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Berries Bittersweet: Visual Representations of  
Black Female Sexuality in Contemporary American Pornography

by

Ariane Renee Cruz

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African American Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Leigh Raiford  
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Professor Patricia Penn Hilden

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Berries Bittersweet: Visual Representations of Black Female Sexuality in Contemporary  
American Pornography

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by Ariane Renee Cruz

Abstract

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Professor Leigh Raiford, Chair

My dissertation, *Berries Bittersweet: Visual Representations of Black Female Sexuality in Contemporary American Pornography* interrogates how pornography, from the 1930s to the present, functions as an essential site in the production of black female sexuality. Closely reading a diverse pool of primary pornographic visual materials, across print, moving image and the internet, such as photographs, magazines, trade magazines, videos, DVDs, and internet website viewings, I argue that pornography offers an ambiguous casting of black female sexuality, simultaneously constructing the black female body as craved and contemned yet ultimately not merely other, but in-human (not woman). Pornography's inscription of racial, sexual alterity on the black female body is both somatic and symbolic.

After an overview of the history of pornography, its central yet liminal relationship to nation and oft ignored collisions with race, I unveil print pornography (photograph, cartoon and magazine) as a medium that ultimately speaks to the photograph's task of visualizing a "real" and authentic racialized body. I argue that men's magazines such as *Playboy* and *Playboys* are important texts that delineate pornographic imaginings of desire and national belonging circumscribed by race. I then explore early moving image porn and the stag genre beginning in the 1930s, arguing that the black female body within stag films challenges the rigidity of gender roles that the films subscribe to, ultimately contesting the black female's position within the bounds of American womanhood. The decade of the 1970s, pornography's golden age, an intensely ambivalent era in the history of American pornography, marks a moment of mainstream recognition for the black female body within pornography, yet her inclusion is still underscored by the premise of her racial sexual difference and her performance of primitivized and pathologized sexuality. I examine the golden age as a critical juncture where hard core

pornography, blaxploitation, and these two genres' analogous pornographic gaze—a heteronormative and sexualizing sociality—cemented the black female body as intelligible in and through not just her pornographication, but her representation as pornographic body produced and consumed for a mainstream mass market audience.

This ambivalence marks the black female in her transition from the stag era in the 1930s, through the golden age of pornography in the 1970s, into the video age beginning in the mid 1980s and through the present. It is most vivid in my discussion of taboo and the popular and financially prosperous phenomenon of black/white interracial pornography. I frame my discussion of Internet interracial porn against the history of American miscegenation and the coeval yet persistent national ideologies of racialized American womanhood and manhood deeply steeped in sexuality. I unveil interracial pornography, one of the most consumed and financially prosperous types of American pornography, as a domain of porn especially invested in the construction of the black female's racial, sexual alterity, allegorically evoked and projected onto the body. Lastly, I explore the space of the Internet, the fastest growing and most transformative area of contemporary American pornography, and cyberspace's unique positioning of the black female as an embodied figure in the typically unembodied realm of cyberspace.

From examining American pornography from the 1930s to the present, I reveal that neither pornography nor its representation of the black female body is fixed, yet both are anchored in a complex and contradictory negotiation between fantasy and reality that hinge upon the authentication of the black female body via the premised indexicality of the photograph's image. The black female body, as an oscillating site of desire and loathing, humanity and inhumanity, both affirms and challenges the ideological foundations, norms, and "rules" of pornography. My project reveals pornography is not just a fertile ground in considering the production of black female sexuality. It is a critical visual media in the production of national imaginings of race, gender, and sexuality, simultaneously maintaining and resisting social hierarchies, hegemony, power structures, systems of oppression and liberation.

My project echoes the inter-disciplinary nature of the field of African Diaspora Studies itself—combining the insights and methodologies of visual theory, psychoanalysis, history, film studies, sexuality, gender and women's studies. By bringing these fields into conversation, I elucidate the power and significance of visual culture and its central role in the production of race, gender and sexuality. A comprehensive exploration of the representation of black female sexuality in these three pornographic media, print, moving image and Internet, is a paramount, multi-faceted project that has not yet been approached within the academy. Beyond filling an academic void, this project exposes the need for counter-hegemonic and polyvalent images of the black female body while lifting the stifling veil of taboo shrouding discussions of sexuality (specifically in the context of hardcore pornography) within the academy. It develops a much-needed critical gaze and an interdisciplinary framework of visual literacy from which to approach visual representations of black female sexuality. This dissertation undertakes an essential, necessary project and my research is a fundamental contribution to cultural studies within the African Diaspora as well as the fields of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Visual Studies.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to Professor VèVè Amasasa Clark (1944-2007).

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee and the Departments of African American Studies and Gender & Women's Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. I also appreciate the financial support of the Ford Foundation as well as The Center for the Study of Sexual Cultures at UC Berkeley. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my friends and family.



## Introduction



*Hustler* magazine's October 2007 Alternative Cover, the "Nappy-Headed Ho Issue," goes well beyond the political incorrectness for which pornography in general, and *Hustler* magazine in particular, are notorious. Placed right behind the actual cover, the alternative cover, functions as a surrogate or a secondary cover. Yet as the second page of the October 2007 *Hustler*, it maintains a distinct salience. So despite functioning as an auxiliary, the image is critical and occupies a foremost positionality within the magazine. The alternative cover boldly communicates a gendered racism that uses black women as the most grotesque discredited signifiers of blackness. The image suggests not only that black women are in a category of their own, but that black women, nappy headed hoes, occupy the most debased category of women and are vulgar and dissolute. MaLaria Brown, whose name overtly symbolizes the perceived sickness and contagion of the black (and brown) female, is depicted as a most undesirable object. Yet she functions as an ancillary *Hustler* cover girl. In her scant attire, Brown embodies all the

stock signifiers of even the most occasional contemporary American television watcher's visual vocabulary for street walker—large bauble jewelry, vividly toned and overdone makeup, and short, tight spandex clothing in equally glaring colors. Her facial expression adds to her garish and deranged appearance while her gaze confronts the viewers with a strange mix of apathy and attitude. She stands posed with her legs spread, allowing the viewers to see even further up her short skirt, with one hand displaying her lengthy manicured nails, up in the air to evoke a talk-to-the-hand/z-formation black vernacular gesture that seems to both the support and abnegate *Hustler's* construction of her.

That is, the arm motion signifies her refutation of her debased status and simultaneously, as a traditionally quintessentially colloquial black female gesticulation, recodes her as black woman who embodies this very status. The cover's text intervenes with an equally offensive and pathetic sense of humor in an attempt to abate the seriousness of the image. It fails. The image stands as a vitriolic commentary on black womanhood—particularly her physiognomic and sexual qualities. As a nappy headed ho she is unattractive. Her kinky hair precludes her from a kind of Eurocentric feminine beauty ideal. But she is also a whore—so the myth of the jezebel, what black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins identifies as one of the controlling images of black women, is very much at work here.<sup>1</sup>

Since its inception in 1974, *Hustler* magazine has displayed a long history of social, political commentary through the glossy pages of its monthly magazine.<sup>2</sup> Owner and publisher Larry Flynt maintains a well-known, well-deserved reputation for pushing the limits of societal tolerance—both in terms of explicit sexual representation and a broader campaign of satire launched against some of the nation's most venerated political and religious figures.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The jezebel is one of the four controlling images that black feminist scholar, Patricia Hill Collins, argues functions to provide the ideological basis for race, gender, class, and sexual oppression of black women. For more see Patricia Hill Collins, *Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Routledge, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Print pornography as medium of social and political criticism has a history far longer than Flynt and our American nation. This familiar imbrication of pornography and politics and the familiar Manichean coupling of the pornographic or highly sexualized and the malign, traces back to eighteenth century France. Pornography was used in revolutionary France as a political tool against various revolutionary figures. These concomitant practices of sexualization and vilification were cast onto the body of Marie Antoinette. Antoinette's denigration was carried out in and through pornography—an unofficial Revolutionary campaign of pornographic literature with Antoinette as lead subject. These pornographic pamphlets, which began even in the last decades of the Old Regime, represented a full fronted anti-establishment attack: court, church, aristocracy, salons, and monarchy. They illustrated Antoinette as treacherous, incestuous, and homosexual. In many ways Antoinette's pornographic treatment in visual media foreshadows that of her would-be countrywoman, Sartje Bartman. Both were visually constructed as pornographic bodies, brimming with an insatiable sexual desire that threatened not just individual, but nation. For more see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Pornographer Larry Flynt started *Hustler* Magazine in 1974, in the height of pornography's golden age. Notorious for his inflammatory sense of humor and his consistent pushing of limits of social acceptability within his magazine, Flynt survived an assassination attempt in 1978 to continue to run on of the most successful American pornography magazines, still recognized for

alternative cover seems to show that nobody is off limits to *Hustler's* signature style of raw, relentless parody. Yet despite its' lampooning of both Imus and his critics—two black leaders who have publically condemned him in the past, Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, the joke is still on the black female cover girl, MaLaria Brown. Brown functions as a synecdoche for the black woman symbolized as a fatal, infectious, parasitic disease devastating humankind, suggesting that black female sexuality is a deadly contaminant. The image references Don Imus' infamous remark, referring to the Rutgers' women's basketball team "nappy headed hoes."<sup>4</sup> In addition to parodying this event, the *Hustler* magazine alternative cover also cites a number of disjointed historical and more current events of anti-black racism and other issues. For example, the image references lynching, actor Hugh Grants' 1989 affair with a black prostitute, and the controversial use of the N word. Yet as the self-proclaimed "Nappy Headed Ho Issue," Imus' remark, and the black woman as nappy headed ho, are the cover's primary focus. So the pathology, both sexual and somatic, of black womanhood is the crux of this troubling image. Malaria Brown's image stands center stage as repulsive stereotype of blackness. Through it, black women are visualized as nappy headed hoes.

The alternative cover illuminates pornography's delineation of the spaces in which race is both disavowed and accepted, ignored and over-accentuated, spaces that symbolically correspond to the boundaries of American womanhood. In addition to illustrating pornography's racially-inscribed making of sexual desire and belongingness, the image speaks loudly to the ambivalence marking the representation of the black female body in contemporary American pornography—her shifting representation between the poles of loathed and desired, same and other, marginalized and centric. Pornography's creation of spaces of racialized desire is imbricated to its making of spaces of belonging in the categories of race and gender. So pornography becomes a critical medium in our constructions and collective imaginings of racialized womanhood—of what it means, what it looks like, to be a black woman.

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its lack of restraint. Flynt's tradition of pushing of the limits with his pornographic parody in the pages of *Hustler* magazine is most illustrated in the 1988 Supreme court case of *Hustler Magazine vs. Falwell*, which protected free speech, upheld Hustler's right to use Jerry Falwell's image in an satirically libelous add campaign and vindicated Flynt in his crusade of social, political, and religious attack through porn.

<sup>4</sup> Don Imus, host of the nationally syndicated television show *Imus In the Morning*, has a long-standing track record of anti-black racism. In 2001 he expressed that Venus and Serena Williams were animals and belonged not in the pages of *Playboy* but rather in *National Geographic*. His more recent anti-black female racist blunder, made on April 4, 2007, in which he called the Rutgers's women's basketball team (majority black) nappy headed hoes, was part of a larger offensive on-air conversation between he and Bernard McGuirk, executive producer of *Imus in the Morning* (also a white male) enjoyed about the majority black female basketball team. To experience Imus' nappy headed hoe remark visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui1jPNDWArM>.



The actual November 2007 cover features a white cover girl, Celeste Star, despite its advertising of two cover stories on black women, suggesting that black women aren't fit for the place of cover girl despite their attractiveness nor the diversity of their beauty. Together, the alternate cover and the "real" cover, reveal a discrepancy that speaks to the ambivalence marking the black female body within contemporary American pornography. She is hot and desired, yet she is simultaneously, in the same moment, represented in a way that reveals her nefariousness in a comically cloaked yet gravely serious manner. Her image remains a discredited signifier of blackness that identifies her as a body of racial sexual alterity. The "Nappy Headed Ho Issue" cover reveals contemporary American pornography's positioning of black women in a space outside and beneath the boundaries of American womanhood and popular sexual desire. The actual cover suggests that black women, if they cannot appear on the front page, might exist somewhere within these grounds, a few pages back. Together these images from *Hustler* illustrate the equivocal positioning of the black female body in porn and serve to introduce this dissertation which explores pornography's contradictory making and mapping of the black female.

This powerful image illustrates the black female's ambivalent position within print pornography as simultaneously marginal and centric, rejected and accepted, coveted and cast aside. In pornography across media and time, the black female body negotiates a complicated slippage between deplored and desired, hyper-racialized and de-racialized, eschewed and embraced. I argue that this ambivalence is compounded by pornography's attempt to simultaneously portray and provide an authentic black female body and a phantasm of this same body. That is, there exists a constant tension in porn generating from the presumed indexicality and truth of the photographic image (the photograph as evidence) and pornography's attempt to provide a sexual fantasy for its viewers. Within pornography artifice and actuality collide and become projected on the black female body as a site of instability and oscillation.

Yet the cardinal ambivalence marking representations of the black female in contemporary American porn is not merely a kind of fickleness, but rather a critical feature of

pornography as a technique of racialization, a mode of representation of difference (racial and sexual), and a discursive strategy of power. That is, pornography's ambivalent making of the black female body is more than a mechanism of racial, sexual alterity; it becomes an exercise of power. Characteristic of black women in porn, Malaria Brown's racial and sexual difference is achieved through both excess and lack. She is hyperracialized and hypersexualized, while suffering from a deficiency of humanistic and "womanly" qualities—she lacks the allure, femininity, and beauty that we tend to expect in and from pornography. As such, what Homi Bhabha terms "productive ambivalence" is very relevant to reading representations of the black female body in porn. For Bhabha, ambivalence functions as a major discursive strategy of not just colonial discourse, but of "discriminatory power,"—how power is deployed and operates hierarchically to maintain the relational positions of colonizer and colonized, self and other, black and white, each grounded in difference.<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth, not to subject its representations to a normalizing judgment. Only then does it become possible to understand the productive ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse—that 'otherness' which is at once the object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity.<sup>6</sup>

Brown, as "an object of desire and derision," emblemizes the black female in contemporary American porn. Productive ambivalence is thus central to the representation of otherness as the "most significant and discursive and psychical strategies of discriminatory power."<sup>7</sup> Furthermore difference itself, otherness, is highly ambivalent, oscillating between not just desire and derision, sameness and otherness, but threat and necessitation.

In theorizing "the spectacle of the other," Stuart Hall also notes the intense ambivalence of difference: "[i]t can be both positive and negative. It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self as a sexed subject—and at the same time it is threatening, as site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, of hostility and aggression towards the 'Other.'"<sup>8</sup> The ambivalence of difference (racial and sexual) of the black female body that pornography articulates and rearticulates across both media and time, in different forms and decades, is a central theme of this dissertation. Pornography is a most prolific site of the production of racial, sexual otherness and in considering how difference is articulated in contemporary American culture. As such it is a ripe space from which to interrogate the question of racial sexual difference.

This dissertation interrogates how pornography, from the 1930s to the present, functions as an essential site in the production of black female sexuality. Closely reading a diverse pool of primary pornographic visual materials, across print, moving image and the Internet, such as photographs, magazines, trade magazines, videos, DVDs, and internet website viewings, I argue that pornography offers an ambiguous casting of black female sexuality. Porn simultaneously constructs the black female body as craved and contemned yet ultimately not merely other, but

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<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, Homi, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 95.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>8</sup> Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 1997), 238.

in-human (not woman). Pornography's inscription of racial, sexual alterity on the black female body is both somatic and symbolic, denoted and connoted.

My dissertation echoes the interdisciplinary nature of the field of African Diaspora Studies itself—combining the insights and methodologies of visual theory, psychoanalysis, history, film studies, sexuality, gender and women's studies. By bringing these fields into conversation, I elucidate the power and significance of visual culture and its central role in the production of race, gender and sexuality. A comprehensive exploration of the representation of black female sexuality in these three pornographic media—print, moving image and Internet—is a paramount, multi-faceted project that has not yet been approached within the academy. Beyond filling an academic void, this project exposes the need for counter-hegemonic and polyvalent images of the black female body while lifting the stifling veil of taboo shrouding discussions of sexuality (specifically in the context of hardcore pornography) within the academy. It develops a much-needed critical gaze and an interdisciplinary framework of visual literacy from which to approach visual representations of black female sexuality.

This introduction first reconciles my own shifting views on pornography and its representation of black women against a backdrop of academic literature on black women in pornography. It then provides a chapter by chapter overview of the dissertation, outlining each chapter's central argument. Lastly, it finishes with a section, *Knowing and Seeing: Towards a Definition of Pornography*, that offers a review of scholarly definitions of pornography and provides my own working definition that undergirds this dissertation. In addition to grounding my exploration of pornography, this final section also communicates pornography's immense salience and power as a national cultural medium.

### **Reconciling Views of Pornography**

She cannot help herself from thinking: Poor: Ignorant: Sleazy: Depressing. This does not excite or stimulate.

Alice Walker, *Porn*<sup>9</sup>

When I first began this project, I firmly believed that pornography was not anti-womanist, Alice Walker's term for a black feminist or feminist of color. That is, pornography was not, in my mind in opposition to black women's self-empowerment, expression of sexuality and access to their erotic powers. Identifying myself as a "sexual liberal," I believed that, in addition to being a central and oft-overlooked site within academia for understanding black female sexuality, pornography was *good*.<sup>10</sup> Pornography was a freedom of speech and a

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<sup>9</sup>Alice Walker, "Porn," in *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1981), 84.

