching.

It is worth mentioning at this point the work of theorist David Marriott, who shows us why it has been so easy and acceptable to exploit the Black male. He also helps us to see another disturbing side of Mapplethorpe's representation of the Black male through his photographs. In his article on Mapplethorpe's photographs he reminds us that the

> "taking of photographs at mass lynching and the taking of body parts from the mutilated victim as a memento (being the most highly prized being the Black penis) seem to have been central to the ritualised ways of looking at the Black man's body. This was at the moment of its annihilation, particularly during the McCarthy era, marked by such atrocities as indiscriminate lynching of Black men for sexual offences, imagined or proven (fig.21)".[38]

---

[37] Ibid, pp. 193-4

[38] Marriott, David (1996) *Bordering on the Black Penis, in Textural Practice,* London Routledge, p9

Fig. 21 Public Lynching (July, 1935)

This history cannot easily be separated from the Mapplethorpe photographs of hooded and decapitated men, whose only sign of masculinity are their displayed penises. There is a very specific object that Mapplethorpe wants spectators to see, and he encourages a very specific way of seeing it, i.e. the cropping the technique which is used so effectively in *The Man in the Polyester Suite* and other photographs. This mode of presentation has the effect of presenting Black male genitalia as a trophy, almost signifying Mapplethorpe's conquest over a very powerful force.

Through this related article Marriott pushes us to consider the depths to which Black male bodies, dead and alive, in both European and American culture, is entrenched in the historical and distorted fantasies of the white imagination it served and presented in Mapplethorpe's work as mentioned earlier. Similar to Toni Morrison's analysis of the Euro-American literary imagination and its construction of the African-American in *Playing in the Dark*,[39] Marriott contends that the Black male body is one of the primary objects of European and Euro-American cultural discourse. Such lynching photographs as mentioned earlier, for Marriott, force us into a world of white fantasy. He establishes an intriguing, problematic nexus via photography, lynching, homoeroticism, and necrophilia. In a perceptive analysis of the work of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, Marriott demonstrates the way in which Mapplethorpe's photographs of Black men, many of which draw us to the genitalia, continue a troubling cultural discourse on the Black male body, a discourse continued in the media propaganda.

In *Hooded Black Man* (1980), for example, a photograph in which a nude Black man is donned with a hood reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan, Marriott reveals the relationship between "scopophilia and Negrophobia," reminding us of the deeply disturbing white preoccupation with Black genitalia before and after death (fig. 22). "To look," according to Marriott, "as a Black male spectator, at such an image, is to be aware of a leash around

---

[39] Morrison, Toni, (1993) *Playing In The Dark : Whiteness and the Literary Imagination,* London: Harvard University Press

your neck, one formed by racial fear and sadistic fantasy and the terrifying-satisfying spectacle of castration".[40]

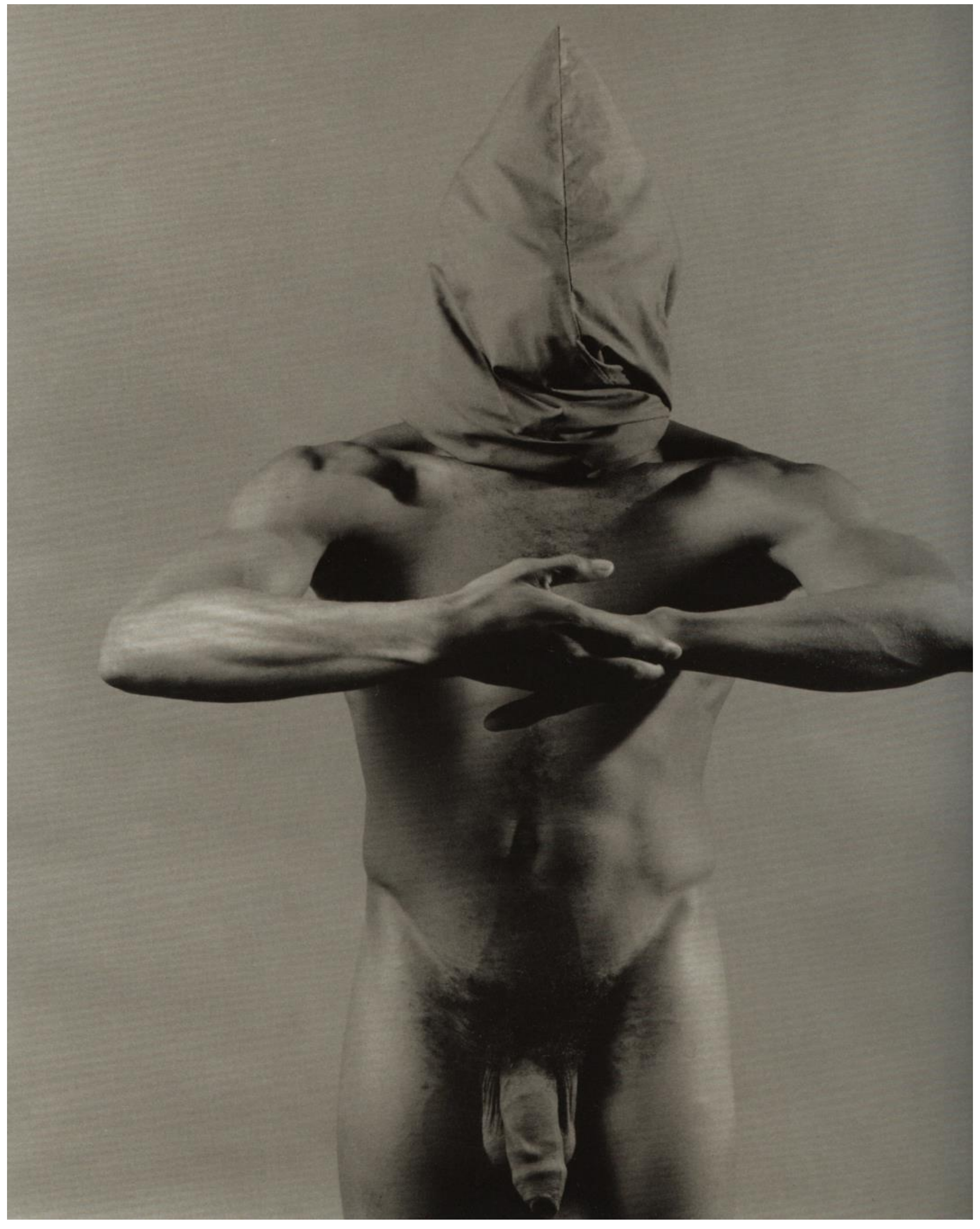


Fig. 22 Robert Mapplethorpe *The Hooded Black Man*

[40] Marriott, David (1996) *Bordering on the Black penis in Textural Practice,* London Routledge, p30

This realisation compels Marriott to ask two questions about the construction of male subjectivity in Mapplethorpe's photographs: (1) whether or not his hooded and decapitated Black male nudes represent "a recuperative act of identification taking place with white racial fears, in whose irruptive and violent filial preservation of racial purity, sadistic fantasies of incorporation and acts of castration were repeatedly manifested in the unveiling of the Black penis as a threat no longer hidden," and (2) whether or not they represent "a form of disremembrance revealing the impossibility of keeping historical images of Black masculinity and white racial anxieties clearly distinct."[41]

Even in our contemporary context, we cannot escape the white preoccupations with the Black phallus. To prove how much the Black phallus bedevils the white psyche, Marriott offers a case study of the serial killer and cannibalist, Jeffrey Dahmer. Having killed scores of Black and some Asian men, Dahmer's sordid fascination with the Black body, in both homosexual and masochistic terms, as well as his detailed photographs of his victims both alive and dead/dismembered are an extreme, though convincing examples of “understanding the camera as a type of devouring eye” (fig. 23)[42]

While Marriott generates a considerable amount of discomfort in casting Dahmer as an artist, he reveals the aesthetic and homoerotic gaze that both Mapplethorpe and Dahmer invoke as white, gay men. For me,

---

[41] Ibid, p. 40
[42] Ibid, p. 34

Marriott proves himself critically astute as he unveils the frightening complexity of the white male gaze and its fixation on the Black male body in a language that reflects both terror and titillation. Marriott's out-look, though contentious and difficult to accept, is refreshing as he tries to distance himself from the longstanding cultural ritual of Black male objectification through his interrogation of cultural images and social rituals, therefore making an important contribution to the ongoing struggle of Black male self-emancipation.