<sup>10</sup>The term sexual liberals is borrowed from Ann Russo who uses the term to "refer to feminist and progressive writers, scholars and activists who criticize the feminist anti-pornography movement on the grounds of potential infringement on individual rights to sexual identity, sexual expression, individual interpretation, freedom of speech and privacy." See Ann Russo, "Feminists Confront Pornography's Subordinating Practices" in *Pornography: The Production*

creative, cultural production that offered vast and productive possibilities of and for sexual expression; it was not to be censored. Porn allows for a safe space in which to access pleasure, enact fantasies and provides pedagogic possibilities for improving one's own sexual experiences and relations with others. By "safe" I mean that via pornography, one can enact her own sexual fantasies without many of the real consequences that are associated with a physical sexual partnership—sexually transmitted infections, obligation, emotional attachment, etc. For some black women in particular, I hoped pornography may even offer a solution for those petrified in what Darlene Clark Hine terms the *culture of dissemblance*, the politics of silence shrouding expressions of black female sexuality. Hine posits that a culture of dissemblance has been practiced by black women in response to the historical reality of sexual oppression, sexual violence, and the threat of both. So as a result of a history of violence rooted in antebellum sexual politics and practice, African American women have "created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors."<sup>11</sup> Pornography, I thought, might be a tool in overcoming the "evasiveness and displacement" that many black women arm themselves with as a protection against sexual violation.<sup>12</sup>

But just as Alice Walker has struggled with her attempt to use porn as a vehicle of sexual pleasure and expression, so too have I grappled with my premise of the virtues of pornography and the regenerative possibilities it may offer for black women in particular.<sup>13</sup> My perspective towards pornography has shifted. The daily deluge of highly repetitive images of often anonymous black women (*phat booty hoes, brown bottom girls, horny ebony sluts, chocolate cream pies*) fragmented, dismembered, and objectified pouring out of the drawers of my file cabinets, book marked at the top of my home computer screen, and now flashing spectacles on the backs of my closed eyelids, has altered my optimism towards pornography. So almost five years later I am indubitably convinced of my first hypothesis—the fact that pornography is an invaluable medium for the racialized constructions of black female sexuality. However, the latter has become less certain. That is, I have become less assured of the virtues of pornography—its expression of alternative sexualities, its possibilities of and for sexual pleasure outside of a white heteropatriarchal imaginative or fantasy and its capability for what I call "sustainable arousal," arousal that is not an ephemeral feeling but rather one that endures. The sexual pleasure engendered by pornography has increasingly been this non-sustainable kind—very much a body

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and Consumption of Inequality" ed. Gail Dines, Robert Jensen and Ann Russo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 35.

<sup>11</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West" *Signs* 14 no. 4 (Summer, 1989), 912.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Gail Collins, *The Art of History: African American Women Artists Engage the Past* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 109.

<sup>13</sup> In *Porn* Alice Walker recounts her personal experience with a male sexual partner who consumed pornography and suggested it as a tool of arousal in their sexual relationship. Previously open to sexual experimentation, Walker looks at his porn collection only to find pornography to be anti-pleasurable. Pornography Walker concludes, is a joyless medium which not arouse but rather depresses her; porn "does not excite or stimulate." See Alice Walker, "Porn" in *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1981), 77-84.

reflexive response that is quickly quelled by the mind's rejection of the image as *Poor: Ignorant: Sleazy: Depressing*.

As such, pornography's function as a "body genre" has a new meaning to me. Linda Williams identifies pornography as one of three types of body genres: genres of film that produce a physical response in viewers that tends to mimic that which the characters on screen are experiencing.<sup>14</sup> Pornography's conceptualization as a body genre is due to its ability to elicit a visceral response from its viewers. It has the power to physically manipulate the bodies of its viewers—whether through an increase in body temperature, a quickening of the heartbeat or most commonly a rush of blood to the genital region and a feeling of sexual arousal. Indeed what I have found to be so compelling throughout my research is how this power of porn as body genre is so at odds with the power of pornography to arouse the mind. That is, frequently racist, sexist and purely offensive material can and will arouse the body while simultaneously quashing the mind. I've consumed countless what I would consider troubling hardcore pornographic images of the black female body. Yet despite my objection to the ways she may be treated by her partner, positioned, framed, spoken to, clothed and/or her expression (or lack thereof) of her own sexual pleasure, there is the potential, albeit short lived, for physical arousal. So there is a way that pornography I believe, often allows for a separation of the mind from the body. Indeed, this ability of pornography—its power to manipulate the mind and body of its viewers in different and conflicting ways, is just another facet of pornography's profound ambivalence. This equivocality is vividly revealed in its instable and oscillating representation of the black female body—between fantasy and reality, lust and disgust. So it is more than that "this manipulation of feeling [that] lies at the heart of porn film's volatility as a genre," but that this vicissitude of apprehension and emotion is the foundation of porn's power as a visual medium—its ability to not just make the mind and body move in different ways, but its intense ambivalence, multivalence, and its power to mean so many different things to so many different people in so many different contexts, in so little time.<sup>15</sup> So while my affinity for pornography has decreased significantly, my faith that it is powerful and important medium has not.

To reconcile this quandary, to "*help [my]self from thinking: Poor: Ignorant: Sleazy: Depressing*" I have continuously relied upon Michele Wallace's conceptualization of negative/positive images as a mantra that underlines my research. Wallace problematizes the negative/positive binary as a prevailing mode of American visual criticism. Much of the literature and dialogue on visual representations of blackness are centered on the negative/positive schema. That is, certain images that depict blacks in a presumably honorific way are "good" while others which portray blacks in a less than favorable nature are deemed "bad." Wallace rightly criticizes this binary approach stating that it sets the mission of cultural production as a corrective one as well as places the salience of representation too much on the side of reception instead of production.<sup>16</sup> Yet relying on the negative/positive schema also stifles how we look at and critique images of blackness and asphyxiates our critical visual lexicon.

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<sup>14</sup> Williams explores horror films, melodramas and pornography as three types of *body genres*, genres of film which have a visceral link to the viewer's body and produce actual physical responses within it. See Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44.4 (1991): 2-13.

<sup>15</sup> Zuromskis, Catherine, "Prurient Pictures in Popular Film: The Crisis of Pornographic Representations," *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 59 (Spring 2007): 4.

<sup>16</sup> Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (New York, Verso, 1990).



Employing a positive/negative framework as a type of representational methodology stifles the language of cultural representational criticism. Wallace's vital theory serves as a constant and much-needed reminder to not fall into the Manichean divide that marks much of the scholarship on pornography, and especially the handful of published material focusing on black women in porn.

Jewel D. Amoah's *Back on the Auction Block: A Discussion of Black Women in Pornography*, for example, argues that pornography is particularly detrimental for black women in its double jeopardy effect of combining racism and sexism. According to Amoah, black women are especially vulnerable to the harms of pornography, and must contend with both its sexual politics and racial politics. Pornography thus "wreaks particular havoc on black women whose representations in pornography are predicated on not just gender exploitation but "negative racial stereotypes and racialized myths."<sup>17</sup> Amoah is not alone in arguing that black women suffer a unique type of dehumanization in pornography due to race.

Tracey A. Gardner's *Racism in Pornography and the Women's Movement* argues that the unique history of sexual exploitation African American women suffered as a result of slavery is essential to the way they are represented in porn. First presented at a Feminist Perspectives on Pornography Conference in 1978, Gardner's attack against pornography, written partly in first person, is deeply personal: "I want you to understand that when a person of color is used in pornography it's not the physical appearance of that person which makes it racist. Rather it's how pornography capitalizes on the underlying history and myths surrounding and oppressing people of color in this country."<sup>18</sup> Published in an anti-porn feminist anthology on porn, *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, Gardner's highly antagonistic and fervent piece is in alignment with the anti-pornography feminists who vehemently oppose pornography.<sup>19</sup> Renowned anti-porn feminist Andrea Dworkin also believes that pornography relies on "racism as a form of sexual pleasure" and that pornography is specifically detrimental for black women. For Dworkin, following in the vein of Fanon, black female skin is dangerously fetishized as a genital in pornography, "[b]lack skin is presented as if it is a female genital, and all the violence and the abuse and the humiliation that is in general directed against the female genitals is directed against the black skin of women in pornography."<sup>20</sup> While I agree that pornography does capitalize on prevailing racial and racist myths regarding the black female body and black female sexuality, these earlier studies on pornography are too firmly anchored in a highly subjective, anti-pornography stance that dismisses pornography as sexist, misogynistic and racist and does not go any further to attempt to understand the diverse ways pornography represents the black female body. Beyond black women's objectification "in pornography as sex objects whose sexuality is available for men" this body of work, published mostly in the 1980s and

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<sup>17</sup> Jewel D. Amoah, "Back on the auction block: A discussion of black women and pornography," *National Black Law Journal* 4. N.2 (Spring 1997): 205.

<sup>18</sup> Tracey A. Gardner, "Racism and the Women's Movement," in *Take Back the Night*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: William and Morrow, 1980), 105.

<sup>19</sup> The anti-porn/pro-porn feminist debate over pornography is discussed in detail in chapter one.

<sup>20</sup> Andrea Dworkin quoted in *The Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (1986) Part Four, Chapter Two. Dworkin's words are reminiscent of Fanon's epic statement, "everything takes place on the genital level" which communicates the genitalization of the black body, the comprehensiveness of blacks as a function of the genital and/or libidinal. See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 157.

1990s, falls short of comprehensively analyzing pornography and its treatment of black women.<sup>21</sup>

While this handful of scholars have approached the subject of black women in pornography from a firmly anti-porn point of view, many other scholars have more comprehensively (as well as less subjectively and emotionally) approached the sexualization of the black female in visual culture, but not in specifically in the medium of pornography. Still while race and visual representation have received recent academic interest, images of the black female body, specifically visual representations of black female sexuality and black femininity remain underexplored. Despite important work done by a few scholars to be discussed, this void continues to be most clearly apparent in the media of print, video, film and Internet pornography. There exists no published work that specifically explores the black female body as represented in all media of pornography—print, moving image and Internet.

Art historian Michael Harris' groundbreaking text *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, which traces the complicated history of the visual representation of the black body, offers a launching pad from which to commence my work on the black female in pornography. His exploration of blackness in visual culture, comprehends blackness as not merely other, but as discredited signifier. For Harris, black is positioned and gains meaning within the visual not only in opposition to white, but in a hierarchical relationship against white, "The point is, that definitions and visual indicators of race were used to form a black-white hierarchal dialectic and that each was dependent on the other to support the whole; but in racial discourse, black is the discredited signifier."<sup>22</sup> Harris begins his exploration in the early nineteenth century with the establishment of racial difference through various scientifically motivated etchings and drawings and continues to discuss more traditional art images such as paintings, drawings and sculpture to explore how such modes of visual representation have constructed black subjectivity, identity, power, and racist ideologies at large.<sup>23</sup> In turn, he also looks at how preexisting racist ideologies have influenced the production and dissemination of such images as well as reinforced already established power hierarchies and systems of knowledge. Harris identifies the massive role that the visual plays in the production, reproduction and reinforcement of racial and racist discourse(s).

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<sup>21</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 1990), 167.

<sup>22</sup> Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, University of Chapel Hill Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>23</sup> Such pseudo-scientific research, re-affirming white supremacy and black inhumanity, was racist propaganda disguised as science. It began in the early eighteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth century. Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau's (1816-1882) "An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races" (1853-1855) is recognized as a pioneer text in this racist discourse. See Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* [1853-55] (Second edition, reprint. Torrance, California: Noontide Press. 1983). Visually, practices such as craniology, physiognomy and phrenology prevailed and scientific racism often manifested itself in carefully detailed drawings comparing the heads of blacks to the heads of apes. Dutch anatomist, Petrus Camper's (1722-1789), drawing of facial angles "The Evolution of Man" (published in 1821), an exemplary and notorious model mapping perceived cranial difference to an evolutionary scale, functioned to reaffirm racial hierarchies. See Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 26.

This project recognizes as well the power of the visual media as holding a crucial role in not merely the production of discourse and the maintenance of power structures and social hierarchies, but in the production of racial, sexual, and gender identities themselves. That is, pornography is recognized as a medium that plays a significant role in not just the representation and depiction of the black female subject/object but in the very production of the black female subject/object. Yet while rightly noting the black female as a discredited signifier of hypersexuality, and exploring many visual practices such as othering and the production of difference, primitivism, cultural appropriation and the birth of the stereotype, in various media from photographs, sculpture, advertisements to fine paintings, Harris fails to analyze any pornography.

Art historian Lisa Collins also confirms the visual representation of the black female as a hyper-sexualized body, identifying three categories of representation within the visual history of the black female body: exotica, erotica, and allegory.<sup>24</sup> The first two are intimately linked in the complex, deeply entangled chain of difference, desire and fear, as Collins states, “[e]xoticism frequently meshes with eroticism.”<sup>25</sup> According to Collins, the black female has existed in visual representation as overly and overtly sexual, a lusting, lascivious being who is sexually available to both white master and black brother. Collins illustrates that allegorical representations of the black female body in art are also deeply infused with the same types of erotification of blackness.

Focusing their attention on photography, Deborah Willis and Carla Williams also expose the highly sexualized nature of the black female body. In their photographic history of the black female, Willis and Williams find that beginning in the nineteenth century, the black female was symbolic of three thematic elements: colonialism, scientific evolution, and most importantly, sexuality.<sup>26</sup> These three interrelated elements speak to the ambiguous positioning of the black female body always already inscribed in visual representations of her form. Willis and Williams posit that the black female in photography is defined by her sexuality and the gratuitous display of black female flesh is not just a characteristic of early colonial ethnographic photography, such exhibition becomes a fundamental thematic within representational history of the black female, as a sign of her libidinal nature. Most relevant to my research is what Willis and Williams term “National Geographic Aesthetic” or “Jezebel” photography in the United States in the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Such imagery functions as a type of early pornography and depicts the black female

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<sup>24</sup> Lisa Gail Collins, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>27</sup> In *Black Feminist Thought* Patricia Hill Collins identifies the Jezebel as one of three controlling images that aid, ideologically, to oppress and subordinate black women. The representation of black female sexuality is founded upon the Jezebel, who as “whore, or sexually aggressive woman—is central in the nexus of elite white male images of black womanhood because efforts to control black women’s sexuality lie at the heart of Black women’s oppression.” See Patricia Hill Collins, 77. For Collins, the Jezebel as icon or archetype epitomizes the hypersexualization of the black female body. She is a critical actor in the overall ideology of domination that does not merely objectify the black woman as other and sexual deviant, but continues to oppress and subordinate her. The Jezebel is then essential to understanding how black female sexuality has been historically constructed and reconstructed through visual

in a highly sexualized manner, partially or completely naked. Yet despite a brief reference paralleling the act of picture taking to the pornography of labor they also fail to interrogate pornography as a medium. Willis and Williams posit that the display of black female flesh in many images is not sexual and therefore involves a type of pornography of labor in which the subject is rendered powerless by the lack of control over the display of her own body. Willis and Williams liken the act of taking photograph to the act of stripping away the object's clothing, suggesting the presence of a sort of pornography of labor in the act the picture-taking and in the subject's lack of control over her own representation.<sup>28</sup> However, while the idea of the pornography of labor is creatively novel and intriguing, it almost seems to overlook the obvious—the actual quality of sexual pornography implicit in such images, which almost always displays the naked black female body, taking a particular interest in her breasts and buttocks.

Artist and art historian, Olu Oguibe briefly discusses the representation of the black female, the “faceless anonymous native,” as pornographic object.<sup>29</sup> Oguibe argues that central to pornography are pleasure and desire which come in and through the eradication of the subject of the image.<sup>30</sup> The black female then, as pornographic actor, becomes erased. While rightly recognizing the practice of objectification of some actors existing in some types of pornography, Oguibe's analysis seems too consumer-based. In this project I interrogate the possibility of pornographic actors enjoying their own acts and taking part in the experience of pleasure and desire. Reading a number of pieces of African paintings and sculpture, Oguibe also contests the “pornographic translation” of African Art and its forced insertion into the pornographic frame as “objects of pleasure and fascination.”<sup>31</sup> Yet he too fails to analyze any pornographic media. I believe that this failure has to do with the illicit nature of pornography itself. My project aims to get past this discrimination and treat pornography as an important, valuable cultural medium ripe for analysis.

Indeed while a handful of scholars have discussed the black female as a signifier of sexuality within art images and visual media, none, with the exception Mireille Miller-Young have explored their representation within pornography itself.<sup>32</sup> Young's dissertation, *A Taste For Brown Sugar* (2004), is a landmark “social and cultural history” of black women in American pornography in which she argues that pornography is a “key site for the production of knowledge about sexuality and race.”<sup>33</sup> However, it tends to focus more on film and video while print and especially Internet pornography are under analyzed. A comprehensive exploration of

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representation and how these constructions are deeply entwined with power via the oppressive systems of class, gender and nation.

<sup>28</sup> Willis and Williams, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Oguibe, Olu, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: The University of Minneapolis Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> For more examples, see Ann DuCille, *Skin Trade* (1996), Sander Gilman, *The Hottentot and the Prostitute: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality* (2002), bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (1995), Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997).

<sup>33</sup> Mireille Miller Young, “A Taste For Brown Sugar: The History of Black Women in American Pornography” (PhD Diss., New York University, 2004), xi.

the representation of black female sexuality in pornographic media is a paramount, multi-faceted project that has not yet been approached within the academy.

While there is an abundance of pornography literature, it has only recently begun to move beyond the pro/anti porn debate largely pioneered by the anti-pornography feminist crusaders, Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon and illustrated by the previously mentioned articles on black women in porn.<sup>34</sup> While both authors did significant work to open up the field of pornography and introduce it into academic discourse, their vehement anti-pornography beliefs permit them from making any kind of truly critical or comprehensive examination of pornography. Their conclusions about pornography are limited to its demeaning treatment and oppression of women. My dissertation treats pornography as a legitimate scholarly and cultural medium that needs to be seriously analyzed with a diverse set of tools as any other type of cultural production.