Fig. 23 Jeffrey Dahmers who photographed his victims. He confessed to killing 17 in 1991

There is however, an antithesis to the concepts presented by Marriot found in the rhetoric of Black resistance founded on a Black male

emasculation. This is a form of attraction to masculinity whose precepts are nationalist. If one also considers the political and sexual status of death or its defiance in the national struggles of Black people in South Africa for example, it becomes interesting how nationalism has built over the years its rhetoric around such images of martyrdom. Significantly, the proliferation of snapshots of Steven Biko's naked dead body did as much to intensify opposition, as to assure conservative Whites that things were under control. Similarly, what authorities promoted as effective emasculation of Black men by stripping them naked and inspecting them, somehow became for certain Black subcultures (such as those in prisons or gangs) one of the few ways in which one's manhood could be tested. This point is further substantiated by the cases of the paratrooper Christopher Alder (1998), and Roger Sylvester (1999), men who died whilst in British custody with their body's stripped as shown in this article from *The New Nation* (fig. 24). Out of these cultures also emanated a form of male homosexual bonding whose reading requires acute attention to the wide and not often clear borders between hetero- and homosexuality.

Franz Fanon has also theorised the relationship between Black and white men as that based on anxiety on the part of the white heterosexual male to simultaneously possess and annihilate the Black man's penis, an argument similar to Marriot's. This anxiety, Fanon argues, are based on the racist fantasy that Black men have large penises that threaten white "womanhood." Regardless, I argue that in Mapplethorpe's photographs, with

their emphasis on the penis as the centre of masculinity and homoerotic desire, Fanon has been prophetic in his analysis, and his points made in the early 1950s have been substantiated by the other theorists mentioned.

'UNLAWFUL KILLING' COPS BACK ON BEAT

Sylvester family angry as police snub IPC

Orantes Moore

THE FAMILY OF a man who an inquest jury agreed had been unlawfully killed by police officers were left in shock last week after Scotland Yard announced that the cops who had been suspended following his death will be reinstated.

Roger Sylvester, a 30-year-old man from Tottenham, north London, died after going into a coma while being restrained by seven officers in 1999.

Last Thursday, after ignoring advice from the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPC), the deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Ian Blair, announced that the officers should be allowed to return to work.

The IPC had argued that the officers should remain suspended while the Crown Prosecution Service considered whether criminal charges should be brought against them and for a High Court judgment to be published.

However, Sir Ian said he was lifting the suspensions 'in the interests of the officers and the people of London'. His decision has angered Roger Sylvester's family and civil rights campaigners. Sylvester's brother, Bernard Renwick, told *New Nation* last week: 'We are bitterly disappointed that the Metropolitan Police has decided to lift the suspension of all the officers. The whole family is deeply distressed by this decision. What the Met are trying to do is pre-empt the judge's decision to quash the verdict. As a family we believe the decision is not in the public interest. Roger would not be dead if these police officers had not laid hands on him.'

In October 2003 an inquest jury agreed that Sylvester had been unlawfully killed because police had used unreasonable force and held him in a restraint position for too long.

The seven officers involved were suspended and they each sought a judicial review, backed by the Met. Earlier this month a High Court judge, Mr Justice Collins, suggested he would overturn the inquest verdict.

Since 1993 almost 80 African Caribbeans have died in police custody, a figure campaigners say is inexcusable.

Deborah Coles, co-director of Inquest, an organisation that provides advice on contentious deaths and their investigations, said last week: 'This outrageous decision once again sends the message that police officers involved in fatal restraint are above the law and families whose loved ones have died as a result of excessive and unlawful force can get no justice and accountability.'

Her comments were echoed by Nicola Williams of the IPC. She said last week: 'The decision to reinstate the officers is, in my opinion, premature. The Met consulted me before they took their decision.

'As a commissioner who practised as a barrister for 15 years, I advised them to wait a little longer for the actual judgment and also the decision of the CPS, who are reviewing the evidence as to whether or not criminal charges should be brought.'

Roger Sylvester: Police involved in his death are back at work

Fig. 24 Roger Sylvester found dead and stripped whilst in custody. *New Nation* (1999)

It may help at this point to know what Mapplethorpe had to say about his photographs. Mercer quotes Mapplethorpe from a 1988 BBC documentary:

> 'At some point, I started photographing Black men. It was an area that hadn't been explored intensively. If you went through the history of nude male

> photography, there were very few Black subjects. I found that I could take pictures of Black men that were so subtle, and the form was so photographical.'[43]

I am not questioning Mapplethorpe's intentions here, for even if we understood them, we must also remember that acts of re-reading are not necessarily bound up with the author's intentions. However, what I hope to show is that the effect of Mapplethorpe's staging of Black male bodies is to stage a reconstruction, or latent re-authenticated 'other', measured below the belt. This may not be Mapplethorpe's intent, but his photographs bear resemblance to those of the lynching period, and whoever else is attracted to them, they must recognise this.

Let us now examine the terms of Mapplethorpe's interest in the "area" that had not been "explored intensively," which, he found so "photographical." There seems to be nothing particularly subtle about a process in which Blacks are "photographical" because they are "an area that hadn't been explored." It is here that Mapplethorpe's judgmental stance is forcefully expressed, even when this is done with a moral positivism that conceals the colonial concepts such as "area," "explore" and "photographical." Thus, when Mercer later invokes the work of the Nigerian-British photographer, among others, as complimentary of Mapplethorpe's work, as Rotimi Fani-Kayode's (1955-1989) photographs are sensitive to the

---

[43] Mercer, Kobena(1993) *"Looking for Trouble,"* in The Lesbian and gay Studies Reader, eds. Henry Abelove et al, New York: Routledge, pp. 350-359

politics Mapplethorpe seems to avoid. Rotimi Fani-Kayode’s was one of the most important black photographers of the late twentieth century, exploring in his work themes of racial and sexual identity. Rotimi Fani-Kayode's Bronze Head can be read as a deliberate parody of Mapplethorpe's *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980), in which the penis, Mapplethorpe’s symbol of a virile Black masculinity, is replaced in Rotimi Fani-Kayode's photograph by a golden mask (fig. 25).

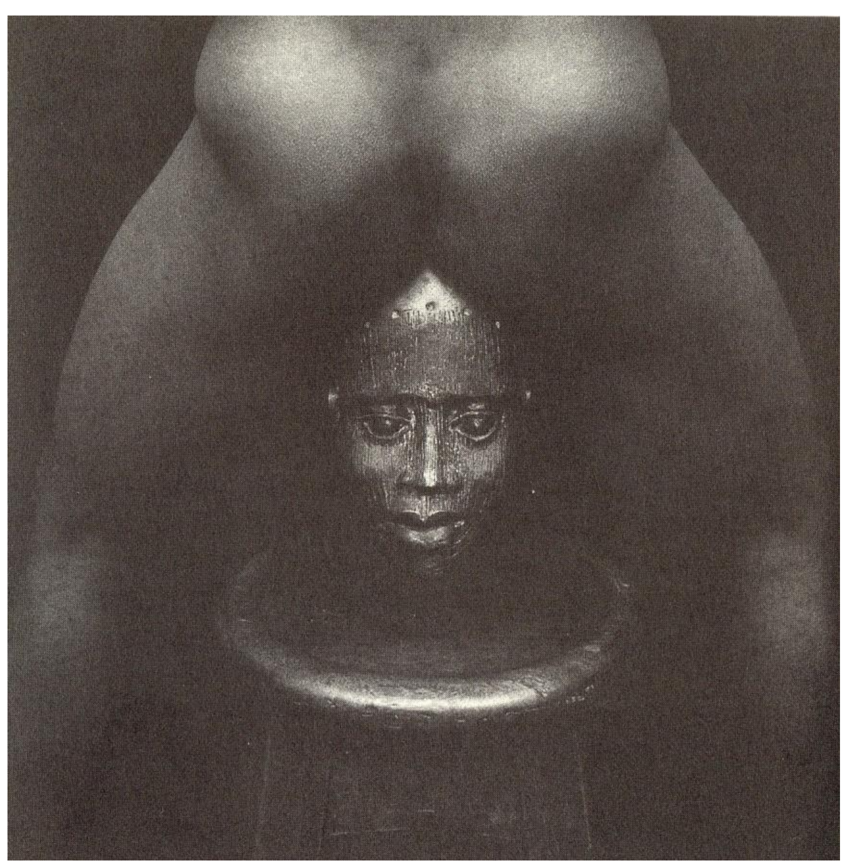


Fig. 25 Fani-Kayode's Bronze Head, (1987)

Rotimi Fani-Kayode's Bronze Head (1987) presents two apparently opposing images, one of a Nigerian bronze head and the other of the rear-end of a

nude Black man; the former represents African tradition (specifically, the Yoruba tradition which Kayode came from), the latter invokes gay erotica. The big African head seems to be penetrating the body while the body concurrently discharges the head, as if they were in a constantly fluctuating state of cultural and sexual traction and friction. This site of communion and confrontation, of possession and dismissal, integration and exile, is also a space of negotiation, a discontinuous inventive process of pollination, transplantation and transformation as in Rotimi Fani-Kayode's words "in matters of sexuality, in terms of geographical and cultural dislocation . . ."[44]

Mercer sees Mapplethorpe's photographs as contesting the ground that was thought rightfully to be heterosexist. In addition to this, on closer analysis of the passage, further issues rise to the surface and need to be addressed, not the least of which is the fact that Mapplethorpe is talking about framed Blacks, as it were, his (*Black Book*). I question the sense in which Mercer talks about these framed Blacks as the "imagined community." Must we assume that this is a gay "imagined community," or, in the specific terms of their framing within commercial art photography, which further frames them within moral AIDS and aesthetic discourses, Mapplethorpe's "imagined community?" Such controversies have created a situation in which there was a compelling political reason for a Black gay critic to want to align himself with the defenders of Mapplethorpe rather than his detractors, and just as significantly, not to disallow the availability for pleasure of the photographs in question, even if that put Mercer in the strange and

[44] Mercer, Kobena(1993) *"Looking for Trouble,"* in The Lesbian and gay Studies Reader, eds, p.72

problematic position of identifying with the gay white gaze. It also flags up the complexity of Black sexuality and how this makes it difficult for a Black gay male to be identified or identify.

For Mercer, Mapplethorpe is to be lauded as a champion for gay rights in a society in which gay identity had to be hidden "as a dirty little secret." The significance of this last point cannot be overemphasised. He introduces the material as the site of a guilty pleasure with a disturbing recognition of the racist and fetishistic nature of the gaze, which frames the photo. The reassessment of the photographs allows for his identification with Mapplethorpe through the pull of homoerotic desire, and for redemption of the work as being about racism rather than an example of it. Mercer cites the 'modernist tradition' of textual ambivalence as the basis of the possibility of racist and antiracist readings as well as homophobic and homoerotic ones. We can now see that Mercer's strategies leave him like others trapped in a logic governed by racialised phallacism, as he credits Mapplethorpe for bringing that logic into view in his work; as it can be about rather than an instance of racism. However, what if Mapplethorpe were an unknown? What if Mercer thought Mapplethorpe was Black?

3

How does the Black Male Represent himself and What Constitutes Black Masculinity?

Our starting point is ambivalence, as Black men are implicated in the same landscape of stereotypes in the gay subculture, which is dominated by the needs and demands of white males as they are in mainstream heterosexual white culture. Black men "fit" into this territory by being confined to a narrow repertoire of types: the super sexual "stud" and the sexual savage on the one hand, the delicate and exotic oriental on the other. The repetition of these stereotypes in sexual representations betrays the continued circulation of colonial fantasies and traces the way the contours of this landscape have been shaped by the cultural legacies of slavery, empire and imperialism noted in chapter one. Colonial fantasy attempts to 'fix' the Black subject into a space that mirrors the object of white males desire, but Black men may re-appropriate pleasures which overturn signs of otherness into signs of identity. In seeing certain images of Black gay men, there is an affirmation and a validation of a Black gay sexual identity. This touches on some of the qualitative differences between straight and gay porn. By receiving images of other men from the public sphere, there is a validation of a private gay identity.

In this context the Robert Mapplethorpe's images of Black males, analysed earlier appear doubly interesting. Mapplethorpe appropriates the

conventions of porn's codes of representation and by abstracting its stereotypes into "art", he makes racism's desire respectable.

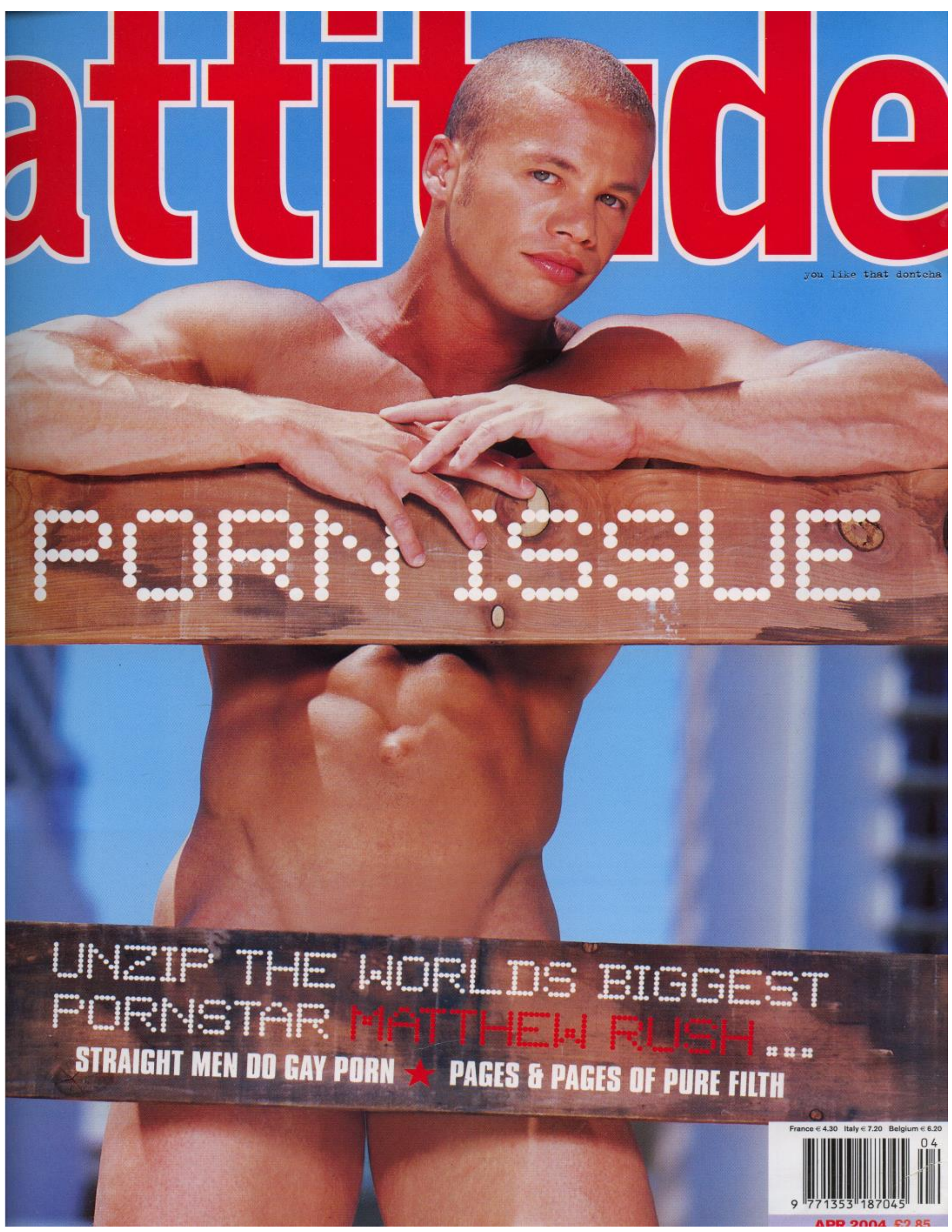


Fig. 26 Black gay Porn Star (Attitude Magazine)

The use of glossy photographic textures and surfaces serve to highlight the visibility of the ‘difference’ of Black skin - coupled with the use of porn's conventions in body posture, framing devices like cropping and the fragmentation of bodies into details - his work reveals an underlying fetishism.