In addition to suffering from the positive/negative framework and not specifically analyzing the medium of porn, much pornography scholarship fails to address race. For example, *Porn Studies* (2004), a more recent publication by Linda Williams succeeds in offering a diverse selection of critical voices on many varieties of pornographic media from graphic Asian comics to the popular home video of celebrity newlyweds Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee. Williams, with the publication of *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* in 1989, was one of the first scholars to move beyond these narrow, morally-motivated, pro/anti-porn dictated readings and offer a serious, in-depth graphic analysis of hard-core pornographic films while uncovering the centrality of porn. However, *Porn Studies* only skims the surface in terms of discussing blackness and pornography in a single essay, written by Williams herself, that focuses on interracial sex in pornography. Furthermore, this focus on interracial relations, while a critical “theme” in pornography and one which is certainly necessary to discuss, may convey the idea that black women in porn are only worth discussing when they are paired with white partners. My dissertation explores the reciprocal relationship between black women and pornography, and reveals that they have been a critical presence in contemporary American porn since its most incipient stages.

## Chapter Overview

Chapter One, *Toward a History of Pornography*, provides a history of pornography in the United States (with a global slant), focusing on the development of pornography as a liminal national phenomenon and its oft-ignored collisions with race. This historiographic process is one that requires interrogating the spaces of invisibility that shroud the black female as a participant in the history of pornography—what I argue to be a deeply racialized history. It therefore seeks to reveal that from its inception, pornography has been a racialized concept, a racially prescribed

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<sup>34</sup>See Dworkin, *Hating: A Radical Look at Sexuality* (1974), *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics* (1976), *Pornography—Men Possessing Women* (1979), *Intercourse* (1987), *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (1988), *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (1997). See Mackinnon: *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (1988) *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (edited by Catherine MacKinnon Andrea Dworkin, 1997).

phenomenon. This chapter also embarks upon a legal history of pornography and of the United States' porn legislation to contextualize the centrality of pornography to nation.

In Chapter Two, *Print Pornography's Making of the Black Female Body*, I read the development of print pornography, cartoon and magazine, and the black female's image within and against the photograph's task of visualizing a "real" and authentic racialized body. In print pornography, artifice and actuality collide and become projected on the black female body as a site of instability and oscillation. First, I explore how the cartoon, as a phantasmagorical medium that already highlights physical and physiognomic distortion and functions as a superlative visual form for racial parody, becomes a fertile site for reading two-dimensional pornographic representations of the black female body. Then, I look at two salient American pornography magazines, *Playboy* and *Players*, to understand the black female's ambiguous position within print pornography as simultaneously marginalized and centric, rejected and accepted. These "men's" magazines reveal how print pornography performs a racially inscribed making of sexual desire and belongingness.

Chapter Three, *Early Moving Image Porn and the Stag Genre*, examines early moving image porn and the stag genre from the 1930s to the 1960s, arguing that the black female body within stag films challenges the rigidity of gender roles to which the films subscribe. The stag genre illustrates the black female's ambiguous positionality within early American moving image porn as bodies that are desired and loathed yet ultimately not merely other, but in-human bodies of racial, sexual alterity. Situating the stag genre in its socio historical context and elucidating stag's relationship to nation, I argue that the genre was a salient force in the racialized constructions of American manhood and womanhood.

Chapter Four takes a socio historical view of, "The Golden Age of Pornography," the decade of 1970s. The golden age is a critical juncture where hard core pornography, blaxploitation, and these two genres' analogous pornographic gaze—a heteronormative and sexualizing sociality—constructed the black female body as intelligible in and through not merely her pornographication, but her representation as pornographic body produced and consumed for a mainstream mass market audience. First, I explore the mutually constitutive nature of blaxploitation genre and porn, two coeval golden age cinematic creations. Next I read *Lialeh* (1974), the first black hardcore pornography film, as illustrative of this golden age cross pollination of blaxploitation and porn. This chapter concludes with a discussion of porno chic, a golden age term referring to the aesthetic, cultural trend porn engendered and its oft ignored linkages to racialized sexuality, entanglement with blackness and indebtedness to the black body within American visual culture.

Chapter Five explores the video age of pornography. Historically narrating the switch from film to the rapid rise of the home video in the early 1980s, this chapter outlines the development of the adult entertainment industry and offers a in-depth reading of two foundational black videos: *Let Me tell Ya 'bout Black Chicks'* (1985) and *Hot Chocolate* (1984). These readings allow us to understand how familiar pornographic representations of black female sexuality as excessive, inhuman and utterly insatiable became an established practice within the adult entertainment industry and the new specialized racial markets of pornography that emerged during the video age, solidifying both an ambivalent desire for the black female body and a thriving market for such images.

Finally, Chapter Six interrogates the Internet as a "new" technology of/for the commodification of black female sexuality. How has the ease of distribution of the Internet (low-cost of and rapid speed of data delivery) changed the dynamics of representation within

pornography? I explore the space of the Internet, the fastest growing and most transformative area of contemporary American pornography, and cyberspace's unique positioning of the black female as an embodied figure in the typically disembodied realm of cyberspace. This chapter also interrogates the rise of Internet gonzo porn and the pornographic discourse of the "real," as well as another salient trend in Internet porn, interracial (IR) porn. I frame my discussion of interracial porn against the history of American miscegenation and the coeval yet persistent national ideologies of racialized American womanhood and manhood deeply steeped in sexuality. I unveil interracial pornography as a domain of porn most invested in the construction of the black female's racial sexual alterity inscribed both somatically and symbolically.

### **Knowing and Seeing: Towards a Definition of Pornography**

*I shall not today attempt to further define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.*

This now infamous remark made my Justice Potter Stewart in regard to the 1964 case *Jacobellis v. Ohio* speaks to pornography's resistance to definition.<sup>35</sup> It is also perhaps more timely than ever with the veritable omnipresence of sexually explicit representation such as music, music video, film, internet images, art and advertisements blurring the lines between pornography and "other" types of cultural production.<sup>36</sup> The testament, "But I know it when I see it" combined with Justice Stewart's reluctance or inability to verbally define pornography attests to the difficulty in defining and delineating porn and the vigorous debates over its meaning. Part of the difficulty in defining pornography derives from the fact that it is constantly evolving and transforming. Indeed, I posit that we must revisit the etymological roots of the word pornography and the term *graphos*, or writing, to recognize that pornography is fundamentally a form of representation whose meaning shifts in different contexts. As a dynamic medium, pornography is part of a complex chain of meaning production via representation about racialized and gendered sexualities, pleasure, power and knowledge. Yet despite this nebular, maybe even recalcitrant quality of pornography, most people at least, agree that it has *something* to do with sex, or more specifically, with looking at sex and the consumption of sex as a commodity.

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<sup>35</sup> This 1964 Supreme Court case reversed the conviction of Nico Jacobellis, a movie theatre manager, for playing the Ohio state-declared obscene film, *The Lovers, Les Amantes* (1958) in Cleveland. This landmark ruling in the history in the American legality of obscenity effectively shifted the role of the determination of obscenity from community standard to national standards. Thus the "community" standards delineated for discerning obscenity in *Roth v. The United States* (1957) were changed to "public" or "society at large" with *Jacobellis v. Ohio*.

<sup>36</sup> It is becoming increasingly difficult to discern the boundaries of pornography in contemporary culture. Brian McNair, author of *Striptease Culture*, argues that the "pornographication of the mainstream," the permeation of sexual imagery into our mainstream capitalist culture, and the expansion and globalization of the porn industry has produced a lowering of barriers and expansion of what he calls the *pornosphere*. For more see Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture: Sex Media and the Democratisation of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002).

Walter Kendrick, in his history of pornography that treats pornography as a modern invention created by our society's very attempts at censoring it, reminds us that "pornography is a fighting word."<sup>37</sup> I explore this conflict in detail in the following chapter's discussion of the battlefield of pornography and the legal contesting of porn within American society. Yet this truculence refers to the term's very meaning—legal, ideological, academic and social, as well. Yet a working definition of pornography is necessary for a comprehensive study of pornography from any angle. In this section, I review various scholars' definitions of pornography. This is not a pleonastic exercise, but a necessary move towards developing and offering my own working definition of pornography as well as a critical component of setting the historical context for pornography in the following chapter. Pornography is oft defined, not by what it is, but by what it is not. The two most frequent of this exercise in negative definition are the erotic or erotica and art.

### **Porn and Erotica**

"Hard core soft porn," a line from the chorus of the Red Hot Chili Peppers hit title song from their 1999 album *Californication*, communicates what I believe to be the overall futility of porn/erotica comparison and what I find most problematic about this value-laden method of framing pornography. Hard core pornography is distinct from "softer" porn by its high level of sexual explicitness (i.e. a "harder" sexual intercourse, more graphic sex acts, and visible genital penetration versus a "softer" sexual foreplay and simulated performances of intercourse or other sexual acts). Linda Williams notes that hard core is a genre of porn distinguished by its "principle of maximum visibility;" this visibility applies mostly to the pornography's extraordinary power of vision, a superhuman sexual eye, to see things one could not normally see during the sexual act—a zooming in on genitals, body parts, skin and of course genital and oral penetration.<sup>38</sup> This distinction between hard and soft mirrors that typically made between pornography and erotica; pornography is considered to be hard, while erotica is somehow softer and gentler. In what seems like nonsense, The Red Hot Chili Peppers effectively voice the absurdity and impossibility of the lines between hard and soft—what is hard to one is soft to another just as one person's erotica is another person's pornography. Their words challenge the lines demarcating two supposedly distinct types of sexual representation highlighting the strong evaluative charge that underlines this split—a delineation that marks the limits of acceptability of types sexual representation. More simply, erotica is okay, pornography is not.

Anti-pornography feminist scholar and activist, Diana Russell, in her essay "Pornography and Rape: A Causal Model", argues that the pro-porn feminists falsely and deliberately blur the boundaries between erotica and pornography in their anti-censorship mission. She finds the distinction between erotica and porn a crucial one and while she strongly rejects porn, she advocates erotica as a medium of sexual expression free from the degradation and abuse that pornography supposedly necessitates. According to Russell, erotica is "sexually suggestive or arousing material that is free of sexism, racism, and homophobia and is respectful of all human

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<sup>37</sup> Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987): 224.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, *Hard Core*, 49.



beings and animals portrayed.”<sup>39</sup> Most dubious in this definition is presumption of a uniform, unified audience—the assumption that all pornography consumers would agree on the parameters of sexism and racism. As illustrated in the numerous and diverse visual practices of white representation of blackness such as ethnographic photography, blackface minstrelsy, lynching postcard circulation, what is diverting and harmless to some has proven racist and injurious to many.

The vituperative charge inherent in the word porn is present even for those who approve pornography and those who not just consume it, but produce it. William Margold, who wrote one of the first black American hardcore pornography videos, *Hot Chocolate* (1984), emphatically rejects the word pornography; he states, “[t]he term pornography is archaic and should never be used unless there is a gun to your head. It’s adult entertainment. It’s always been adult entertainment. Pornography is uttered by those who think that sex is dirty.”<sup>40</sup> In contrast with anti-pornography feminists such as Russell, Margold’s statement more closely embodies the pro-pornography feminist philosophy towards porn which recognizes pornography as something to be enjoyed by both women and men. These the pro-porn feminists, also termed *libertarian Feminists*, *pro-sex feminists*, *anti-censorship feminists* and *feminist sex radicals*, believe in the possibilities of pornography for women’s sexual pleasure, power and a sort of liberation or freedom of expression of women’s sexuality.<sup>41</sup>

Audre Lorde offers one of the most unique, untraditional and at the time (1984) radical, conceptualizations of the erotic. As a black feminist writer, Lorde was acutely aware of the stakes of representing black female sexuality. Lorde’s erotic is not necessarily a sexual one, it is a source of power and knowledge women need to reclaim their “deeply female and spiritual plane.”<sup>42</sup> The erotic, as a “life force of women” is present in all aspects of women’s daily existence and our interactions with others, not merely just sexual exchanges and physical relationships. Lorde posits that the erotic was self-suppressed previously by women in order to access and radiate a sort of exterior and masculine-approved strength. She argues that the erotic has also been co-opted by men as a tool of subordination against women. According to Lorde, most of women’s denial of the erotic is due to its conflation with pornography. In an unjust and nefarious juxtaposition,

The erotic has often been misnamed by men and used against women. It has been made into the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For this reason we have often turned away from the exploration and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. But pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic for it represents suppression of a true feeling. Pornography emphasizes suppression without feeling.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Diana Russell, “Pornography and Rape: A Causal Model,” in *Feminism & Pornography*, ed. Drucilla Cornell (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>40</sup> Bill Margold, Conversation with author, July 12, 2009. The video *Hot Chocolate* is discussed in detail in chapter five.

<sup>41</sup> The pro/anti porn feminist debate is discussed in detail in chapter one.

<sup>42</sup> Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” in *Feminism & Pornography*, ed. Drucilla Cornell (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 569.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 570.

For black female sexuality as always already hypersexualized, Lorde's conception of the erotic may have been especially liberating. Yet, while Lord's reclaiming and reconceptualization of the erotic may offer a vehicle away from sexual repression for some women and a possibility for and finding sharing joy, I ultimately find problematic a number of issues in her view of the erotic. First, it disavows the possibility for a male erotic or a male access to and of the erotic. The homogenous, essentialized male is vilified as the cause of women's (also a falsely homogenous group) repression of the erotic. Second, in its situating of pornography and the erotic as two "diametrically opposed uses of the sexual," it unjustly demonizes pornography. Pornographic pleasure is reduced to a type of suppression and lack of sensation. Lorde's conceptualization of the porn/erotic split summons what sex-worker, pornographer and feminist Carol Leigh identifies as the problem of the anti-porn platform's move to separate porn from erotica-- a condemnation.<sup>44</sup> The porn/erotic comparison reveals and reinvigorates the emotive and evaluative charge that underlines pornography. Porn is bad. Erotica is good. Pornography becomes, once again, the familiar pariah of sexual representation. Lorde's erotic is decidedly not pornographic.

### **Porn and Art**

Art Historian, Lynda Nead references Kenneth Clarks' testimony in the 1972 Longford Committee against Pornography, stating that pornography's "incentive to action" is what distinguishes it from art.<sup>45</sup> This contention suggests that the illicit /licit separation which demarcates pornography from art, a boundary between high and low culture, is one derived from the presumed effect of pornography. Pornography spurs one to act, presumably in a sexual manner--masturbation, sexual relations or intercourse; art, however, does something else, something presumably more sublime. Nead questions the fixity of this binary as one that is a "necessary ideological polarity in patriarchal society" and proposes that we need to examine the historically shifting relationships between art and pornography.<sup>46</sup> Peter Lehman also interrogates the "dubious assumption that pornography and art are two distinctly separate categories" citing the temporally and spatially swinging line between the pornographic and the non-pornographic, a line that will be illustrated in the following chapter's discussion of the legal history of porn and

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<sup>44</sup> Carol Leigh who also goes by the name of Scarlot Harlot states in a interview "I am a sex worker, life artist, bisexual, feminist, anarchist, pagan, humanist, poet, performance artist, video artist - and of course I don't like labels" is a activist for sex workers rights, an spokeswoman for COYOTE (Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics), an organization for sexworkers rights and the decriminalization of prostitution founded in 1973 ([www. www.widdershins.org](http://www.widdershins.org)). For more on Leigh's take on the porn/erotica split visit [www.philospohytalk.org](http://www.philospohytalk.org).

<sup>45</sup> 1972 Longford Report was a privately funded commission by Lord Longford to examine pornography and its effects in Great Britain. The 52-man committee, hand-picked and led by Lord Longford, a conservative aristocrat and former Labor cabinet minister, published a 520-page report on pornography, finding that pornography leads to sexual pathologies and overall moral and social degradation. For more on the Longford Report, see "Lord Porn's Report," *Time Magazine*, 2 Oct, 1972, and John Ellis, "On Pornography," *Screen* 21, no.1 (Spring 1980): 81-108.

<sup>46</sup> Lynda Nead, "The Female Nude: Pornography, Art and Sexuality," *Signs* 15:2 (1990): 325.

obscenity legislation.<sup>47</sup> While both art and pornography, as products of a patriarchal culture based in and around “possession, power and subordination” share a clear interest in the unclothed female body, Nead states that “art has to be protected from being engulfed by pornography in order to maintain its position as the opposition to pornography;” thus the two rely on each other in a reciprocal system of “mutual definition” based on dis-identification.<sup>48</sup> Yet a definition of “Porn is porn because it’s not art,” does not *do* enough to help us understand pornography.

The comparison or distinction between pornography and art, is of course, derived from the fact that both types of visual representation share a particular interest in the female nude as subject. For Nead “the female nude marks both the internal limit of art and the external limit of obscenity.”<sup>49</sup> The female body is a highly ambiguous signifier, its representation within the frames of high art, translates to value and class, while in pornographic representations, equates to filth and obscenity. There is then the possibility for both a high art nude and/or a *low* pornographic nude. But given the racially exclusionary tradition of Western art, particularly within the high art canon, this high art nude has historically excluded the black female as subject (and artist).<sup>50</sup> Precluded from the category of the high art nude, the black female all too often becomes pornographic nude. As discussed, this pornographication of the black female nude has been the subject of many black female critics and artists.<sup>51</sup>

Judith Wilson also acknowledges the “problem” of the black nude. This problem, according to Wilson, is made even more pronounced by black artists’ attempts to work in the language of western high art—the female nude. Indeed the black female nude, as a contested site, was typically avoided by black artists until the twentieth century because of its painful history of exploitation.<sup>52</sup> The black female nude is read by Wilson as a sort of ghost, haunting black and white artists with its history of misrepresentation through the practices of

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Lehman, “Introduction: ‘A Dirty Little Secret’—Why Teach and Study Pornography?” in *Pornography: Film and Culture* ed. Peter Lehman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>49</sup> Nead Lynda, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 25.