The stereotypes of Black men in pornography have other meanings for Black men, because at one level they say, "Black Gays exist”, as evident in this cover picture (fig. 26). Even more, occasionally "positive" images slip through the net of white defined codes. The convention in porn is to show single models in solo frames to enable the construction of one-to-one fantasy. Sometimes when porn models pose in couples or groups, other connotations - friendships, solidarities, collective identities - can struggle to the surface. This ambivalence in our response to porn embodies aspects of the contradictions Black gay men live through on the gay scene and in the gay sub-culture. While very few of us actually conform to the stereotype, in the social networks connected and mapped out by the landscape of stereotypes, some Black Gays appear to accept and indeed play up to white expectations and assumptions.

The hegemonic repertoire of images of Black masculinity, from docile "Uncle Tom" to "Superspade" heroes like Shaft, has been forged in and through the histories of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. We have seen that central strand of the racialised power exercised by the white male slave master was the denial of certain masculine attributes, such as authority,

dignity and familial responsibility to Black males. Through these collective historical experiences Black men have adopted and used certain patriarchal values such as physical strength, sexual prowess and being in control to create a system of Black male gender roles in which "macho" or "toughness" is used as a means of survival to cope with the repressive, violent and destructive power of the plutocracy and the state.

As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, there is a complex cross continental circulation of Black music and cultural texts. In this heterogeneity, this hybridity of Black identity has the potential of acknowledging the realities of gay Black sexual desire, which for quite some time has gone unrecognised. A commitment to radically inclusive communities is linked to an interest in the politics of difference. The crisis here is multiple: the violence of the Black diaspora, the exclusion, and dominations of particular forms of Black Nationalism, and crises of conceptual categories, of what constitutes Black masculinity. Such desires question the essential binaries that firmly divide the alienation of diasporas from the unity of homeland. Such divisions can be seen in the work of Fanon, who appears to find issues of sexual politics in a Black context problematic. Mercer attempted to show how Fanon's relations to homosexuality and women underlie significant moments of anxiety in his writings. Thus demonstrating how sexuality can complicate fixed notions of identity or a position from which to speak. Moving beyond a narrow reading of Fanon, Mercer insists that raising the issue of homophobia in Black

intellectual discourse offers an alternative to what he calls "the culture of retribution" that was a part of the nationalist sentiments of the Civil Rights movement. Discussion of homophobia is for Mercer a way to avoid the "ideological traps in which an identity politics of gender can get stuck".[45]

Sexuality, sexual choices, desires, and identities have always been on the agenda of Black politics as far as our political aspirations for freedom have always found cultural forms of expression. It is in music, above all, that Black people's personal and political desires have been articulated. While the music of the Afro-Christian church - hymns, spirituals, and gospel - sang of a desire to transcend the misery of the material world, the blues or the devil's music of the street sought to find a worldly transcendence here and now through the pleasures of the flesh. In and through music Black men have launched critiques of traditional concepts of masculinity. While "Black macho" was big box office in the Blaxploitation movies of the early 1970's, Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye undercut the braggadocio to reveal a whole range of concerns with caring, responsibility, and sensitivity. Today, Black artists like Luther Vandross, Justin Fashanu and the much-maligned Michael Jackson disclose the "soft side" of Black manliness (fig. 27). As a way forward in debates on race, sexuality and culture we need to reclaim these resources to make visible the positive ways Black men have been involved in a political struggle around the very meaning of masculinity.

---

[45] Nelson, Steven (1996) *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*, Seatle: Bay Press

Once we reclaim the camp and crazy "carnivalesque" excesses of Little Richard, the original queen of rock and roll himself, we can appreciate the way Black men in popular music have parodied the stereotype of Black masculinity to send-up the whole charade of gender roles. Little Richard's "outrageousness," the model for many who have deployed the subversive rhetoric of irony like George Clinton's Parliament and Funkadelic, Cameo and even Prince, affirms the plurality of Black male identities and draws critical attention to the cultural constructedness of sexual identity. These figures remind us that our pleasures are political and that our politics can be pleasurable.

Fig. 27 Justin Fashanu (1993)

The poetry of Essex Hemphill addresses many of these themes, along with others. His poetry cleverly manages the feelings of anger and grief in an uncaring society. Essex Hemphill is a Black gay male poet whose writing spans from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. He died in 1995 due to AIDS-related illnesses. He wrote three books of poetry: *Earth Life, Conditions*, and *Ceremonies: Poetry and Prose*. He also edited *Brother to Brother*. *New Writings by Black gay Men* and , *gay and Lesbian Poetry in Our Time*. Furthermore, his essays and poetry have appeared in a number of journal publications.

"*Brotherhood*" is a significant theme that runs through many of Hemphill's poems. Primarily, he discusses the shared brotherhood of Black gay men, although sometimes this is expanded outward towards all Black men. In a move towards solidarity in *"When My Brother Fell"*, Hemphill writes:

Standing at the front lines
flanked by able brothers
who miss his eloquent courage,
his insistent voice
urging us to rebel,
urging us not to fear embracing
for more than sex,
for more than kisses

and notches in our belts.[46]

Hemphill is calling for solidarity here beyond that of homosexual relations, urging us to go beyond coming together merely for sex. He argues that men need to embrace one another for political as well as sexual actions.

Much of Hemphill's work focuses on the lack of a Black gay subjectivity, or a Black gay subjectivity that has been compromised in some fashion. In discussing the work of Robert Mapplethorpe, Hemphill rightly contends in agreement with theorists mentioned previously that Mapplethorpe has reduced the Black man into the Black penis, the sexual object rather than the speaking subject. In "*Does Your Mama Know About Me*?" he writes

> In many of his [Mapplethorpe's] images, Black males are only shown as parts of the anatomy, genitals, chests, buttocks close up and close cropped to elicit desire. Mapplethorpe's eye pays special attention to the penis at the expense of showing us the subject's face, and thus, a whole person. The penis becomes the identity of the Black male, which is the classic racist stereotype recreated and presented as Art in the context of a gay vision.[47]

---

[46] Hemphill, Essex (2000) *Ceremonies*, USA: Cleis Press, p.35
[47] Ibid, p. 41

Like the divisions between heterosexual and homosexual among the Black community, the divisions of race in the gay community are crucial to understanding how images of Black men function. Hemphill points out how white men objectify not the Black male, but the Black penis, and how Mapplethorpe cuts off the heads of his subjects in favor of their anatomies. Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer note the racism and colonialism of Mapplethorpe's works, but also point out that while we recognise the oppressive dimension of these images of Black men as Other, we are also attracted:

> 'We want to look but don't always find the images we want to see. This ambivalent mixture of attraction and repulsion goes for images of Black gay men in porn generally, but the inscribed or preferred meanings of these images are not fixed; they can, at times, be pried apart into alternative readings when different experiences are brought to bear on their interpretation.'[48]

Julien and Mercer recognise that the Black gay man might be as much attracted to these images as they repulse him, and that resistant readings of them can be produced, a topic to which I will return to later in the context of Hemphill's own resistant readings of heterosexist oppression. Stuart Hall notes:

---

[48] Goldon, Thelma (1994) *Black Male: Representation of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, New York, p. 91.