<sup>50</sup> For a wonderful, yet broad exploration of the function of race and its representation in Western art and its practice of art historical criticism see Kymberly N. Pinder ed. *Race-ing Art History* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> Collins, Lisa Gail, “Economies of the Flesh: representing the Black Female Body in Art,” in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*, edited by Kimberly Gisele Wallace-Sanders, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Collins, Patricia Hill, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 1990); Willis, Deborah and Carla Williams. *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Wilson, Judith. “Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden’s Use of Pornography and the Problem of The Black Female Body in Afro-U.S. Art” in *Black Popular Culture*, edited by Gina Dent (New York: The New Press, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> Judith Wilson, “Getting Down to Get Over: Romare Bearden's Use of Pornography and the Problem of the Black Female Body in Afro-US,” In *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 114.

primitivization, animalization, distortion, and of course, sexualization. A number of contemporary black artists who employ the image of the black female body do so to reclaim the black female nude from such practices and to celebrate the beauty of the black female nude.<sup>53</sup> This recovery of the nude black female body is often an exercise in self-representation by black female artists who work within the language of stereotypes to reinvent, recontextualize and ultimately deconstruct the pathological othering of the black nude.<sup>54</sup> But in addition to recognizing the troubled history of the black female nude in Western art, Wilson makes the familiar distinction between art and pornography. She defines pornography as “the entire spectrum of representations that fetishizes the body and objectify desire for public consumption.”<sup>55</sup> While it is certain that pornography fetishizes the body as commodity, this seems too large of a domain for pornography. Wilson’s “entire spectrum of representations” definition is far too broad and most importantly, makes no specific reference to sex, the sexual act, or representations of either.

As is evident from the previous discussion of the anti- and pro-pornography feminists, definitions of pornography tend to carry with them a sharp moral judgment and tend to focus more on what pornography does than what it is. Although I too am interested in the question of what pornography does, I believe this question needs to be explored from a less restrictive space. The terms positive and negative prove lacking to analyze representation. So too, does pornography need to be liberated from its Manichean critical ideological schema. As the Dworkin and MacKinnon anti-porn feminist definition of porn, “[t]he graphic sexually explicit subordination of women,” reveals, pornography absolutely suffers from this positive/negative framework.<sup>56</sup> I seek to not only approach it from a location unstructured by this rigid binary, but also to explore the many and conflicting ways it has been interpreted by scholars in the realm of the discourse of pornography. Working through these existing scholarly definitions is essential to developing and refining my own definition of pornography.

Bernard Arcand presents a conceptualization of pornography that is very context-based. He, like Justice Stewart, refers to the intangibility of pornography and to the fact that pornography is primarily, as is well noted from its history of contestation, known by its effects.<sup>57</sup> He offers three definitions of pornography that come from three distinct “universes.” First, he identifies a current analytical definition of pornography “the representation of obscene things”—as being “deceptively simple.”<sup>58</sup> This approach, for reasons largely not communicated, Arcand

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<sup>53</sup> Judith Wilson cites Augusta Savage, Eldzier Cortor, William Johnson, and Francisco Lord. I would also look toward Robert Colescott’s painting, *Demoiselles d’Alabama* (1985), an racially-charged appropriation of Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. 1907)* (1907), and the work of the following black American female artists whose work addresses the high art classical ideals disavowal of the black female nude: Betye Saar, Allison Saar, Emma Amos, Renee Cox, Faith Ringgold, Carrie Mae Weems and Kara Walker.

<sup>54</sup> For more on black female nude’s resuscitation by African American female artists, the see Lisa E. Farrington, “Reinventing Herself: the Black Female Nude” (2004).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>56</sup> Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, Final report. 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1986), 198.

<sup>57</sup> Bernard Arcand, *The Jaguar and the Anteater: Pornography and the Modern World* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc 1991), 23.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

terms the clinical approach to defining pornography. Second, he notes a “market” definition of pornography in which pornography is understood as a consumer product delineated by its content, how it’s sold and/or its marketing strategies. This way of looking at pornography inserts it into a type of Marxist capitalist framework, underlining the commodity role of pornography as product “[p]ornography is after all a commercial product, manufactured in order to be sold.”<sup>59</sup> This market definition maintains salience particularly in our current economy where the worldwide pornography industry functions as a major contributor to the global economy with revenues rivaling the combined forces of top technology giants such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo!, Apple, Netflix and EarthLink.<sup>60</sup> Pornography revenues are estimated to total between ten and fourteen billion dollars per year in the United States alone.<sup>61</sup> Since the 1980s porn has evolved from product or commodity to American industry: the adult entertainment industry.

The market definition of pornography is important because it not only recognizes porn’s function as American industry, but alludes to pornography’s doubly commodified nature—its function as a commodity and its commodification of bodies. That is, as a thriving part of the American economy, pornography maintains its own sexual economy, a highly racialized and gendered economy that this project seeks to deconstruct. Pornography, across media from print, cable television, phone sex, to Internet and beyond, is a commodity that has embedded itself into the American economy, maintaining prosperous relationships with not just American telecommunications and media conglomerates such as AT & T, Time Warner, Cablevision Systems Corporation, Continental Cablevision, and TeleCommunications Inc., but major American hotel chains like Hilton, Hyatt, Holiday Inn and Sheraton. Pornography may also be considered one of our nation’s prime exports, generating upwards of forty five billion dollars in global revenue.<sup>62</sup> Since the “format war” of the mid-to-late 1970s it continues to set standards in visual technologies and home entertainment.<sup>63</sup> Arcand’s market definition of pornography fails to grasp the prodigiousness of the pornography industry. Lastly, Arcand identifies the state-established definition which includes the previously discussed legal perspectives regarding pornography as obscenity as well as the feminist waged anti-porn crusades. This state definition, is of course, largely based on censorship—the state is largely concerned with the *problem* of pornography.

Arcand’s definitions are literally viewpoints of pornography from different places and/or groups, and he cleverly names them as such: the view from the *Ivory Tower*, from the *Street* and

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>60</sup> (<http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html#anchor2>).

<sup>61</sup> This figure comes from Frank Rich’s 2001 New York Times article *Naked Capitalists*. However it has been disputed by Dan Ackman in his 2001 Forbes Magazine article, *How Big Is Porn?* for being grossly over-inflated. However, most pornography writers including Laura Kipnis (1999), Linda Williams (2004) concur that pornography is a minimum ten billion dollar industry. With such massive revenue, pornography maintains the power to greatly influence new technologies in video and home entertainment (<http://www.bizreport.com/news/8560/>). See Frank Rich “It Was Porn That Made Them Do it,” *New York Times*, May 30, 2004 and Dan Ackman, “How Big Is Porn?” *Forbes*, May 25, 2001.

<sup>62</sup> Nicola Simpson, “The Money Shot: The Business of Porn,” *Critical Sense* (Spring 2005): 11.

<sup>63</sup> The format war and pornography’s growth into American industry are further discussed within the context of the video age in chapter five.

from the *Queen's bench*. For Arcand, pornography then becomes pornography because of its context and how it is seen in a particular place, space, time, with a set pair of eyes and a certain type of vision. This approach is useful in theorizing pornography because it recognizes, as Arcand notes, that pornography is a constantly changing and evolving phenomenon. His approach recognizes that pornography is a form of representation and as such, its meaning relies heavily on elements such as audience, context, space, time, etc. His three definitions are all centered on the basic premise that pornography exists in the eye of the beholder, “nothing is pornographic in and of itself and the label is attached only after and evaluation of its social context.”<sup>64</sup> As is evident from his unique style of writing—wry tone and prolix language—as well as his somewhat entangled definitions, Arcand himself seems to be highly aware of the difficulty in defining the term pornography. Curiously another, seemingly contradictory definition emerges from the author, “[t]hus the definition is perfectly simple; pornography is the representation of sex for sex’s sake, with no cover, no outside reference, no pretext or excuse—in short, sex with no other meaning.”<sup>65</sup> While this approach rightly credits sex as a prime determiner of pornography’s meaning, it seems to over-privilege sex. Instead of having or offering no excuse, pornography becomes the excuse in its conflation with sex, while its other “pretexts” are disregarded. Pornography is about much more than sex—politics, pleasure, desire, power and the representations and constructions of gendered and racialized bodies. Pornography, despite its core of sex, is never just “sex for sex’s sake.”

In his article *What is Pornography ?*, Michael C. Rea provides a much more complicated definition of pornography than Arcand. Despite a valiant effort, there are a number of troubling underlying assumptions in Rea’s process of a formulating a definition of pornography. Rea, like most writers on the subject of pornography, begins with a slight caveat referencing the elusive nature of a definition of pornography. Rea categorizes and dismisses other scholar’s definitions of pornography in search of what he terms a “real definition”. The six categories are as follows:

- (i) those that define pornography for the sale of sex for profit, (ii) those that define it as a form of bad art, (iii) those that define it as portraying men and women as, as only, or only as sexual beings or sexual objects, (iv) those that define it as a form of obscenity, (v) those that define it as a form of (or contributor) to oppression, and (vi) those that define it as material that is intended to produce or has the effect of producing sexual arousal.

According to Rea, each of these categories of definitions fails to produce a *real* definition of pornography, because they do not provide what he terms the “conditions necessary for something’s being pornographic.”<sup>66</sup> Rea’s two-part definition resembles more of a mathematical equation—something that needs to be solved itself, rather than an answer to the question: *What is Pornography?* The evasive nature of the term pornography is one that results from the transformative nature of pornography as a type of cultural production as well as, as McConahay states, the fact that it “carries the burden of describing the material and evaluating it at the same time.”<sup>67</sup> Most importantly, the nebulous character of the word is derived from the fact that pornography, something Rea, and Arcand do not explicitly address, is first and foremost a form

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>67</sup> John B. McConahay, “Pornography: The Symbolic Politics of Fantasy,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 51, No. 1(Winter 1988), 36.

of representation and as such is constantly influx in regard to the meanings and responses it engenders and evinces.

John Berger's advancement of our understanding of visual representation as a "language of images" is most useful here. Berger argues that because of modern technology in the advancement and mass reproduction of art images, such images have changed meaning and adopted new values,

What modern means of reproduction have done is to destroy the authority of art and to remove it—or rather, to remove its images which they reproduce—from any preserve. For the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free. They surround us in the same way as language surrounds us. They have entered the mainstream of life over which they, in themselves, no longer, have power.<sup>68</sup>

Berger's asserts that images carry meaning not within themselves, but as a result of their continuous interaction with other things. Similarly, in opposition to Michael Rea's approach in *What is Pornography?*, there is no true, fixed, or singular definition for pornography, and its power lies not inherently fixed in its images, but in the myriad of shifting ways that these images are made, seen, used and reacted to.

Stuart Hall echoes this understanding of representation as a fluid, dialogic process not a static entity, using the term intertextuality to communicate the idea that images do not impart meaning on their own, but rather gain meaning through their contact with other media and texts.<sup>69</sup> Hall's intertextual approach to viewing images (similar to Berger's) can be positioned within a social constructionist method in its assertion that meaning is produced rather than discovered. Conceptualizing representation from this stance, allows one to see how meaning is produced in and through visual images, rather than a property that lies intrinsically dormant within images. This understanding of representation also allows for a multiplicity of interpretations and the possibility that multifarious meanings will be derived from the same image. Such an approach views images as functioning like words in a reciprocal conversation—accumulating meaning and adapting meaning throughout the course of the dialogue. Furthermore, understanding pornography as representation allows one to deconstruct the critical gazes that give the medium meaning as well as recognize it as a site of social, political and cultural struggle. Looking at pornography as representation also imbues it with a sort of power and significance that I feel it traditionally lacks in academic and scholarly circles. It recognizes that pornography is something more than just, to recall Kenneth Clark, an "incentive to action", or an agent of sexual stimulation.<sup>70</sup> Michael Heath, following in the tradition of Clark, cites a definition of pornography as "defined in the first instance, by its function—which is to turn the

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<sup>68</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), 32.

<sup>69</sup> Stuart Hall, ed, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 1997), 232.

<sup>70</sup> Art Historian, Lynda Nead references Kenneth Clarks' testimony in the Longford Committee against Pornography (1972), in which he states that pornography's "incentive to action" is what distinguishes it from art. See Lynda Nead, "The Female Nude: Pornography, Art and Sexuality," *Signs* 15:2 (1990): 325.

user on, leading to sexual activity such as intercourse or masturbation.”<sup>71</sup> While pornography’s financial success and omnipresence testify to its ability to do just so, I am reluctant to rely on intention in a definition of pornography. A focus on the erotic intentionality of pornography, wrongly limits the question of pornography to one of arousal where “pornography’s aim is to make you horny.”<sup>72</sup> Like Clark and Heath, Linda Williams, who provides one of the most comprehensive academic definitions of pornography, cites porn’s intent in her definition of pornography, “the visual (and sometimes aural) representations of living, moving bodies, engaged in explicit, usually unfaked, sexual acts with a primary intent of arousing the viewers.”<sup>73</sup> While I do recognize, like Williams and probably the majority of commercial pornography producers, that most porn is made with an intention to arouse viewers (i.e. an intention to sell), an intent to arouse is not what defines or constitutes pornography. Claiming arousal as porn’s intent, disavows the multivalent reactions that porn elicits in different viewers, intended or non-intended. Definitions of pornography that cite intent ironically close the very important question of what pornography does on a larger scale. A practical definition of pornography needs to leave out intention and effect as this is an entirely unpredictable aspect of representation—what titillates some viewers, repulses others. Also, unlike the anti-porn and pro-porn feminists, I am reluctant to assign a moralistic value to pornography—it is neither good nor bad, wrong nor right.

Pornography is, however, a vehicle that deploys representations of sexuality to convey moral ambiguities related to right and wrong, desire and repulsion, hence the ease with which it becomes mapped into the black body. Instead, for the purposes of this project, which is image-based, I am using the working definition of pornography as visual representations of sex, or sexually explicit behavior, acts and/or activity. My definition of pornography revisits the etymological roots of the word—the term *graphos*, or writing, recognizing that pornography is first and foremost, a form of representation. This definition seeks to acknowledge the challenges pornography brings as a type of representation that means different things to different people in different times in different places. Pornography is medium influx, part of a complex chain of meaning production via representation about racialized sexuality, race, gender, pleasure, power and knowledge. But pornography is not merely a thing, as Lynn Hunt reminds us, “pornography came into existence, both as a literary and visual practice, as a category of understanding, at the same time as—and concomitantly with—the long term emergence of western Modernity.”<sup>74</sup> It is an incredibly revealing medium, phenomenon, and technique that offers much insight into contemporary culture, social hierarchies, the political climates of our time, our social anxieties, fears, fantasies and most of all, the imbricated constructions of gender, sexuality and race.

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<sup>71</sup> Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema: Theories of Representation and Difference* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 40.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power Pleaser and the Frenzy of the Visual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 30.

<sup>74</sup> Lynn Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography, 1500-1800: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 10.



## Chapter One

### *Toward a History of Pornography*

Rush Limbaugh's recent infamous dismissal of the Abu Ghraib photographs as being merely "good old American pornography" speaks volumes about the ambivalent place of pornography in American culture as well as the thick, yet unspoken, imbrication of pornography race, gender and nation.<sup>75</sup> It also dynamically pinpoints what I believe to be the motivity at the heart of pornography in the United States. The notion that pornography, despite all of its struggles, embattled history and purported iniquity, is a rhetorically inherent and almost innocent part of the nation—a wholesome, harmless pleasure. Pornography, like baseball, can be understood as a distinctly American pastime. A *New York Times* article about the photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib titled, "It Was the Porn That Made Them do It," gestures toward the perceived power of pornography to harm and corrupt, an idea continually engaged throughout this chapter.<sup>76</sup> Yet it simultaneously palliates pornography, citing it as an excuse to exculpate the horrid acts of a group of American soldiers. Pornography is used to both explain and exonerate American fallibility at Abu Ghraib. It is also used to effect the denial of American led torture necessary to preserve the "virtue" of American democracy and our "civilizing peace-making" mission in Iraq.<sup>77</sup>

So despite our rigorously displayed contempt for it, pornography is also viewed, by some, as a familiar, innocent American indulgence—a slice of apple pie. But in this *good old* rhetoric, à la Limbaugh, misogyny and white male heteronormative privilege are invisibilized so both the act of looking and the right to pleasure become that of Limbaugh, as white male. It is from this position of privilege that Limbaugh can overlook all that the images convey and turn them into *just* pornography. His remark is then, as revealing in what it does not say. That is, the unexplained slippages made by Limbaugh—homoerotic to heterosexual in his labeling of "standard good old American pornography," the culturally-specific discourses of sexuality in America versus those of Iraq, and the omission of any comment upon the gender of the prison guards or the role of race in the images, specifically the photograph's evocation of the peculiar, deep-rooted historical fascination of the brown body, as sexualized object and other.

The photographs illustrate familiar pornographic conventions.

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<sup>75</sup> Limbaugh's full remark, seemingly a public attempt to exonerate U.S. military personnel accused of abusing Iraqi prisoners, on his May 6, 2004 radio show was:

"The thing though that continually amazes -- here we have these pictures of homoeroticism that look like standard good old American pornography, the Britney Spears or Madonna concerts or whatever, and yet the Libs upset about the mistreatment of these prisoners thought nothing of sitting back while mass graves were being filled with three to 500,000 Iraqis during the Saddam Hussein regime." For more visit <http://mediamatters.org>.

<sup>76</sup> Frank Rich, "It Was Porn That Made Them Do it," *New York Times*, May 30, 2004.

<sup>77</sup> In *Regarding the Torture of Others*, Susan Sontag, compares the Bush Administration and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's reluctance to use the word torture to describe the Abu Ghraib photographs with their unwillingness to use the word genocide in Rwanda a decade prior. She argues that viewing the photographs as evidence of torture belies America's imagining and memory of itself as democratic and virtuous nation. Here, I believe pornography becomes an unlikely, yet convenient scapegoat. See Sontag Susan, "Regarding the Torture of Others," *The New York Times*, May 23, 2004.



American soldiers and their Iraqi victims, usually naked, become pornographic actors engaged in sadomasochistic, dominatrix acts—in one image a victim is pulled on a leash and in another, male prisoners are posed about to engage in oral sex, either real or simulated. The Abu Ghraib pornographic script is however, dependent upon racial difference. The bodies of the Iraqi, as racial others become the pornographic objects in the images, manipulated by white Americans, male and female. But is this Limbaugh's slippage or pornography's ?