> 'The continuous circling around Mapplethorpe's work is not exhausted by being able to place him as the white fetishistic gay photographer; and this is because it is also marked by the surreptitious return of desire--that deep ambivalence of identification with makes the categories in which we have previously thought and argued about Black cultural politics and the Black cultural text extremely problematic.'[49]

In agreement with Julien and Mercer, Hall here finds that simply placing Mapplethorpe as a fetishistic photographer is too simple, that there are more complicated readings of his work. Ambivalence enters in, not only with regard to desiring the object pictured, but also with regard to identifying with him. The sexual objectification of the Black gay male by white men is not so simple, argue Julien, Mercer and Hall.

Hemphill often calls for not only solidarity of Black gay men, but for them to consider how they react to one another. Erotic relations between Black men, he notes, are even more taboo than homosexuality itself. In "Heavy Breathing", he writes

> I wanted to give you
> my sweet man pussy,
> but you grunted me away
> and all other Black men

[49] Hall, Stuart (1996) *New Ethnicities. Black British Cultural Studies*: A Reader. Eds. Houston A. Baker, Jr., Manthia Diawara, Ruth H. Lindeborg, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

who tried to be near you.

Our beautiful nigga lips and limbs

stirred no desire in you.

Instead you chose blonde,

milk-toned creatures to bed.

but you were still one of us,

dark like us, despised like us.[50]

Here, Hemphill comments on the Black gay man who passes over other Black men in favor of white men, who refuses to even consider Hemphill or any other Black man as a partner. He further points out that, in spite of their choices, they remain racially marked. In a later poem, *"The Occupied Territories,"* he writes "You are not to touch / anyone of your own sex / or outside of your race",[51] discussing how society forbids relations outside of race or inside of sex. Hemphill's poetry and prose is very conscious of how people are pigeon holed in our society.

Essex Hemphill's poetry brings up many of the issues discussed in academia currently of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classicism. His works have been largely ignored by academia, however, as there are very few critical writings on them, and only a handful of book reviews of his poetry. The fact that there is no critical attention to his work, and that his works have gone out of print quickly after his death, leads one to believe that academia would like to forget that these issues are not discrete and

[50] Hemphill, Essex (2000) *Ceremonies*, USA: Cleis Press, p.4
[51] Hemphill, Essex (2000) *Ceremonies*, USA: Cleis Press, p.80

separable, but can occur over the site of one person, one body. His poetry opens up the possibility of resistance to the discourses that lead to the othering of Black men such as Brian Williamson, Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. His critiques of homophobia and heterosexism within the Black community, of sexism among Black men and of racism among gay Whites serve as a reminder that being oppressed does not mean one is unable to oppress others.

4

Black gay Male and the Modern diaspora

> 'Our images seem to be so one-sided of Black people, of Black families, especially of Black men. I think it is evident if you think about the woman who drowned her children and blamed it on a Black man. The man who killed his wife and blamed it on a Black man. Everybody believed it. It was no big deal. . .I think it will only change when we have more images.'[52]

The oppositional representation of the Black male body that does not perpetuate white capitalist patriarchy will not be highly visible unless we change the way we see and what we look for. More important than the race, gender, class or sexual practice of the image-maker is the perspective, the location from which we look and the political choices that inform what we hope these images will be and do. The Black body needs to be released from such control and given back its life. This can be made visible through diversity of images that can stand forever to contest the colonial legacies. For many artists, there is a tremendous need for representations that actively recognise the diversity of the Black experience, the complex heterogeneous tensions of sexuality, gender, culture, and nation across the Black diasporas.

[52] Pat Ward Williams to Lynell George Los *Angeles Times*

Meanwhile, grassroots Black artists, musicians and other cultural workers in Britain and the United States have survived gruelling assaults. Facing systematic state-defunding of the arts, a violent economic devastation of Black communities and a retreat of the radical antiracist politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is remarkable the degree to which hip hop and other forms of independent Black culture continue to survive.[53] Aided particularly by a fairly tokenising and limited recognition of Black artists in avant-guard art circles and organisations, a new generation of Black artists are producing complex, new languages of experience and political solidarity, expressed through the work of Jean Michelle Basquiat, Eddie Chambers, Keith Piper, Sonia Boyce…………to name but a few (fig. 28).

It is evident from the work analysis of different theorists and through interrogation of visual examples presented in this paper, that the Black male body is a particularly dense site of controversy. In some currents of hip-hop and Black Nationalism, the production and enforcement of a particular model of macho, Black masculinity is crucial to larger projects of proving a homogenous, unified Black community as a basis for contesting white supremacy. A growing body of Black feminists and queer artists, writers and theorists, however, have made the challenging and radical reproduction of Black masculinity and the Black male sexualised body equally centred to projects of radically inclusive collective identities and an insurgent antiracism and homophobia.

---

[53] West, Cornel (2001) Race Matters, London: Beacon Press, p.120

Fig. 28 Jean Michelle Basquiat (1960 – 1988)

Among the artists operating in ground-zero of these complex cultural and material contestations of masculinity, Black identity, and white supremacy is Isaac Julien, a Black British gay filmmaker. Much of Julien's work has directly addressed these issues, in its mode of production, its

textual form, and its contents. Julien has explored through his films and videos the fragile possibilities of community. Through his artistic interrogations of Black gay sexuality and the complex hybrid and contradictory locations of the Black identity in the diasporas, Julien offers us a remarkable and valuable understanding of the possibilities of insurgent inclusive communities in the midst of this late twentieth century moment of white patriarchy.

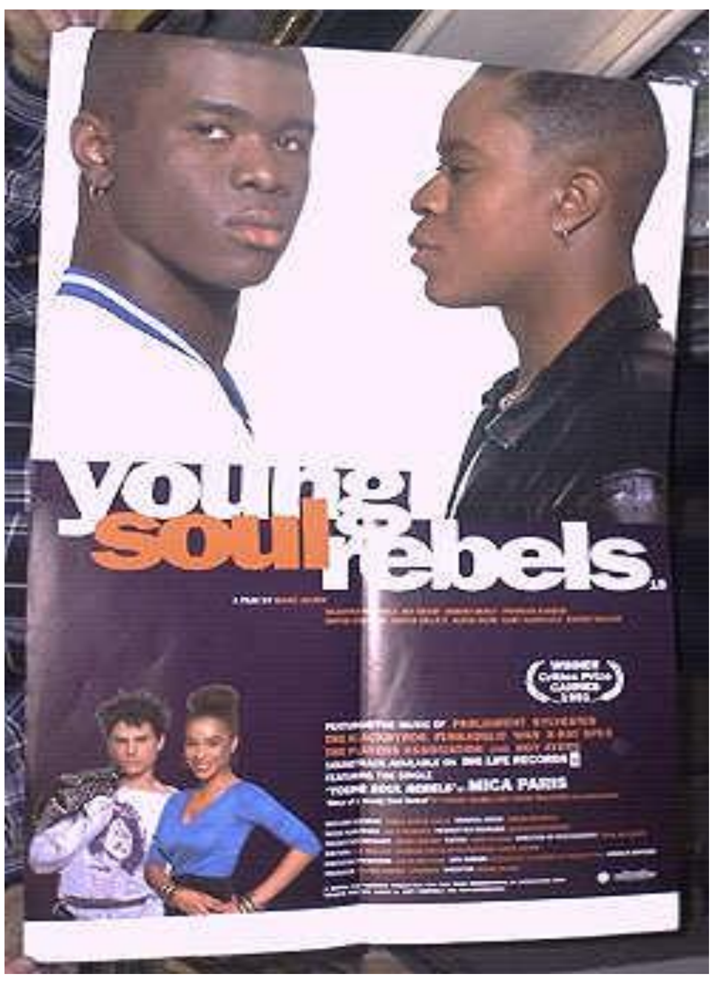


Fig. 26 Julien Isaac Young Soul Rebels (1991)

This commitment to diversity runs counter to what Mercer describes as "the burden of representation";[54] where a handful of artists are expected to accurately represent the Black community as a whole, a construction directly based on economic scarcity and the prevalence of racist exclusion. The economic limitations of Black artistic production and the tokenism of Black inclusion into the arts places a heavy burden on Black artists.

Through out Julien's films, for example *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) and *Looking For Langston*(1988) he has consistently grappled with the problematic of Black gay sexuality (fig. 29). His work is located in an emerging generation of queer Black artists and theorists addressing the homophobic inadequacies of certain modes of essentialist Black Nationalism and systematic racisms of white queer communities. He was trying to create a space for debate about the Black gay self or Black gay community. Julien refuses to limit his audience to Gays and lesbians. He is trying to challenge straight Black viewers to participate in debating the politics of sexuality, a challenge shared by Hanif kureishi with the film 1986 *My Beautiful Launderette*.

These constructions deny the existence or legitimacy of Black queers, calling on a forced and violent homogenisation of the Black community. Such constructions characterised currents of Black Nationalism. Julien and Mercer Note:

---

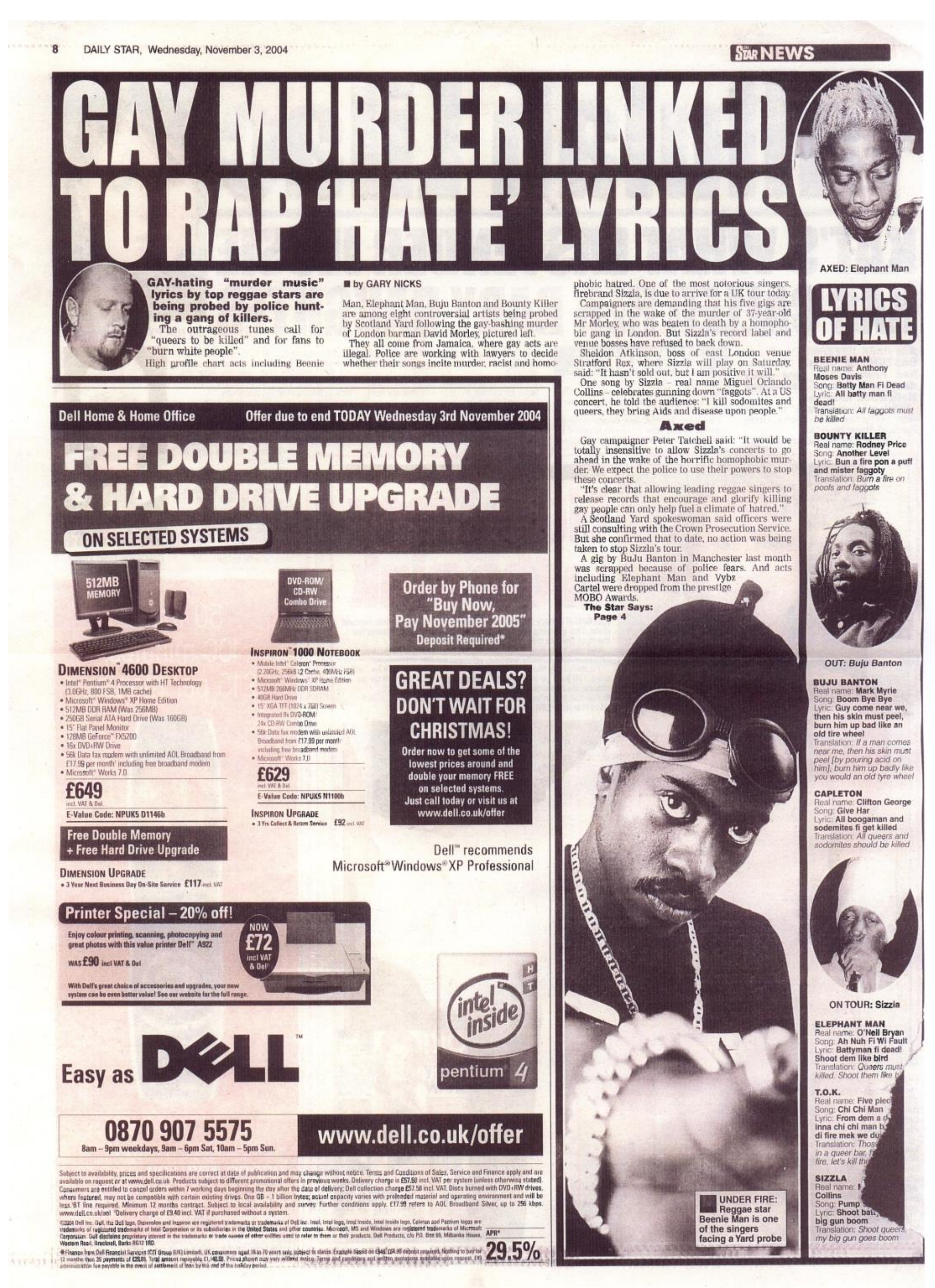
[54] Mercer, Kobena (1994) *Welcome to the Jungle*, London: Routledge, p21

> Changing representations of Black men must be a collective task. Black people committed to renewed Black liberation struggle, the de-colonisation of Black minds, are fully aware that we must oppose male domination and work to eradicate sexism……Collectively we can break the life choke-hold patriarchal masculinity imposes on Black men and create life sustaining visions of a reconstructed Black masculinity that provide Black men ways to save their lives and the lives of their brothers and sisters in struggle.[55]

Resisting, mirroring and perpetuating the systematic racial and class violence assaulting Black communities in the US and Jamaica, particular forms of Black masculinity attack Black queers and women to assert their own dominance. Throughout, Julien recognises many of the very complex contradictions surrounding Black popular music, rejecting crude and simplistic critiques of Black homophobia.

Music, poetry, photography and cinematic images cross the Atlantic, history and social space, link diverse communities, identities and relations. These Diasporic texts are heavily invested and implicated in the complex sexual and cultural economies of Black homosexual desire. In contrast to the hard-left masculine politics of reggae, Julien writes, "Soul, on the other hand,

[55] Hooks, Bell (1992) *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, London: South End Press, p. 113



8 DAILY STAR, Wednesday, November 3, 2004 — STAR NEWS

GAY MURDER LINKED TO RAP 'HATE' LYRICS

GAY-hating "murder music" lyrics by top reggae stars are being probed by police hunting a gang of killers.

The outrageous tunes call for "queers to be killed" and for fans to "burn white people".

High profile chart acts including Beenie Man, Elephant Man, Buju Banton and Bounty Killer are among eight controversial artists being probed by Scotland Yard following the gay-bashing murder of London barman David Morley, pictured left.

■ by GARY NICKS

They all come from Jamaica, where gay acts are illegal. Police are working with lawyers to decide whether their songs incite murder, racist and homophobic hatred. One of the most notorious singers, firebrand Sizzla, is due to arrive for a UK tour today.

Campaigners are demanding that his five gigs are scrapped in the wake of the murder of 37-year-old Mr Morley, who was beaten to death by a homophobic gang in London. But Sizzla's record label and venue bosses have refused to back down.

Sheldon Atkinson, boss of east London venue Stratford Rex, where Sizzla will play on Saturday, said: "It hasn't sold out, but I am positive it will."

One song by Sizzla – real name Miguel Orlando Collins – celebrates gunning down "faggots". At a US concert, he told the audience: "I kill sodomites and queers, they bring Aids and disease upon people."

Axed

Gay campaigner Peter Tatchell said: "It would be totally insensitive to allow Sizzla's concerts to go ahead in the wake of the horrific homophobic murder. We expect the police to use their powers to stop these concerts.

"It's clear that allowing leading reggae singers to release records that encourage and glorify killing gay people can only help fuel a climate of hatred."

A Scotland Yard spokeswoman said officers were still consulting with the Crown Prosecution Service. But she confirmed that to date, no action was being taken to stop Sizzla's tour.

A gig by BuJu Banton in Manchester last month was scrapped because of police fears. And acts including Elephant Man and Vybz Cartel were dropped from the prestige MOBO Awards.