There is a way that these clearly sexualized images of the bodies of racialized others cannot and are not be widely understood as pornography in the same way that American lynching photographs are not, yet, both, thanks to Limbaugh maybe, need to be re-viewed in a pornographic lens.<sup>78</sup> Susan Sontag makes this equation between the Abu Ghraib photographs and lynching through the idea of the trophy—both the Abu Ghraib

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<sup>78</sup> The parallel of American lynching photographs and the photographs from Abu Ghraib is a fascinating one that cannot be discussed within the limits of this chapter. Beyond the commonalities of torture and trophy, I am interested in this parallel on the level of the pornographic and its construction of the bodies of racialized others—how visual representations of sexuality challenge revisit and reconstruct existing

and American lynching photographs, often in postcard form, prevalent from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early twentieth century, functioned as trophies, objects to be collected, shared, viewed, and enjoyed in an albeit troublesome way.<sup>79</sup> But these visual trophies of sexualized spectacle are steeped in racial violence that Sontag doesn't address. The sexual economy that interlines the practice of lynching as a technique of racial control in the turn of the century, is discernable in the Abu Ghraib images. So the body of the racialized other, possessed in and through the photograph, becomes a most ambivalent trophy, a pornographic prize signifying both desire and denunciation.

This dissertation seeks to understand this complicated and contradictory process and the conflicting, yet reciprocal ways that pornography constructs and disseminates meaning about the black female as a racialized body. This chapter in particular, considers the historical relationship between pornography and racial inscription, arguing that race and pornography coincide and inform one another, in multiple ways in the history of the nation. So there is also something of value in the notoriously inflammatory Limbaugh's remark about the place of pornography. It gestures to the complicated and contradictory salience of pornography in American culture. Limbaugh's remark introduces this chapter, *Towards the History of Pornography*, a history of slippages and contradictions, that provides a historical background of pornography in which the black female can enter.

Pornography revenues are estimated to total between ten and fourteen billion dollars per year.<sup>80</sup> The pornography *industry* is largely recognized as influencing new technologies and developments in representational media.<sup>81</sup> It is also touted for its role in shaping the production of desire and fantasy; Laura Kipnis argues that "center stage within all pornography is the question of fantasy and its social meanings."<sup>82</sup> However, it is imperative to recognize that pornography is not merely a mirror, projecting pre-existing fantasies, but also a highly implicated partner in the production and dissemination of fantasies.

Yet despite this potential, there exists, what I term a paradox of porn, a condition that describes pornography's liminal yet central placement within American culture, its unstable residence somewhere between the real, symbolic and imaginary, mainstream and margins, legal and illegal, good and bad, and urgently desired yet highly shunned. Kipnis states that

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narratives of racial, sexual alterity. For more on this correlation, see Dora Apel, "Torture Culture: Lynching Photographs and the Images of Abu Ghraib," *Art Journal*, Summer 2005.

<sup>79</sup> Later in this chapter I read the censorship battle against pornography in alignment with the narrative of racial-sexual control that scripts the American practice of lynching as another, although extreme (and extralegal), practice of control aimed at correcting (not only) black transgression.

<sup>80</sup> This figure comes from Frank Rich's 2001 *New York Times* article *Naked Capitalists*. Though it is disputed by Dan Ackman in his 2001 *Forbes* Magazine article, *How Big Is Porn?* as over-inflated, pornography scholars, including Laura Kipnis (1999) and Linda Williams (2004), concur that pornography is a minimum ten billion dollar industry. With such massive revenue, pornography maintains the power to greatly influence new visual technologies in video and home entertainment. See Frank Rich, "It Was Porn That Made Them Do it," *New York Times*, May 30, 2004 and Dan Ackman, "How Big Is Porn?" *Forbes*, May 25, 2001.

<sup>81</sup> The adult entertainment industry is said to be one of the key drivers of new technology in home entertainment. Its high volume in release and sales of DVD titles allows it to set new standards in DVD technologies.

<sup>82</sup> Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), ix.

pornography “is simultaneously entirely central and entirely marginal.”<sup>83</sup> Linda Williams echoes this belief with her development of the term *on/scenity*: “the gesture by which a culture brings on to its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, pleasures, that have been designated ob/scene and literally kept off-scene.”<sup>84</sup> There is an undeniable love/hate relationship with the medium. It is everywhere but not allowed, prohibited yet permitted, rejected yet of seemingly ubiquitous. Yet pornography’s omnipresence and our voracious consumption of it contest our attempts to sequester it. As this chapter reveals, pornography is tightly enmeshed into the fabric of our nation. Al Goldstein’s crude but truthful remark about Linda Lovelace, star of *Deep Throat*, “[o]nly in America could a cocksucker go so far,” confirms this notion and recalls Limbaugh’s remark about the of entanglement of America (nation) and pornography, a highly paradoxical relationship.<sup>85</sup> The contradiction in and of pornography’s relationship to nation coincides with that of the black body.

Anne McClintock coins the term, *the paradox of abjection*, to discuss the problematic and contradictory nature of exclusion—the expulsion of certain groups to the impossible margins of modernity. This process of abjection is complicated and conflicted because of modernity’s highly overdetermined nature, not merely its dependence upon that which it rejects, but its composition out of that which it disavows,

[a]bject peoples are those who industrial imperialism rejects but cannot do without: slaves, prostitutes, the colonized, domestic workers, the insane, the unemployed, and so on. Certain threshold zones and abject zones are policed with vigor: the Arab Casbah, the Jewish Ghetto, the Victorian garret and kitchen, the squatter camp, the mental asylum, the red light district, and the bedroom. Inhabiting this cusp of domesticity and market, industry and empire, the abject returns to haunt modernity as its constitutive inner repudiation; the rejected from which one does not part.<sup>86</sup>

This paradox of abjection, as both the cause and effect of exclusion, is the paradox of Diaspora—the demands of modernity on a people that they belong somewhere and their simultaneous uprooting from the place(s) and space(s) they occupy. Diaspora emerges out of this racial rejection, this claim of non-belonging; yet it also helps to intervene, to resolve this paradox by first, inventing and imagining notions of origin and identity defined by this physical space, and secondly imagining and scripting new narratives of belonging. As a diasporic subject, the black female is very much part of this paradox; the paradox of abjection resounds again clearly in the context of pornography. This project explores how this paradox of pornography coincides with the paradox of abjection that frames the African diasporic subject, specifically the black female body. The contestation that is so essential to the history of pornography—the consistent and continual questions surrounding its place in society, audience, function, purpose and meaning—echoes that of the black female as both Diasporic subject (abjected from nation

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<sup>83</sup> Kipnis, 181.

<sup>84</sup> Linda Williams, ed., *Porn Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>85</sup> Al Goldstein, pornographer and self-professed “porn king,” was founder of *Screw* magazine, a pornography tabloid magazine popular in the 1970s. See Legs McNeil and Jennifer Osborne, *The Other Hollywood; The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 101.

<sup>86</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 72.

and modernity yet fundamental to their very constitution) and as always already pornographic yet too often overlooked in the historiography and development of pornography.

Despite numerous books on the subject, the history of pornography is one that needs to be written. My task in researching and writing this chapter has been excavating key moments from this history and re-inserting the missing links to race and the presence of racialized bodies. This historiographic process is one that requires interrogating the spaces of invisibility that shroud the black female as a participant the history of pornography, a deeply racialized history. This history then serves to provide a space in which the black female is permitted to enter, where she is recognized as subject not shadow, skulking somewhere in the tenebrous background of pornography. Therefore it seeks to reveal that from its inception, pornography has been a racialized concept, a racially prescribed phenomenon. It has developed, not in some sort of raceless vacuum, as it might seem from the current scholarship, but its development is intimately linked to racial formations and concepts of race in our nation. Many scholars have recognized the black body's designation as a pornographic body, but it is necessary still to explore how pornography can be understood as being "blackened itself."<sup>87</sup> There is a reciprocal, if silent, conversation between blackness and pornography that needs to be narrated.

Taking the historical and geographical leaps necessary to provide the context in which our contemporary understandings of pornography have been formulated, this chapter begins to transcribe this dialogue. I begin this history, a kind of genealogical archeology of pornography, with the origin of pornography as a cultural invention traced back to the cultural collision of the two historic civilizations: ancient Rome, and the Victorian era. I then discuss the legal history of pornography and obscenity legislation. Finally, I explore the more contemporary debate over pornography, the so-called "porn wars," waged largely by pro and anti porn feminists. My choice of England as a socio-historical parallel to the United States in this history is due to the fact that Victorian codes of sexuality and England's history of pornography set the stage for American pornography. That is, legally, socially and culturally, America's history of pornography takes its cues from England. These passages allow for the presence of the black female in the history of American pornography that I have hitherto found shrouded, showing that within the fabric of pornography, race is an essential thread.

## Excavating Pornography

Modern pornography can be said to be, if not indebted to, then discovered by, an Italian peasant digging a well in a small town south of Naples. The mid eighteenth century discovery of Pompeii, a Roman city buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, is profoundly important to the history of pornography.<sup>88</sup> Petrified by layer upon layer of volcanic ash, this

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<sup>87</sup> As discussed in the introduction, many scholars have recognized the hypersexualization of the black female body, particularly in visual representation. See Willis and Williams (2002), Patricia Hill Collins (1990), Oguibe (2004), DuCille (1996), Gilman (2002), bell hooks (1995), and Hall (1997).

<sup>88</sup> The origins of pornography as a cultural invention are traced back to the cultural collision of the two historic civilizations ancient Rome, and Victorian era, by many historians such as Simon Goldhill, Walter Kendrick, John Clarke, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill and Alison Smith among others. See Simon Goldhill, *Love, Sex & Tragedy: How the Ancient World Shapes our Lives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), John Clarke, *Roman Sex, 100 B.C.-A.D. 250* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), Andrew, Wallace-Hadrill, *Augustan Rome* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), Walter Kendrick, *The Secret*

frozen city was an untouched record of Roman life, waiting to be revealed. Excavations soon ensued; however; archeologists panicked when objects of an explicitly sexual nature were repeatedly discovered: wall paintings and frescoes of men and women engaged in sexual



intercourse, various representations of the god identified by his gargantuan phallus, and even marble sculptures depicting acts of bestiality.<sup>89</sup> A marble statue of Pan, a Greek God renowned for his sexual powers, having sexual intercourse with a goat

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*Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude, Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996). There are of course, other genealogies of pornography. France, in particular, has a long and rich genealogy of porn—both libertine literature and pornographic images. Lynn Hunt for example, reads pornography’s emergence in early modern Europe, as type knowledge, political device and regulatory that was also highly gendered and concomitant with the emergence of modernity. Focusing on pornography’s emergence in the French Revolution (1789-1799) Hunt explores Marie Antoinette’s role as “Bad Mother”, tracing the concomitant practices of sexualization and vilification in the body of Antoinette, as a result the anxieties her public presence generated as a woman in political scene of France. Antoinette’s transformation to *bad mother* was carried out in and through pornography—an unofficial Revolutionary campaign of pornographic literature with Antoinette as lead subject. These pornographic pamphlets, which began even in the last decades of the Old Regime, represented a full fronted anti-establishment attack: court, church, aristocracy, salons, and monarchy. Pornography in eighteenth century France was highly entangled with the political and functioned as a representational device that both mirrored and made real the corruption and perceived conspiracy of the aristocratic. For more, see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). I look toward England because I believe it both legally and culturally sets the stage for American Pornography offering a paradigmatic narrative for both the rhetoric and practice of othering via pornography. Furthermore, I am following in footsteps of the above historians who concur that modern pornography was generated from a clash between two specific historical civilizations—Rome and the Victorian Era. I, however, interject that race is an important part of this development.



was one of the first statues unearthed at Pompeii, immediately inciting panic in the excavators. Art historian John Clarke notes that the removal of Pan and the goat began a separation of sexually explicit representation from the remainder of society and reinforced the idea of the power of such images to disturb and contaminate.<sup>90</sup> Yet depictions of sex and sexual activity were commonplace in ancient Greek representation. Images of sexual intercourse were omnipresent and not enshrouded by shame, guilt or suppression; such images were even found on the bottom of children's eating vessels to amuse them after meals. Roman civilization enjoyed a similar openness and celebratory attitude regarding sexual imagery.<sup>91</sup> Such sexual indulgence and lack of shame with regard to sex is illustrated in the many artifacts from the Pompeian ruins.<sup>92</sup> These early archaeologists faced what would be no ephemeral dilemma in the context of pornography and its place in our culture: to preserve history such objects had to be removed from the ruins, carefully cleaned, cared for and catalogued.

Yet, to educate and enrich the greater public, these ancient but obscene artifacts would have to be put on display. The Secret Museum, a room in Museo Borbonico (presently called the Naples National Archaeological Museum), temporarily fixed this quandary. A private gallery separated from the rest of the Museo Borbonico, the Secret Museum, (Il Gabinetto Segreto) allowed the sexually explicit material to be both exhibited and concealed. The removal of the lascivious artifacts from the "normal" artifacts, demonstrates a separation of pornography from

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<sup>90</sup> John Clarke, *Roman Sex* (2003).

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Montgomery H. Hyde, *A History of Pornography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964), 41.

the rest of life and culture.<sup>93</sup> In addition to the physical division of pornography from the rest, there was a taxonomical shift in pornography that signified its condemnation and prurience.

The word pornography, an ancient Greek term deriving from the words πόρνη (porni) "prostitute" and γραφή (grafi) or "writing," translates to mean to write about prostitutes. Although largely believed to have made its first appearance in an English medical dictionary in 1857 where it was defined to refer to prostitutes and/or prostitution as an issue of environmental health, the word pornography appeared 7 years prior in an English translation of a book written by a German archaeologist, C. O. Müller, who used the term to describe sexually explicit materials unearthed in Pompeii.<sup>94</sup> Within the span of five years however, the word pornography took on a new meaning, one that was evident back in the eighteenth century with the very need to create a Secret Museum. It was then defined in the Webster's Dictionary as "[I]ncentious painting or literature; especially, the painting anciently employed to decorate the walls of rooms devoted to bacchanalian orgies."<sup>95</sup> So what was once *believed* to be a more neutral, scientific term used to describe social and medical texts on the problem of prostitution was transformed into a morally libelous term. Pornography was no longer a relatively impartial term to describe prostitution, it was now something deemed obscene—a form of representation with not only inimical connotations but deleterious powers. With this taxonomic change, pornography was imbued with new power and instilled with the ability to pollute and contaminate.

## Victorian Roots

If conceptions of sexuality in the Roman Empire, via the discovery of Pompeii, are essential to our modern conceptualization of pornography, they are only so in relation to that of the Victorian Era. Modern pornography is very much a Victorian invention, emerging from the cultural collision of two very different worlds: The Victorian era and ancient Rome. The differences in understandings and opinions of sexuality between the two historic civilizations is evident—the sexually open society of Rome (which would not only allow for multiple artistic representations of Priapus but find such pieces amusing) versus the closed-door, sexual conservatism of the Victorian era. Thus in order to understand the birth of pornography, we must move from a place where sex was highly *fêted* to where it was thoroughly surveyed.

Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, an exploration of the historical imbrication of sexuality and power, provides the necessary framework to comprehend Victorian sexuality's critical role in the production of modern pornography. *The History of Sexuality* treats sexuality as socially and institutionally molded rather than as a sort of biological essence. As Foucault states,

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries to gradually uncover. It is the

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<sup>93</sup> Secret Museums were not relegated to Italy but were rather were a geographically and culturally independent phenomenon. The Reserve Room of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, formerly known as *The Collection de L'Enfer*, and The Private Case in the British Library represent two more examples of the separation of obscene representation and cultural production (in this case writing) from the rest of society.

<sup>94</sup> Clarke, 12.

<sup>95</sup> *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilisation*. Dir. Fenton Bailey. Narr. Marilyn (Milgrom Koch Vision, 2006).



name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances in accordance with a with a few major strategies of knowledge and power.<sup>96</sup>

Not simply is sexuality socially constructed, but Foucault alerts us, through his carefully drawn connections of the intimate relationships between power and sex, of the technologies and mechanisms of power that make and re-make sexuality. Foucault believes not just that sexuality was invented, but that it was invented, “as an instrument-effect in the spread of bio-power” and became a crucial force in the strategy of power.<sup>97</sup>

However, while Foucault offers a critical intervention into the study of sexuality, his history is peculiarly a de-racialized one. After offering a reading of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, I invoke JanMohammed’s discussion of racialized sexuality to problematize the absence of race in Foucault’s history. This discussion of racialized sexuality carves a space for the black female within this history. Re-reading Foucault’s theory of sexuality using JanMohammed’s intervention with regard to racialized sexuality serves to elucidate how sex and sexuality, as technologies of power and control, become deployed in distinctly racialized modes. Understanding the ways that sexuality, power and race are linked is critical to any discussion of the black female body in pornography. The *History of Sexuality* begins with a discussion of what could be termed the *Victorian condition*, a condition of the Victorian bourgeoisie, in which sex was confined to the home, as a sort of secret and/or private sphere and assigned to the married heterosexual couple, the conjugal family. In the eighteenth century, there began a policing of sex—a regulation of sex through public discourses such as the use of population (birth and death rates) as technique of power that informed sexuality.<sup>98</sup> Sexual practices were governed by the discourse(s) of the institution, including canonical law, the Christian pastoral, and civil law, each of which determined what was illicit and licit in the realm of sexuality.<sup>99</sup> During the nineteenth century, according to Foucault, sex *disappeared*, “repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence and affirmation of non-existence, and, by implication, and admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see and nothing to know.”<sup>100</sup> Foucault takes us on this historical journey (looking at things like marriage laws and like the role of confession in manufacturing truth) to disprove the *repression hypothesis*, the idea that throughout history we have moved from an epoch of liberation and openness in regard to sexuality, sex and our bodies, to one of increasing repression and subjugation.<sup>101</sup> The nineteenth century was not only therefore, a period of sexual repression, but one in which there was a proliferation of discourses aimed at uncovering the truth of sex. It is crucial to recognize that the production of this truth is highly entangled with mechanisms of power and control. Sexuality in the Victorian era became,

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<sup>96</sup>Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 106.

<sup>97</sup>Herbert L Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983)

168).

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>101</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 128.

subjected to a regime of repression so intense as to present a constant danger; not only is sex a formidable secret, as the directors of conscience, moralists, pedagogues, and doctors always said to former generations, not only must we search it out for the truth it conceals, but it carries with it so many dangers, this is because—whether out of scrupulousness, an overly acute sense of sin, or hypocrisy, no matter—we have too long reduced it to silence. Henceforth social differentiation would be affirmed not by the sexual ‘quality’ of the body, but the intensity of its repression.<sup>102</sup>

Here the link between sexuality, the body and repression is enunciated: sexuality functioned as a marker that allowed certain bodies to be repressed, hence it became a mechanism of bourgeois power and control. Sex, its function and meaning, was extended as a technology of power and control.

Sex, sexuality, and representations of either in the hands of the “wrong people,” such as the lower class, women, children and racialized others, became an incredibly dangerous force that needed to be constantly monitored and controlled. The right to look was a pleasure often reserved for affluent white males, *gentleman*, as they were believed to be only ones who could safely partake. We see this white male privilege illustrated at many moments throughout the early history of pornography: the fact that, initially, only men were allowed to visit the Secret Museum of Naples and other collections like it worldwide, and the limited availability of some of the first modern pornographic media (from enjoying pornographic images in Medieval and Renaissance texts books to watching American stag films in the early half of the twentieth century) to a *class* of white males. This privilege is also embodied in the very concept of the connoisseur, as a wealthy gentleman with time, resources and knowledge to accumulate, organize and publish or circulate the information. The connoisseur is qualified and able to look; his civilized status, (and perhaps even skin color), immunizes him to the contamination that purportedly comes along with looking at pornographic imagery.

*The History of Sexuality* is essential to understanding the integral nexus between sexuality and power, or in a sense, what Foucault terms the *deployment of sexuality*. Foucault attempts to identify and untangle the tight knot of sexuality and power, developing, not a theory of power, but an *analytics* of power, “toward a definition of specific domain formed by relations of power, and toward a determination of the instruments that will make possible its analysis.”<sup>103</sup> In the context of what Foucault terms the *domain* of sexuality, he identifies four historical strategies that, since the eighteenth century, have framed the mechanisms of knowledge and power surrounding sex: a hystericization of women’s bodies (as a child bearer the feminine body was sexualized, pathologized, and hystericized), a pedagogization of children’s sex (children were viewed as constantly indulging in dangerous sexual activity such as masturbation), a socialization of procreative behavior (sexuality’s importance was seen through the mechanism of fertility/reproduction and in the context of population and the fecundity of the social body in addition to the physical body), and a psychiatrization of perverse pleasure (sexual instincts and behavior were classified on the basis of normal and pathological, and “corrective technologies” were constructed for anomalies, thereby allowing for the birth of sexual minorities or those whose sexual practices and desires did not fit in with the majority). Traces of these historical strategies are clearly evident in the sexualization of the black female as a sort of quintessential sexual “Other” whose body continues to be highly sexualized specifically in regard to a

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<sup>102</sup> Foucault, *History*, 129.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

fascination with her genitalia. Her perceived over-libidinal nature contributed to her often infantile, pathological, and primitive representation. The above strategies were instrumental in the production of sexuality via a sort of moral interest in sexual health (anti-perversion) and even a eugenicist motivation to preserve the purity, understood in distinctly racial terms with black body positioned at the very bottom of the hierarchy of value and humanity, of the human race. The link between the deployment of sexuality and power made by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* is critical to showing how operations of power are directly linked to the body, as a key site in which power is enacted, as well as in understanding the context in which our conceptions of sexuality and representations of sexuality, such as pornography, have been engendered. However, it is important to consider Foucault's elision of race to probe how and power, race and sexuality are entangled.

One place where we may begin to intervene with a discussion of racialized sexualities, specifically blackness, in the space of Foucault's history of sexuality is via the woman's body. Abdul JanMohammed, for example, posits that the strategic hystericization of women's bodies "is paralleled on the racial-sexual border by the hystericization of the black body, which is represented as saturated with sexuality."<sup>104</sup> However, in contrast to Foucault's women's body, the black body is, never "integrated into the sphere of medical practices" nor "placed in organic communion with the social body" and therefore maintains a positionality outside of the realm of the civil.<sup>105</sup> For JanMohammed the hystericization of the black male was a primary force in maintaining the divide between two racially-distinct realms of sexuality, black and white. However, in arguing that "it is the hystericized, oversexualized body of the black male that is used by the discourse of racialized sexuality to reinforce the hysterical boundaries between the two racialized communities" he historically disavows the black female.<sup>106</sup> While the black male, as dangerous and hypersexual body, was clearly symbolic of the hysterical boundaries between black and white, inhuman and human, other and self, the black female was also used to delineate these boundaries. As Hazel Carby demonstrates in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, the ideologies of white, specifically southern white, womanhood (which shares clear commonalities with Victorian codes of femininity) is positioned as absolutely antithetical to that of black womanhood. These opposing constructions of black and white womanhood are particularly evident through the figure of the slave and the mistress. Carby identifies four cardinal values of true (white) womanhood: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity, that were necessary to become and be recognized as "woman." These attributes were unobtainable for black women consequently, "[t]he figurations of black women existed in an antithetical relationship to the cult of true womanhood, an absence of the qualities of piety and purity being a crucial signifier."<sup>107</sup> Hence black women need to be recognized as a "primary force in maintaining the divide between two racially-distinct realms of sexuality."<sup>108</sup> The disavowal of the black female is evident on a linguistic level here as well. We have Foucault's *hystericization of women's bodies* and JanMohammed's *hystericization of the black body*; these phrases work together to communicate that black means black male, and woman cannot mean black female.

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<sup>104</sup> JanMohammed, 104.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 32.

<sup>108</sup> JanMohammed, 104.

Another place where black female sexuality makes a critical, yet unnoted intervention into Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is within the space of silence; JanMohammed finds silence to be a definitive quality of racialized sexuality, what distinguishes racialized sexuality from bourgeois sexuality. Silence and repression, two key forces Foucault argues against in *History of Sexuality* as part of his rejection of the repressive hypothesis, are then very different in and for racialized sexualities; therefore power must operate differently as well. Power is problematized by this racial-sexual border. For racialized sexualities power is neither accessed nor disseminated in the same modes Foucault discusses.

Because silence and repression "play a strategic rather than a tactical role," sexuality on the racialized border "becomes an even more dense transfer point for relations of power."<sup>109</sup> The peculiar nature of this silence is the "open secret" that JanMohammed refers to, white patriarchal sexual violation in and through the master's rape of the black female slave, a simultaneously public and private act of intimacy, an overt violation, a "don't go there" that is frequently visited, an "open secret." Reading JanMohammed, Linda Williams also finds racialized sexuality in the US to be "more occulted."<sup>110</sup> Historically, the slave's silence about this act was necessary in a strategic sense—it accomplished the denial of white desire for the black slave, the repudiation of the humanity of the black body that this desire and the act of sexual intercourse evinces, the subsequent maintenance of walls of white patriarchy as the very foundation of the racial sexual border. The slave's silence, motivated by life and personal safety, further protected the very institution of slavery.

Yet this silence is not merely a racialized concept, but a highly gendered one. The black American female has historically both negotiated and strategically deployed this silence very differently. Many black feminist scholars have discussed the presence of silence as a definitive feature of black women's sexuality. Darlene Clark Hines, notes that the institutionalized rape of the black American female slave formed a tenacious "culture of dissemblance" for black women, the "behaviors and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of the inner lives and selves from their oppressors."<sup>111</sup> Black women's ability to dissemble is a technique of survival against sexual violence which did not dissipate with the abolition of slavery.<sup>112</sup>

So I believe it is, following JanMohammed, necessary to recognize the limitations of Foucault in illuminating racialized sexuality, specifically black female sexuality. However I find Foucault tremendously useful for what he doesn't say; that is, the absence of the role of race in

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>110</sup> Williams use of the word occulted, seemingly an attempt to reference the silence JanMohammed exposes, conveys a sort of mystic, arcane and supernatural quality to black sexuality that reinforces the idea of a natural difference, and the super-sexuality and inhumanity of black body, as demonstrated by their otherworldly sexuality. It seems to cite the language of the economy of the *Manichean allegory* JanMohammed works to deconstruct, "a field of discursive yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and other, subject and object." See JanMohammed, 106. See also Linda Williams (2004), 272.

<sup>111</sup> Darlene Clark Hines, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," *Signs* 14 no. 4 (Summer, 1989): 912.

<sup>112</sup> Hines explains that women's positions as domestic laborers furthered the conditions of and for their sexual violation, as a type of re-casting of their roles as "domestics" under slavery, Hines notes that in Chicago in 1930, eighty percent of African American women worked as personal servants and domestics. For more see Darlene Clark Hines (1989).

his history of sexuality and his simultaneous assumption (or presumption) of the universality of history, reveals just how forceful the Eurocentric male gaze has been in formulating and disseminating discourses of sexuality, a gaze that as JanMohammed brilliantly states, “is consistently blind to the various forms of sexualities that it implicitly constructs as it alterities.”<sup>113</sup> This project exposes and deconstructs this gaze to understand how representations of black women in contemporary American porn, the majority of which are products of this Eurocentric male gaze (a white heteropatriarchy) are critical in the formation and circulation of our understandings of sexuality. That is, beyond the shallow and quotidian acknowledgement of pornography as a vehicle of “getting off,” how do these images function to racialize not only the women pictured within them, but also the viewers who consume them, and the people who produce them? Understanding the tumultuous history of pornography not just via the gaze of white men—socially, lexically, and legally—but at the same time, distinctly entangled with race, helps us to better consider the complicated processes of racialization at work in porn. Indeed one place where this critical link between race and pornography becomes visible is in the context of the battlefield of pornography and porn’s legal contention in both Britain and the United States, a battleground where social anxieties about obscene material were firmly enmeshed with societal anxieties about the presence of racialized bodies. So pornography, as obscenity, is highly informed by the black body as an obscene body.

### **The Battlefield of Pornography**

The passage of the Obscene Publications Act in 1857, at what could be regarded as the height of the Victorian Era, is considered the first legislative act against pornography.<sup>114</sup> Though pornography had long been considered a growing problem in England, it signals the commencement of state intervention in looking at representations of sex.<sup>115</sup> A major British anti-obscenity legislation, the Obscene Publications Act made the sale of obscene material a statutory offense and gave the courts power to seize and destroy obscene material. The passage of this act shifted the focus from sex itself to looking at sex and created state-set legal consequences to viewing representations of sex that have lasted until today.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Lynn Hunt, who reads Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* as engaged in a grander philosophical exploration of the self and the meaning of the self, also finds problematic his discussion of power. Foucault, de-genders power when in fact, it is “profoundly gendered” phenomenon, “the genderless functional operation of power is juxtaposed, uncomfortably and even inexplicably, with a profoundly gendered concept of the individual as adult male subject. See Hunt, “Foucault’s Subject,” 84. I would, however, push Hunt’s critiques of Foucault even further, towards the direction of JanMohammed, to point towards the assumption of the individual as white adult male subject. For more see Lynn Hunt, “Foucault’s Subject in the History of Sexuality,” Ed. Donna Stanton, *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to Aids* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) See also JanMohammed, 116.

<sup>114</sup> The act, also known as Lord Campbell’s Act was introduced by Lord Campbell (1779–1861), the Lord Chief Justice, in September of 1857. Pornography had long been considered a growing problem in England and organizations such as the Society for the Suppression Against Vice founded in England 1802 indicate the public desire and action to quell the spread of sexually explicit matter flooding the streets.

<sup>115</sup> Organizations such as the Society for the Suppression Against Vice founded in England 1802 indicate the public desire and action to quell the spread of sexually explicit matter flooding the streets.

<sup>116</sup> *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilisation*, Dir. Fenton Bailey, Narr. Marilyn Milgrom, Koch Vision, 2006.

Xenophobia marked a critical aspect of Lord Campbell's Act. The Obscene Publications Act illustrated the xenophobia that characterized Britain at the time, in its presupposition that obscenity was an outside infiltrator, a foreign invader responsible for contaminating the home soils of Britain.<sup>117</sup> This xenophobia, however, needs to be examined within the larger context of colonialism and British imperialism. Britain's desire and access (both physical and visual/or photographic) to African land, products, bodies and was severely heightened during the latter half of the nineteenth century with events such as the scramble for Africa and the Berlin Conference. As this project demonstrates, this desire for the black body (evinced and engendered by porn) continues to be simultaneously coupled with disgust and fear.

Lord Campbell claimed to his opponents that the Obscene Publications Act was meant "to apply exclusively to works written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of the youth and of a nature calculated to shock the common feelings of decency in a well-regulated mind."<sup>118</sup> Such works, were positioned against those perceived to possess artistic merit. This belief that artistic merit is something inherent in a work waiting to be found, is of course highly problematic, perhaps reflecting a central conflict in the nature of representation itself—that of production (intention) versus reception. Lord Campbell's citation of artistic merit privileges the reception of representation; furthermore it puts the reception in the hands of *qualified* interpreters. Historian Montgomery Hyde notes that a failure of the Obscene Publications Act was this very problem of reception "it turned the average English magistrate into a censor of artistic and literary morals by leaving him to say whether in his opinion any particular work was obscene and, if it was, to order its destruction, regardless of any artistic, literary, or social merit it might possess."<sup>119</sup> County magistrates were then instilled with not just the power to seize and destroy obscene materials, but to deem certain materials obscene—making them some of the first modern censors according to Hyde.<sup>120</sup> The Obscene Publications Act came at a time when pornography was simply flourishing in England. In 1834 London's Holywell Street, also known as Bookseller's Row, had fifty-seven shops selling pornographic materials such as novels, etchings, prints, as well as catalogues for prostitutes.<sup>121</sup> Sadomasochistic literature, specifically that with a keen interest in the act of flagellation, was very common in the Victorian period.<sup>122</sup>

## England's Development of Pornography

*The Hicklin Test* is essential to any discussion of England's history of pornography, which in turn, informed the path of pornography in United States, providing the groundwork for anti-obscenity legislation in both Britain and the US. In the 1868 English case, *Hicklin v. Queen (Regina)*, Britain's then Chief of Justice Alexander Cockburn overturned a previous ruling overlooking the dissemination of a lewd, anti-Catholic pamphlet. Cockburn, stated "[t]he test of obscenity is whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt

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<sup>117</sup> Kendrick, 119.

<sup>118</sup> Montgomery Hyde H, *A History of Pornography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964), 169.

<sup>119</sup> Hyde, 171.

<sup>120</sup> In *A History of Pornography*, Hyde traces the first pornographic literary censorship attempt back to the end of the fourth century b.c, with Plato's proposition to prohibit Homer's works to be read by youth.

<sup>121</sup> (<http://www.bbc.co.uk>).

<sup>122</sup> For more specific examples of pornographic literature during the Victorian Era see Hyde, Kendrick or Hunt.

those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall."<sup>123</sup> Also known as the Hicklin Rule, it set an early precedent for obscenity and was cited in American court cases throughout the 1800s and early 1900s. The rule allowed a publication to be judged for obscenity based on isolated passages of a work considered out of context and judged by their apparent influence on the most susceptible readers, such as children. *Regina v. Hicklin* (1868) ruled that any material that tended to "deprive and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences" was deemed obscene and could be banned on that basis. *Regina v. Hicklin* set the standard for defining criminally punishable obscenity, a criterion which American courts soon adopted. A work was deemed legally obscene if it possessed the *tendency* towards depravity and corruption.

The Hicklin Case of 1868 gave The Obscene Publications Act a much more restrictive interpretation than Lord Campbell had ever intended, mainly what the material in question's possible effect on the mind of a "hypothetical schoolgirl."<sup>124</sup> This hypothetical schoolgirl then, as living being, representational group, symbol and or synecdoche became the ideal victim of pornography at the time and it is not only she who needs to be examined, but the group of people she, as a category, most vehemently excludes. That is, it is important to think about the racial idealization of this hypothetical schoolgirl in mid-to-late nineteenth century England, who was certainly not, imagined as a girl of color. The Hicklin Test shows that the anxiety behind censorship attempts and the urgent desire to identify and eradicate the so-called obscene were just as much about the stability of white male patriarchal positionality and prerogative, as they were about societal contamination and youth corruption. So what was at stake to be lost was not then, the pristine values of the impressionable, virginal "Young Person," but the positions of those who held the power to deem what was proper and improper knowledge. Thus, the Hicklin test was not a test of obscenity, but more an indication of this sort of privilege, that of "men inhabiting a particular class and a particular historical moment."<sup>125</sup> This privilege needs to be understood as a not just classed, but distinctly racialized, linked to middle and upper class white manhood.

## The Early American Fight

The 1815 Pennsylvania case, *Commonwealth v. Sharpless*, represents the first United States conviction for the common law crime of obscene libel. The case involved Jesse Sharpless, found guilty of hosting paid viewings of an obscene painting depicting an anonymous man and woman in an "indecent" pose in his private home. The judge believed the image shown had the power to excite lust and, despite being shown in a private home, represented a public threat of demoralization and debauchery. This decision confirmed the perceived power of the image, summoning pornography's accredited power to contaminate the moral fabric of society.

The 1842 Customs Act, also known as The US Tariff Act of 1842, represents another important government action against pornography. The Customs Act was the first federal law restricting import of obscene material. This federal statute, which implied the belief that foreign obscenity, not some sort of home grown filth, was responsible for the contamination of America,

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<sup>123</sup> (<http://www.radford.edu/~wkovarik/class/law/1.12obscenity.html>).

<sup>124</sup> Hyde, 171.