The Star Says: Page 4

UNDER FIRE: Reggae star Beenie Man is one of the singers facing a Yard probe

AXED: Elephant Man

LYRICS OF HATE

BEENIE MAN
Real name: **Anthony Moses Davis**
Song: **Batty Man Fi Dead**
Lyric: **All batty man fi dead!**
Translation: *All faggots must be killed*

BOUNTY KILLER
Real name: **Rodney Price**
Song: **Another Level**
Lyric: **Bun a fire pon a puff and mister faggoty**
Translation: *Burn a fire on poofs and faggots*

OUT: Buju Banton

BUJU BANTON
Real name: **Mark Myrie**
Song: **Boom Bye Bye**
Lyric: **Guy come near we, then his skin must peel, burn him up bad like an old tire wheel**
Translation: *If a man comes near me, then his skin must peel [by pouring acid on him], burn him up badly like you would an old tyre wheel*

CAPLETON
Real name: **Clifton George**
Song: **Give Har**
Lyric: **All boogaman and sodemites fi get killed**
Translation: *All queers and sodomites should be killed*

ON TOUR: Sizzla

ELEPHANT MAN
Real name: **O'Neil Bryan**
Song: **Ah Nuh Fi Wi Fault**
Lyric: **Battyman fi dead! Shoot dem like bird**
Translation: *Queers must killed. Shoot them like*

T.O.K.
Real name: **Five piec**
Song: **Chi Chi Man**
Lyric: **From dem a inna chi chi man di fire mek we du**
Translation: *Thos in a queer bar, fire, let's kill th*

SIZZLA
Real name: **Collins**
Song: **Pump**
Lyric: **Shoot bat big gun boom**
Translation: *Shoot queers, my big gun goes boom*

Dell Home & Home Office — Offer due to end TODAY Wednesday 3rd November 2004

FREE DOUBLE MEMORY & HARD DRIVE UPGRADE
ON SELECTED SYSTEMS

DIMENSION™ 4600 DESKTOP — £649 incl. VAT & Del. E-Value Code: NPUK5 D1146b

INSPIRON™ 1000 NOTEBOOK — £629 incl. VAT & Del. E-Value Code: NPUK5 N1100b

Order by Phone for "Buy Now, Pay November 2005" Deposit Required*

GREAT DEALS? DON'T WAIT FOR CHRISTMAS!
Order now to get some of the lowest prices around and double your memory FREE on selected systems. Just call today or visit us at www.dell.co.uk/offer

Free Double Memory + Free Hard Drive Upgrade

Dell™ recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional

Printer Special – 20% off! NOW £72 incl VAT & Del. WAS £90 incl VAT & Del

Easy as DELL

0870 907 5575 — 8am – 9pm weekdays, 9am – 6pm Sat, 10am – 5pm Sun.
www.dell.co.uk/offer

APR* 29.5%

Fig. 30 *The Star News* Homophobic Dance Hall Sounds (2004)

allowed for the inter-racial relationships and challenges some of the structures of Black masculinity. It opened up a less fixed and more fluid space". Music clubs of the time were notable for "their wonderfully hybrid space – Black/white, gay/straight". [56]

Fig. 28 Lyle Ashton Harris. Billie #11, (2002)

[56] Isaac, Julien (1991) *Diary of a Young Soul Rebel*, London: BFI (British Film Institute) Press, p. 2

Lyle Ashton Harris is one of many artists, who through his work is challenging some of the structures of Black masculinity. He is known for self-portraits, which explore issues of performance, identity, family, gender, masculinity, and race. Lyle Ashton Harris has presented a new series featuring himself in a variety of loaded guises: Josephine Baker, Boxer and the Billie Holiday as shown here (fig. 31)

Black British identity is constituted within and across these complex networks of cultural exchange, hybridized fusions, and cross-cultural negotiations. As Gilroy notes, Black popular culture and its multinational character and the experience of colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy offer a sophisticated critique of the too easy fusion of nation-state formations and ethnic identities. The systematic exclusions of Black from the political and cultural structure of Britishness is constantly contested, rejected, and transgressed within British Black culture.

In recent years, politics has become a very complex affair. The New Right and its neo-liberal projects producing massive geographical and economic dislocations have gained substantial ground. This is highly evident in such global circulations of music across the Black diasporas (mentioned earlier), which are not always so pleasant. Lyrics openly encourage the violent punishment for anyone who is deemed to be a ‘cha cha man’, a ‘batti man’, when translated means homosexual. Buju Banton as shown in the article encourages the shooting of all gay men to rid Jamaica of the scourge that is spoiling the country. These types of lyric are unfortunately extremely

common in Jamaican dance hall and US hip-hop. They share a great deal through their trans-national exchanges, including constructions of Black masculinity that can take on virulently sexist and queer-bashing forms as shown in this article (fig. 30). The common violence of these music forms is not an accident or simply cultural. Black homophobia like Black queer sexuality is constructed across and within diasporic exchanges.

The Guardian Thursday August 14 2003 17

International news

Size does matter, Jamaicans decide

Naked tribute to emancipation sparks debate on history, race and, er, length

Gary Younge in Kingston

It was supposed to symbolise liberation and celestial reverence in an independent Jamaica. Two naked 7ft-high bronze figures — a male and a female — looking skywards on a dome-shaped fountain embossed with Bob Marley's lyrics "None but ourselves can free our minds".

But according to the statue's critics the artist is too light-skinned, the male figure is too generously endowed, and both are, well, too naked.

Since Redemption Song was unveiled at the entrance to Kingston's new Emancipation Park a fortnight ago it has prompted a debate that has revisited myths about the black male, scratched at sores about "shadism" and brought to the fore a prudish streak in a country more renowned for taking things easy.

Every morning the nation's airwaves and letters pages are jammed with comments that range from the puerile to the priggish and the raunchy to the racial; every evening a permanent crowd of different people gather to point, laugh and engage in bouts of public banter that mix art criticism and sex education.

An unscientific straw poll, conducted just by listening in on the conversations of onlookers for half an hour and judging by the balance of letters and phone-in callers, suggests most people like it but that a sizeable number are scandalised.

Yesterday a columnist in Jamaica's Daily Observer, Lloyd Smith, described the sculpture as "a rape of our democracy".

Another writer ridiculed Renaissance sculptors for being not generous enough. "Just because Europe's classical statues had small penises," argued Mark Wignall, another Observer columnist, "does not mean Jamaica must follow suit."

A letter to the sculptor, Laura Facey Cooper, from the director emeritus of Jamaica's national gallery praised the statue and described the controversy as "vulgar epithets spat out by an unknowing and uncaring public".

Having attracted past criticism for a near-naked and well-endowed carving of Christ, the sculptor knew Redemption Song would draw some flak but had no idea it would be so sustained.

"It has surprised me," she said. "I expected something but not this. Public art is new to Jamaica and people project their own anxieties on to it."

'Europe's classical statues had little penises but we don't have to'

She laid out her symbolic intentions in a contest conducted last year by the Jamaica national heritage trust. "The water washes away the pain, angst and suffering of slavery," she wrote in her submission. "The figures rise having transcended the past, standing in strength, unity and reverence."

The greatest amount of controversy relates to the nudity. In a country that produced the bawdy gyrations of dance hall queens, such conservatism would seem out of place. But despite, or perhaps because of, this reputation for licentiousness there is a deeply prim and proper element in Jamaican society; an MP recently called for the virginity testing of schoolgirls and tabloids have problem pages entitled "Tell me pastor".

Many feel affronted by the public nudity — albeit in inanimate objects — in Redemption. "Do we wish to give foreigners who visit the park the image that we are promoting nakedness?" asked Alfred Sangster, a visitor to the park.

Others have an issue not with the figures' nakedness in general but the size of the man's penis in particular. The 49-year-old sculptor says she used models and photographs and insists: "It is in proportion to the rest of the sculpture. I certainly didn't overplay it."

Unapologetic

Cooper is unapologetic about the complaints that have come her way. "Both the male and female are very well-endowed in every possible way. It's an important part of life and it's a wonderful part of life. I'm a wife and I have kids and I enjoy that part of life."