<sup>125</sup> Kendrick, 123.

recalls the practice of xenophobia that Walter Kendrick notes to be present in Britain's anti-obscenity history.<sup>126</sup> However, it is absolutely essential to view these xenophobic moments in the history of pornography in not merely a foreign/domestic sense, but under a racial lens. For example, Donald Alexander Downs in, *The New Politics of Pornography*, notes that little obscenity prosecution happened in the United States until after the Civil War.<sup>127</sup> I contend that this has to do with American anxiety over the newly free black body as a threat to the moral backbone of the nation. But beyond mere social menace, the emergence of the African American as citizen produced a profound angst based on their power to disrupt the economic, political system of white male supremacy already firmly in place. Emancipation, and the increased presence of free black bodies represented a crisis in the boundaries of nation and nationhood that is absolutely reflected, though unacknowledged by pornography historians and scholars, in the movement against pornography. At this time, the maintenance of national purity was a prime concern. Both pornography and the black female body become configured within the national imagination as obscene and threatening to maintenance of national progress and purity. If, as John Clarke notes, "our concept of pornography depends on our judgments about what is obscene" then our conceptualization of pornography is indebted to the black body as obscene itself.<sup>128</sup>

It is necessary to read the censorship battle against pornography in alignment with the narrative of racial-sexual control that scripts the practice of lynching. Lynching represents another, although extreme (and extralegal), practice of control aimed at correcting (not only) black transgression. Both lynching and anti-porn efforts represent responses to the threat of the intertwining systems of the social, economic and political structures of white patriarchal supremacy that the emergence of free black bodies signaled. Black emancipation changed the context of and for sexual discourse—this discourse not only includes the rules of sexual relations, to which lynching is clearly tied, but also the production, dissemination and use of sexual representation and pornography.

The mid nineteenth century contestation of pornography is most definitely aligned with that of the black body as well as the immigrant body and the bodies of racialized others. The enforcement of the first federal anti-obscenity statute passed in 1842 was not eagerly enforced until the post-Civil War torrents of immigration.<sup>129</sup> Historical patterns of US federal immigration control confirm this xenophobia with regard to outside, foreign and/or Other sexuality. The US immigration control is an institution that reveals the regulation of sexuality via the protection of the category of whiteness—an upholding of the sexual purity and normalcy which whiteness symbolized and protected.

The Immigration Act of 1891, which made immigration a matter of the Federal government, contained certain provisions with regard to sexuality aimed to ensure protection of

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<sup>126</sup> Kendrick, 126.

<sup>127</sup> Downs, Donald Alexander, *The New Politics of Pornography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>128</sup> John Clarke, 12.

<sup>129</sup> John B. McConahay, "Pornography: The Symbolic Politics of Fantasy," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 51, No. 1 (Winter 1988): 53.



American whiteness in the face of the incoming national threats. Such provisions were meant to forbid entry to those involved in sex crimes including rape, sodomy, adultery and bigamy, also reflect the medicalization of sex through instructing immigration physicians to look at overall physical health and evidence of sexually transmitted diseases as being indicative of atypical sexual practices and vigorous libidos.<sup>130</sup> In 1903, the Act was amended with a stronger focus on sexuality through limiting the trafficking in women for prostitution. For example, single and/or pregnant women were denied entry as they were believed to be prostitutes who would further deteriorate America's chaste moral fabric. Polygamists were also banned as they too threatened the model of the nuclear family so critical to the developing nation, as well as complicated the heterosexual coding of family founded on monogamous biological reproduction. Ironically polygamy, which carried with it all sorts of nasty associations of foreign primitivity and the taboo versus the "civilized" American codes of sexuality, was the choice for many of the founding fathers of our Nation, who maintained relations with their legal wives as well as with their female slaves, often fathering children to all women.<sup>131</sup>

Immigration law thus reflected concerns over national racial purity and its sexual protection and was enacted through the bodies of woman of color. Anchored in a eugenicist ideology of Eurocentric racial superiority, immigrations laws offer a keen lens in considering pornography's racialized history. The following excerpt from a 1920 hearing before the United States House of Representatives' Committee on Immigration and Naturalization demonstrates the anxiety surrounding the imbrication of race, sex, and sexuality with regard to immigration. It also speaks to the perceived always already pornographic nature of black women, "women of the lower race," who functioned as a national social contaminant and served to mark the limits of the very categories of "lower" and "higher" races:

The higher races everywhere tend to keep themselves pure on account of the relative chastity out of wedlock of the women of the higher caste, and the lower race tends to mix for exactly the opposite reason. Whenever two races come into contact, it is found that the women of the lower race are not, as a rule, adverse to intercourse with men of the higher. And that has been true throughout history. It is true now.<sup>132</sup>

What this passage also resonates is the ambivalence of black female sexuality as deplored and desired and the contradictory yet well established sexual relationship between black women and white men, "men of the higher caste." A not just sexually, but racially comprehensive purity collides with pornography on many sites, revealing more than pornography's intimate relationship to and with nation but the conjugate relationship of blackness and nation. Immigration is one of the places where these connections emerge in high relief.

Despite increasing federal involvement in the regulation of sexuality and the restriction of obscene materials, in the United States, as in England, a lot of the anti-obscenity enforcement came from private organizations. The most notable of these private organizations were the Watch and Ward Society in Boston and the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, officially started in 1873. Anthony Comstock, born in rural New Canaan, Connecticut in 1844 of

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<sup>130</sup> Ethne Luibheid, *Entry Denied: A History of U.S. Immigration Control* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 9.

<sup>131</sup> Luibheid, 7.

<sup>132</sup> Testimony from Harry H. Laughlin, Eugenics Research Association Biological Aspects of immigration, Hearing before the House Representatives, Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, April 16-17, 1920, Page 15.

Puritan heritage, is largely remembered for being the most enthusiastic and effective member of these private organizations. After a brief period of service to the Union during the American Civil War, Comstock became a clerk at a dry goods store. It was not until he moved from Connecticut to New York, that he became involved in the anti-obscenity movement that would consume his life. With funding from the Young Men's Christian Association, the anti-obscenity crusader was able to convince congress to pass what was unofficially called The Comstock Law. This act, passed on March 3, 1873, "an Act for the Suppression of Trade in and Circulation of, obscene Literature and articles of immoral use" essentially solidified Comstock's previous self-designated position as a United States Postal censor. Comstock's act, which he rigorously and personally enforced, prohibited the delivery and transportation of "obscene, lewd, or lascivious" material including that which referenced birth control and even anatomical textbooks. The irony of such an aggressive censorship campaign, as led by Comstock, is that it only succeeds in publicly disclosing that which one so desperately wishes to obstruct; or as Walter Kendrick rightly reminds us "only neglect can kill a printed book."<sup>133</sup> This irony is a thread that underlines the history of pornography and censorship; as evident in the unearthing pornographic materials from Pompeii only to be immediately inhumed a Secret Museum.

Essential to Comstock's notion of American morality is the figure of the child as symbolic of purity, virginity, youth and goodness; his book, *Traps for the Young* (1884), is according to Comstock himself, a "plea for the moral purity of children."<sup>134</sup> This symbolic rhetoric of the child, as a raceless or race-neutral being, needs to be more closely examined as it speaks to the racialization undergirding Comstock's anti-obscenity sentiment. Anne McClintock, in *Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family*, discusses how this concept of classifying some people or groups of people, as children was essential to the emergence of a European national narrative formulated through a process of gendering nation time. Specifically, Britain's emerging national narrative was one dependent upon the gendering and racialization of time, a process performed by coding certain groups like women, the colonized, and the working class, as forever behind the time of the modern developing nation. So that, as McClintock states,

Women, it was argued, did not inhabit history proper, but existed, like colonized peoples, in a permanently anteriorized time within the modern nation, as anachronistic humans, childlike, irrational and regressive—the living archive of the national archaic. White men, middle-class men, by contrast were seen to embody the forward thrusting agency of national progress.<sup>135</sup>

Hopelessly anachronistic, children and those classified as such, were therefore in need of the guidance and protection of this white middle class male. Black women as both "colonized peoples" and "women" most dynamically enact this anachronistic humanity, which is especially visible in and through their a-normal sexuality, something, as this project reveals, pornography is heavily invested in. Understanding how the metaphor of the child can be and was used in the context of the nation and nationality, Comstock's child is at once vividly multifaceted— both a symbol of American purity (whiteness) as well as the threat of immanent contamination and the constant need to police for obscenity in the wrong (read: not affluent white male) hands. However, Comstock's child, unlike the Victorian child, is gendered male. This is because,

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<sup>133</sup> Kendrick, 96.

<sup>134</sup> Anthony Comstock, *Traps for the Young* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), x.

<sup>135</sup> Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism, and the Family," *Feminist Review* 44 (1993): 67.

Kendrick believes, “Male sexual constitution suited itself more readily to economic metaphors. Corrupted men ran dry: corrupted women did something quite different, something that apparently eluded Comstock’s imaginative grasp.”<sup>136</sup> This, highly gendered, monetary language, is quite ironically, the rhetoric of pornography.

### **Porn and the Law: A Brief History of U.S. Supreme Court Rulings**

The following represents a brief history of some of the more important rulings of the Supreme Court in the arena of pornography. Such a history allows us to understand how the public and private debates and dialogue around pornography formed and how pornography as a phenomenon is currently understood, treated, and represented in our society. This history is important to understand pornography’s salience as a national medium—its contested yet constitutive relationship to and with nation.

*Roth v. the United States* (1957) was a monumental Supreme Court ruling in the history of obscenity. *Roth* created another test for obscenity replacing the Hicklin Principle previously adopted in the United States from England. The case involved a New York publisher, Samuel Roth, who was a well-known figure in the obscenity circles, convicted of mailing material that appealed to the “prurient interest.” The court’s conviction of Roth, established that obscene material was not guaranteed the protection of the First Amendment. But through *Roth*, the delineations for obscene material were constitutionally redrawn. Presiding Chief Justice William Brennan, notes that obscene material that possessed any perceived amount of redeeming social value was under the protection of the First Amendment,

All ideas even the slightest redeeming social importance—unorthodox ideas, controversial ideas, even ideas hateful to the prevailing climate of opinion—have the full protection of the guaranties, unless excludable because they encroach the limited area of more important interests.<sup>137</sup>

Although Kendrick insists, “Roth cleared nothing up, but it did reflect a new maturity in public discourse on ‘the obscene’” the Roth test remained in effect as the standard, no matter how vague or malleable, for the determination of obscenity until 1973, with *Miller v. California*.<sup>138</sup>

*Miller v. California* (1973) was a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling, overruling the Roth decision as well as instituting a new, more specific definition of obscenity that remains the present criterion today. The case involved another instance of the distribution of obscenity through the United States postal system. Marvin Miller, the defendant, was convicted of mass mailing sexually explicit materials for sale. The outcome was a new Supreme Court standard for the determination of obscenity; material thus labeled was not protected under the First Amendment. The Miller test has three principles: (1) whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest, (2) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and (3) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, and scientific value. The Miller test shifted

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<sup>136</sup> Kendrick, 143.

<sup>137</sup> PBS, Frontline American Porn: Prosecuting Obscenity: an Overview of Past Pornography Rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/porn/prosecuting/overview.html> (accessed June 2, 2007).

<sup>138</sup> Kendrick, 202.

pornography's audience away from the national community to a more state-specific and local community, in its reference to the "average person." Miller sets the standard for a legally mandated definition of pornography, however the definition of pornography continues to be hotly contested.

## The Debate

The battlefield of pornography was not limited to the courtroom. Debates waged among private citizens and groups of individuals who questioned the parameters of pornography, its contents, use and societal affects. Battles waged against modern pornography in the US have often been at the hands of self-professed feminists, or feminist groups. The majority, or at least the most vocal, of these feminists position themselves against pornography and rally around the idea that pornography is both a harm to women and a detriment to society at large. For example, Women Against Pornography (WAP) founded in New York in 1975, was a feminist group embodying its title. Working to gain attention to sway public and legal and public opinion against porn, WAP was a catalyzing force in the American feminist movement against pornography.

Gail Dines, co-author of *Pornography: The Consumption of Inequality* (1998), employs what she terms a *critical feminist perspective*, one which upholds the common belief that women are oppressed in our patriarchal society and that one of the main dimensions of this oppression is sexual.<sup>139</sup> According to Dines, pornography plays a lead role in the sexual and social subordination of women. Dines et al discuss pornography in two ways:

[fi]rst there is a widely understood definition of pornography in the culture: Pornography is the material sold in shops for the purpose of producing sexual arousal for mostly male consumers. While this does not define the term with absolute precision, it is sufficiently clear to make conversation possible. Second, from a critical feminist analysis, pornography is a specific kind of sexual material that mediates and helps maintain the sexual subordination of women.<sup>140</sup>

Pornography for Dines et al is violence against women, arising from patriarchal notions of sexuality.<sup>141</sup>

*A Drug Called Pornography* (2000) is an anti-pornography, highly propagandistic film that attempts to establish a causal relationship between violence and pornography. The film is representative of the anti-pornography feminist opinion. Both drug addiction and its supposed co-addiction, pornography, are demonized throughout the film, through the use of lighting, voice, and imagery. Frequently the familiar language of drug addiction— references to highs, withdrawal, dependence, and out of control behavior—is evoked and applied unconvincingly, and often humorously to pornography addiction. The film juxtaposes testimonies from pornography addicts (who are often featured with their faces darkened and or voices digitally altered) with rape convicts in a way that unfairly parallels the two. *A Drug Called Pornography* relies on the academic backing of Gail Dines, as pornography authority and historian, to lend credibility to its claim that pornography is a dangerous drug, a diabolical, highly addictive, social

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<sup>139</sup> Dines, Gail dines, Robert Jenson & Ann Russo. *Pornography: The Consumption of Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 3.

<sup>140</sup> Dines et al, 3.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 29.

substance that paves way to sexual violence and overall societal demise. It also relies on the testimony of another important, well-known anti-pornography activist and scholar, Andrea Dworkin.

Radical feminist, Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005) gained significant notoriety, in both academic and legal circles, for her anti-pornography crusade begun in the late 1970s. Dworkin's book *Men Possessing Women* (1979), a quintessential example of a feminist anti-porn book, inaugurated her role as a leader in the anti-pornography feminist movement of the late 1970s early 1980s. Dworkin, in a supposed archaeological excavation of the term to its etymological roots, provides a judgment-laden definition of pornography that demonizes sex-workers and pornographic actors:

Contemporary pornography strictly and literally conforms to the word's root meaning: the graphic depiction of vile whores, or in our language, sluts, cows, (as in: sexual cattle, sexual chattel), cunts. The word has not changed its meaning and the genre is not misnamed. The only change in the meaning of the word is with respect to its second part: *graphos*; now there are cameras—there is still photography, film, video...The word pornography does not have any other meaning than the ones cited here, the graphic depiction of the lowest whores.<sup>142</sup>

In addition to instilling in pornography a false sense of stagnancy that denies its evolution and adaptation as a social phenomenon functioning in different times and environments, Dworkin supplies us with a definition of pornography that is reliant upon the same type of moral judgment, or perhaps more appropriate in Dworkin's case, condemnation, that accompanied the word following its emergence in the 1850s. Dworkin, and a number of anti-pornography activists including groups such as WAP, gained more attention and support following the release of the feature length pornographic film *Deep Throat* (1972) when lead actress, Linda Boreman (stage name Linda Lovelace), publicly testified that she had been abused and sexually coerced into making the film, thus providing for many, satisfactory evidence of the link between pornography and the sexual domination and abuse of women.<sup>143</sup>

Dworkin's testimony is also included in the 1986 Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, better known as the Meese Commission (named after Attorney General Edwin Meese).<sup>144</sup> Just short of two thousand pages, this document seeks to, in the words of the commission,

determine the nature, extent, and impact on society of pornography in the United States, and to make specific recommendations to the Attorney General concerning more effective ways in which the spread of pornography could be contained, consistent with constitutional guarantees.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1981), 200.

<sup>143</sup> The film *Deep Throat* is discussed in chapter four.

<sup>144</sup> Similar commissions such as The Williams Committee in Great Britain (1977-1979) and The Fraser Committee in Canada (1986) have been established outside of the U.S. to study the effects of pornography on society, reinforcing the overall significance and prevalence of pornography as critical medium.

<sup>145</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography. Final report. 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1986), li.

Therefore the report maintains a very legal focus and is concerned primarily with law and law enforcement in regard to pornography. The first President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography was initially created in 1967, staffed in 1968, and reported in 1970. The report is mainly concerned with the question of harm, that is, with discerning pornography's potential for and degree of social harm. In the context of harm, most of the research focuses on sexually violent material that the committee believes has the most potential for harm. Overall, the committee finds a link, a causal relationship, between exposure to sexually violent materials and increased aggressive behavior towards women. However, they find no persuasive evidence supporting the link between non-violent and/or non-degrading porn and acts of sexual violence. Andrea Dworkin's testimony to the Meese Commission undoubtedly strengthens the first claim.

For Dworkin and equally renown, fellow anti-pornography feminist, activist and lawyer, Catherine MacKinnon, with whom Dworkin has collaborated on the 1983 Anti-Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance, pornography is rape as a form of entertainment that furthers the violent submission of women.<sup>146</sup> A section of the Meese report entitled *victimization*, contains an exhaustive list of testimonies from self-professed pornography victims including a number of star testimonies from Dworkin, Linda Boreman and a number of anonymous *Playboy* models.<sup>147</sup> The Meese Committee cites Dworkin and MacKinnon's joint definition of pornography as the "sexually explicit subordination of women" through text and/or image.<sup>148</sup> For Dworkin and MacKinnon, pornography objectifies women through a host of devices—via pain (physical and emotional), humiliation, rape, dismemberment, possession, fragmentation, abasement, exploitation, degradation and even torture. This definition embodies the anti-pornography feminist sentiment, a sentiment which the Meese Commission seems to often times agree with, despite the continued use of equivocal, elusive, language and previously stating that there was no connection found between non-violent pornography and victimization.

In addition to swaying towards an anti-porn stance, the Meese Commission's report reveals an extreme heteronormative bias. Such inclination becomes apparent through phrases like,

We all agree that some large part of the privateness of sex is essential, and we would, for example, unanimously take to be harmful to society a proliferation of billboards displaying even the hypothesized highly explicit photograph of a loving married couple engaged in mutually pleasurable procreative vaginal intercourse.<sup>149</sup>

Married couples "engaged in mutually pleasurable procreative vaginal intercourse" disavows homosexual relationships as well as a host of other possibilities for sexual relationships such as polyamory, transgender and transsexual sexual relationships, and experimental relationships. Hence the committee, while disagreeing somewhat over the extent and manners in which pornography harms society, was in agreement that the right type of sex is vaginal, and occurs between a man and a woman, husband and wife, in the privacy of their own home.