Others have issues not with the sculpture but the sculptor. Cooper is eighth-generation Jamaican and like most Caribbean islanders is the product of some racial mixing. She looks white and claims African ancestry through her father. "At least one of my ancestors was a slave."

For some that is simply not enough. "[She] is a fine sculptress," wrote Kali Krishnadatta in a letter to the Sunday Herald. "But in the complex race-colour-class network that governs Jamaica she is neither the right race, the right colour nor the right class ... The implication is that black people in Jamaica are incapable of representing themselves."

Such criticism no longer bothers Cooper. "I know that with my privilege comes responsibility and growing up I struggled with it," she said. "But I'm comfortable with who I am. I don't even think of myself as white, I think of myself as Jamaican."

Meanwhile, the debate continues to raise a host of issues that Cooper never intended and few could have envisaged.

"See the woman standing there naked with her high breasts," one mother told her two daughters as they stood before the statue. "See the man standing opposite with his penis still flacid and they're not even touching. That is emancipation."

Redemption Song in Emancipation Park, Kingston: sculptor Laura Facey Cooper says everything about her statue is in proportion
Photograph: Jamaican Observer

Fig. 28 Public Sculpture that sparked controversy in Jamaica (2004)

These post-nationalist communities, as Homi Bhabha notes, are not pre-existing, they must be constructed. “Community has to be created and negotiated; it isn’t just there because you are Black or gay”, all identities are multiple. Rather than fitting a single category, each character is displaced

Fig. 33 Isaac Julien, The Long Road to Mazatlan, 1999. Single screen video projection. Collaboration: Isaac Julien and Javier de Frutos. Director: Isaac Julien, Choreography and movement: Javier De Frutos

across multiple forms of difference, constituting themselves within and between the mantra of race, class, gender, and sexuality. So how do we construct this all-embracing post nationalist community? How do we move beyond stereotypes presented in this paper? How do we expand the perimeters of our images of others beyond categorical cliché? How do we disengage all-too-fixed notions of race, sexuality, gender, and class? Can we indeed, and should we?

To deal with the last question first, I think that it is important that we develop strategies for moving past the limitations of traditional stereotypes together. As mentioned earlier in this paper, all of the different identities need to act together as a cohesive whole. The consequence of not doing so is that we will find ourselves trapped in an ever-narrowing, ever more threatening terrain of we/they, self/other separateness. This leads the black community into scheme of misrepresentation and total confusion, as example of which can be seen in the debates about this Jamaican public sculpture, where they are enacting the same inherited dialectics of power and ambivalence about black sexuality (fig. 32). It shows the way we think is embodied by and reflected in the images produced. If we conceive and depict in stereotypes, the range of solutions we bring to any life challenge is diminished. Multiple and diverse portrayals of ourselves, all of our selves, and our lives, inspired by new thoughts, in turn inspires new thought, this I feel is one of the ways forward (fig. 33).

Bibliography

Alessandrini, Anthony C. (ed) (1999) *Franz Fanon*, London: Routledge

Anne McClintock, (1995*) Imperial Leather*, New York and London: Routledge

Anita Loomba (1998). *Colonialism/Postmodernism*, New York and London: Routledge

Bettina Messias Carbonell (ed) (1998) *Museum Studies*, Oxford:Blackwell Publishing

Bindman, David (2002) *Ape to Apollo*, London: Reaktion Books

Bloom, Lisa (1999*) With Other Eyes,* London: University of Minnesota Press

Carbado, W. Devon (ed) (1999) *Black Men on Race, Gender and Sexuality*, London: New York University Press

Constantine-Simms, Delroy (2001) *The Greatest Taboo*, London: Alyson Books

Cooper, Emmanuel (1994*) The Sexual Perspective*, London: Routledge

Cohen, Phil (ed) (1999) *New Ethnicities, Old Racisms*, London Zed Books

Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (ed) (2003) *Museum Culture*, London: Routledge

Dabydeen, David (1987) *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art*, Manchester: Manchester University

David Peters Corbett and Lara Perry (ed) (2000) *English Art 1860-1914,* Manchester: Manchester University Press

Dimes, Gail. Jean M. Humez (eds) (2003) *Gender, Race, and Class in Media,* London: Sage Publications

Donald Preziosi (ed) (1998) *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Du gay, Paul and Jessica Evans, Peter Redman (ed) (2004) *Identity: The Reader*, London: The Open University Press

Dyer, Richard (1997) *white*, London: Routledge

Evans, Jessica and Stuart Hall (ed) (2004) *Visual Culture:The Reader*, London: The Open University Press

Fanon, Franz (1986*) Black Skin, white Masks*, London: Pluto Press

Fine, Michelle and Lois Weis, Linda C. Powell, L. Mun Wong (ed) (1997) *Off white,* London: Routledge

Gill Perry (1999) *Gender and Art*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Gen Doy (2000) *Black Visual Culture Modernity and Postmodernity*, London: I. B. Tauris

Golden, Thelma (1994) *Black Male. Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art*, New York: Whitney/Abram

Hall, Stuart ed. (2000) *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, London: Open University

Hall, Stuart and Paul Du gay (ed) (1996) *Questions of Identity*, London: Sage

Hemphill, Essex (2000) *Ceremonies*, London: Cleis Press

Holburn, Mark and Dimitri Levas (ed) (1995) *Mapplethorpe Altars*, New York: Randon House Inc

Honour, Hugh (1989) *The Image of the Black in Western Art (part 1*), Texas: Harvard University

Honour, Hugh (1989) *The Image of the Black in Western Art (part 2)*, Texas: Harvard University

Hooks, Bell (1995) *Art on My Mind. Visual Politics*, New York: The New Press

Jonathan Harris (2002) *The New Art History A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge

Karp, Ivan. Steven D. Lavine (1991*) Exhibiting Cultures*, London: Smithsonian Institution

Kennedy, Randall (2002) *Nigger. The Strange Career of a Troublesome Work,* USA: Vintage Books

King, Catherine (1999) *Views of Difference: Different Views of Art*, London: Yale University Press

Landau, Paul. S, Kaspin, Deborah. D ed. (2002*) Images & Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa,* London: University of California

Marshall, Richard (1988) *Robert Mapplethorpe*, London: Secker & Warburg

McClintock, Anne (1995) *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest,* London: Routledge

Mercer, Kobena (1994) *Welcome to the Jungle*, London: Routledge

Merelman, M (1995) Representing Black Culture, London: Routledge

Owusu Kwesi (ed) (1998) *Storms of the Heart*, London: Camden Press

Poupeye, Veerle (1998) *Carribean Art,* London: Thames and Hudson

Powell, Richard J (1997) *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century*, London: Thames and Hudson

Quilley, Geoff, Kriz, Dian ed. (2003) *An Economy of Colour*, UK: Manchester University

Richard R. Brettell (1999) *Modern Art 1851-1929*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press

Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (ed) (2003) *Critical Terms for Art History*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press

Shange, Ntozake (1999) *Black Book / Robert Mapplethorpe*, London: Schirmer/Mosel

Smith, Charles Michael (ed) (1999) *Fighting Words. Personal Essays by Black gay Men,* New York: Avon Books

Steve Edwards (1998) *Art and its Histories,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Tyler Startlings (2003) *Whiteness a Wayward Construction*, California: Laguna Art Museum

Walvin, James (2000) *African's Life*, London: Continuum

Walvin, James (2000) *Making the Black Atlantic*, London: Cassell

Walkin, James (1971) *The Black Presence,* London: Orbach & Chambres

West, Cornel (1994*) Race Matters*, USA: First Vintage Books

white, Lenford Anthony (1997) *Slavery: An Introduction to the African Holocaust,* Liverpool: Grovsvenor Print

Whitney Chadwick (1990) *Women, Art, and Society*, London: Thames and Hudson Primary Sources –

Newspaper Article

New Nation (10. May. 2004), p.10

New Nation (19. April. 2004), p.4

New Nation (4 October 2004), p.7

The Voice (June 14, 2004) p. 11

Midlands Zone (December. 2004)