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<sup>146</sup> Catherine MacKinnon has co authored several texts against pornography with fellow anti-porn feminist Andrea Dworkin. See *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (New York: Women Against Pornography, 1988); Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, ed. *In Harm's Way: The Pornography Civil Rights Hearings* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998)

<sup>147</sup> By victims, the committee seems to mean people who have been adversely affected by pornography, either as participants themselves or as victims of abuse from pornography "users."

<sup>148</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 1986, 198.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*,45.

The anti-pornography feminists that emerged in the late 1970s offer a definition of pornography that is not only framed through the ineffective binaries of negative and positive, but one that is too narrowly formulated in terms of privileging the effect of porn rather than its production; hence one that denies the realities of pornography's history as an ever-enduring, expanding, and evolving cultural medium. Similarly, the Meese Commission report also demonstrates this brand of writing on pornography, where pornography is analyzed as societal detriment. It is necessary to move beyond the tendentiousness of pioneers like Dworkin and MacKinnon, to develop an understanding of pornography that is not limited by this viewpoint. Pornography, as this project illustrates, is much more than a sometimes vehicle of patriarchal domination, misogyny and violence against women. It is also much more than an erotic possibility for women to explore and eventuate their own sexual desires and fantasies. As this project argues, pornography's creation of spaces of racialized desire is imbricated to its making of spaces of belonging in the categories of race and gender. So pornography becomes a critical medium in our constructions and collective imaginings of racialized womanhood—specifically of what it means and what it looks like to be a black woman. Pornography is a powerful visual medium that narrates of the boundaries of nation, symbolically enacting its exclusions and inclusions, imagining of communities, and racialized constructions of American womanhood and manhood.

On the other side of the so-called porn wars, often viewed as a conservative/liberal battle, were the pro-porn feminists, also termed libertarian feminists, pro-sex feminists, anti-censorship feminists, and feminist sex radicals.<sup>150</sup> In this polar conflict, pornography was either a kind of violence against women, or a the pro-porn feminists believed, a possibility for sexual expression. Donna Stanton notes that while the anti-porn feminists had noble intentions, such as resisting misogyny, “this alliance also supported the broad conservative goal of imposing stringent limitations on sexual practices and discourses.”<sup>151</sup> The limiting of sexual freedom is what underlined the pro-pornography or anticensorship feminist (ACF) platform, who believed that treating pornography as only a part of a larger phallographic repression of female sexuality and censoring it, actually restrained women's right to sexual pleasure. These women, of whom Carol Vance is a prime example, were equally concerned with sexual violence towards women, but believed in the possibilities of pornography for women's sexual pleasure, power and liberation or freedom of expression of women's sexuality. Entangled in the anti-porn mission (which also shunned sadomasochistic sexual practices, and other more experimental, non-traditional, sex acts thought to harm women), Vance and other pro-porn feminists believed, was a denial of a woman's fundamental right to define and make her own sexual pleasure.<sup>152</sup> Vance and other pro-porn feminists, posited that the anti-porn feminists were not only anti-porn, but anti-feminist—their vehement opposition of pornography translated into a denial of the diversity of women's sexual experiences, their transgressive sexual fantasies and a rejection of women's control of their own sexuality that were essential components of feminist discourse.<sup>153</sup> Pro-pornography feminist, Wendy McElroy, author of *A Women's Right to Pornography*, self-

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<sup>150</sup> Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art* (London: Routledge, 2001), 32.

<sup>151</sup> Donna Stanton, ed. *Discourses of Sexuality: from Aristotle to Aids* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 13.

<sup>152</sup> Self-proclaimed sex positive feminists, Nina Hartley and Carol Queen, who have both worked as pornographers and pornographic actors, are also pioneers in the pro-sex, pro-porn feminist movement of the 1980s.

<sup>153</sup> See Vance, *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

identifies as an individualist feminist. In contrast to radical anti-porn feminists like Dworkin and Mackinnon who view the issue of pornography as a uniform harm, a detriment to all women, individual feminists champion women's diverse sexualities and recognize that there exists no true collective interest or choice.

This Manichean dialectic that marked the feminist porn wars of the 1970s and 1980s, and still largely frames the discourse surrounding pornography, is one that asphyxiates pornography's underestimated yet significant narration on sex, sexuality, sexual culture, power, representation, access, desire, fantasy, gender and most importantly for this project, race and the construction of racialized sexuality. While these feminist scholars have made important contributions to the field of pornography, as well as helped put pornography on the map in academic circles, their writing on pornography is often sensationalistic and deficient. Furthermore, such reaction against pornography, as exemplified by these critics is *in* response to its rapid growth as a crucial medium in American culture. This development, the growth of pornography into American industry (print, moving image and Internet) is explored in the following chapters to interrogate the black female's multivalent representation in contemporary American pornography.



## **Chapter Two**

### ***Print Pornography's Making of the Black Female Body***

This chapter interrogates the evolution the black female body from her earliest appearances in a variety of diverse two-dimensional print media from cartoon images to mainstream “men’s” magazine pornography. I read the development of magazine print pornography and the black female’s image within it against the photograph’s task of visualizing a “real” and authentic racialized body. The story of the inclusion of the black female into mass circulated American porn magazines is one of segregation and ambivalent inclusion for the black female body. The dynamics of which are deeply connected to her irresolute visual making as a site of racial sexual alterity. In other words, the black female’s gradual inclusion into mainstream print pornography, specifically mass circulated pornographic magazines, was not with total acceptance, but was often predicated upon her deracination, representation as Other, and/or her positioning in a separate space of representation, thus signifying her provisional admission. Yet the black female’s exclusion from early mainstream print pornography belies a societal desire for her.

First I interrogate the cartoon images of Tijuana Bibles, sexually graphic comic books popular from the 1920s to the mid 1950s, exploring how the pornographic collides with the comic in the tradition of blackface minstrelsy to frame the highly sexualized black female body. The cartoon as a phantasmagorical medium which already highlights physical and physiognomic distortion becomes a superlative visual form for racial parody and a fertile site for reading two dimensional pornographic representations of the black female body. Next, I look at two salient American pornography magazines, *Playboy* and *Players*, to understand the black female’s ambiguous position within print pornography as simultaneously marginalized and centric, rejected and accepted.

#### **Porno-comic: Tijuana Bibles and the Cartoon Black Female Body**

Relying on anti-black racist satire, Tijuana Bibles were a vibrant force in the American sexual imagination in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Tijuana Bibles were small, portable books with black and white illustrated images of sexual acts. Small in size, approximately four inches wide by three inches high, Tijuana Bibles allowed for a portability and transport that speaks to the use of the medium. Also called “Eight Pagers” (each comic consisted of a series of eight printed images), “Bluesies” (they were sometimes printed in blue ink), or more simply “Fuck Books,” Tijuana Bibles were convenient, on-the-go sources of pleasure. The name Tijuana Bibles is a taxonomical merger of a geographic location, the Mexican city of Tijuana, and a pillar of Christianity, the bible. Tijuana was at the time, in the mid-twentieth century, a popular American tourist destination identified in the American imagination for its debauchery and hedonism— drinking, drugs, gambling and prostitution. As such the term Tijuana Bibles is a satirical mix of the sacred and profane. However, beyond the salaciousness that the location of Mexico symbolizes, there is a racial presence to the name Tijuana Bibles. The name thus evokes not only Mexico as an exotic destination, but also Mexican people, racialized Others, as inherently wanton themselves. Therefore Tijuana Bibles are lexically anchored in a racialized discourse that relies on the racialized, exoticized, exotified other as a prime signifier of sexuality. The content of these sexually explicit comic books popular from the 1920s to the mid 1950s,

often drew heavily on race, the ribald, and the vernacular featuring caricatures of celebrities and folk culture. Relying on satire, Tijuana Bibles mobilized sexism and racism into a not just comically palatable, but sexually pleasurable, two-dimensional form of the comic book image. Cartoons, as filmmaker Marlon Riggs has noted, of all media, provide the best form for racial caricature.<sup>154</sup> In addition to being popular, comics function as a superlative media for ethnic and racial caricature because they reflected “fantasy world” in which “physical distortion and violence were comic.”<sup>155</sup> Tijuana Bibles also illustrate the diversity of media that print pornography spanned as well as the centrality of race in early American print pornography.

Comic artist and writer, Art Spiegleman compares the work two different Tijuana Bible artists, Mr. Prolific and Mr. Dyslexic, concluding that “[t]here’s a mean spirited malignance to Mr. Dyslexic’s misogyny, xenophobia and racism that compares unfavorably to the rather sweet misogyny, xenophobia and racism in many of the earlier Tijuana Bibles.”<sup>156</sup> Spiegleman’s longing for the earlier days of a “sweeter” misogyny, xenophobia and racism, while clearly disturbing in its exculpation of these hurtful practices, speaks to the role of race in these early pornographic images. Despite Spiegleman’s later concession that the “nasty stereotypes” in the images “infected all strata of our popular culture, certainly including the movies, radio shows, and comic strips they parodied” there is something to be said of the racial parodies that saturate Tijuana Bibles.<sup>157</sup> They speak to what Michael Rogin terms the tradition of “white identification with (imaginary) black sexual desire.”<sup>158</sup> This tradition, which Rogin traces through the practice of blackface minstrelsy, enjoys an overlap throughout the 1930s when Tijuana Bibles were most popular. Furthermore, this tradition reveals the entanglement of the processes of racialization and sexualization within the pornographic imagination.<sup>159</sup> Racist and racialized stereotypes were

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<sup>154</sup> Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notions*, VHS, narrated by Esther Rolle, 1987. Transcription available at <http://www.newsreel.org/transcripts/ethnicno.htm> (accessed Aug 1, 2008).

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> There is little biographical information known about both of these two artists, "Mr. Prolific" who Spiegleman identifies as “the artist who *single-handedly* set the standard for all the rest” was a World War I veteran, “who drew girlie cartoons for magazines aimed at cheering up ex-soldiers back from the liberated shores of Europe.” So “Mr. Prolific” began post WW I and continued drawing probably until the late 1950s. Mr. Dyslexic is the name Spiegleman coins for a post WW II artist who reflects a certain sense of dyslexia and error in his work—poor spelling, average drawing skills, and a habit of out of order sequencing of the cartoons themselves. Spiegleman views Mr. Dyslexic as indicative of the overall decline of the post WW II craft. For more see <http://www.salon.com/aug97/spieg2970819.html>. Also, Bob Adelman, compiled by, *Tijuana Bible: Art and Wit in America’s Forbidden Funnies 1930s-1950s*. Essay by Art Spiegelman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 8.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>158</sup> Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 79.

<sup>159</sup> Micheal Rogin’s analysis of blackface minstrelsy as a technique of Americanization and form of racialized entertainment as commodity is revealing in viewing Tijuana Bibles and their depiction of black body as pornographic body. Indeed, Tijuana Bibles (in their use of satire to mask utterly somber social commentary about race, racism and racialized desire) can be seen as engaging in two-dimensional form of black face minstrelsy, a type of performance dependent on the ambivalent erotic economy of the celebration and profiteering, or as Eric Lott states on *love and theft* of the black body; see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). For more on blackface, see Michael Rogin,

simply rampant in these books. Such stereotypes are not “sweet” as Spiegleman notes, but bittersweet in their highly ambiguous framing of the black body.

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*Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).



Aunt Jemina has been a part of the American consciousness for a century and more. She was invented in 1875 to represent a new self-reviving pancake flour, and her phony, jocular image remained unaltered for decades. By the 1960s, the unambiguously racist stereotype was rejected in favor of a wistful, almost chic Aunt Jemina, far from the original, and even farther from the crude caricature shown in this eight-page.

One particular comic, titled " Aunt Jemima Turn 'Em On a Hot Griddle" reads the familiar mammy stereotype through a pornographic lens. In the comic the Aunt Jemima

character is both mammy and madam, who welcomes two white men to be entertained by two white women, presumably prostitutes. Shallow symbols and metaphors pervade the comic through the crude language of the characters. The metaphor of food is frequently and flagrantly repeated—women are referred to as “stacks of hot numbers,” “hot cakes and syrup;” men’s genitalia is “meat” ready to be fried on Aunt Jemima’s “griddle.” As madam, Aunt Jemima, presides over the sex, offering various commentary to make sure her customers are satisfied. As mammy, she adopts another facet of the mammy’s proverbial role as caretaker, promising to deliver sexual satisfaction, even providing a “suck on the house” for one man at the other one’s dismay. Even after the two male customers leave, Aunt Jemima engages in three-way oral sex with the other women. However as she is always pictured as one the giving end of the sex acts, both her power and sexual pleasure could be questioned. That is, commensurate with her position as mammy, she provides a sexual service or labor to others.

Patricia Hill Collins names the figure of the mammy as one of the four controlling images (along with the matriarch, jezebel and welfare mother) she identifies to be part of a three-way system of oppression of black women: ideological, economic, and political. For Collins, the mammy functions within what Stephen Small terms the *racialized regime of representation* as a construction of the white gaze and as antithetical to cardinal constructions of pure white womanhood.<sup>160</sup> Collins argues that the mammy is a distinctly “asexual woman, a surrogate mother in blackface devoted to the development of a white family.”<sup>161</sup> Art historian Michael Harris also asserts the asexuality of the mammy. For Harris, she is an asexual construction (a body that is neither sexually desired nor desires sex) of and for white male patriarchal domination, “[t]he mammy construction was useful for the maintenance of white patriarchal authority over both black and white women while avoiding sexual access to and domination over them.”<sup>162</sup> The figure of the mammy is an essential and tenacious image of the mythology of slavery that, despite its oft theorization or imagination as an asexual figure, has critical resonances within early print pornography.

Yet in both Harris’ and Hill Collins’ labeling of the mammy as a non-sexual body, they not fully reconcile the sexual contradiction that hybridizes the mammy or uncover the latent sexuality in a seemingly asexual image.<sup>163</sup> If the mammy, the black female, is the opposite of the ideal white woman, we can also read her to be not only un-fragile, but also impure and immoral in a sexual manner. There is thus a sexual ambivalence present in the mammy that Harris and Hill Collins do not fully address. The mammy’s perceived state of sexual benignity masks the sexual politics behind her construction as an icon of black femininity and sexuality. “Aunt Jemima Turn ‘Em On a Hot Griddle” speaks to this very lack. It hints at the latent sexuality in a

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<sup>160</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 7. In his study of representations of slavery in plantation museums, Stephen Small identifies the “racialized regime of representation” as particular representational strategies that structure the “white-centric” sites of the plantation museums. This regime that is sustained by the construction and reconstruction of difference in which the black body, through such practices as primitivization, othering, stereotyping and sexualization, is crowned and re-crowned ambassador of alterity. See Stephen Small and Jennifer L. Eichstedt. *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 10.

<sup>161</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 72.

<sup>162</sup> Michael, D Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, University of Chapel Hill Press, 2003), 90.

<sup>163</sup> Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 92; Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 72.

seemingly asexual image revealing how the quintessential figure of Aunt Jemima becomes pornographically imagined as sexual object of the white male gaze.

Aunt Jemima, the archetypal mammy is a perfect symbolic personification of servant and mother. She is the ultimate symbol of idyllic southern antebellum black devotion, a figure of plantation nostalgia whose obsequious, exaggerated smile simultaneously becomes status symbol for wealthy white families as well as proof of the inherent servility of the black body—its seemingly natural physical and mental need to serve its white masters. Nancy Green, a domestic servant in Chicago, fixed a place as mammy in our popular imaginations when she became Aunt Jemima, the face and spokesmodel for a self-rising pancake flour company in the 1890s.<sup>164</sup> Aunt Jemima, still a figure on pancake mix and syrups sold today, came to symbolize the quintessential matriarchal domesticity of the black female as well as the philanthropic mission of plantation domesticity and enslavement that allowed for her very creation. The mammy, as both myth and actual living body, served to make benign and benevolent the violent and dehumanizing institution of slavery and reinforce the essential, inherent servility of the black female. This comic captures the black female's plural identity as jezebel and surrogate matriarch, all rolled up into one portable pornographic package, the Tijuana Bible.

These early American pornographic images thus solidified the importance of blackness to the commercial success and appeal of sexual representation and the early evolutionary tides of print pornography before its quintessential modern form, the men's magazine. Tijuana Bibles thus reinforce the complicity of pornography and the black female body and reveal the cross pollination of black female sexuality and porn. The images of the black female body in Tijuana Bibles were far more hardcore—more sexually explicit— than their photograph counterparts in magazines would become until almost a half a century later.

## **A Brief History of the Pornographic Magazine Industry**

If, as chapter one reveals, the history of pornography is itself obfuscatory, then tracing the history of print porn specifically is even more tangled. As we know from the pre-twentieth century anti-porn crusade of individuals like Anthony Comstock, and the passing of the Comstock Act in 1873 which forbid the transmission of prurient images via the United States Postal Services, print pornography was not only in existence but must have had a consumer base to warrant to its suppression. Images like photographs or drawings of naked women engaged in sexual acts or “solo” masturbation circulated in underground networks. However, because such images were not mass produced they did not meet large audiences. Due to the clandestine nature and fragile physical quality of these images (often printed or drawn on single sheets of paper) little record remains. The Kinsey Institute Documentary Collection of Photographs archive for example, houses over forty eight thousand of such sexually explicit photographs from around the world. Most of these photographs, which range in date from the early twentieth century to the 1960s, were anonymously donated to the Institute. Many of these photographs from the United States were acquired by the Kinsey archives through various police departments across the United States, in particular the New York and Chicago Police Departments. Mostly the property of booked male prisoners, these images were confiscated by the police department at the time of booking and later handed over to the Kinsey Institute. Though there is little to no historical information about these photographs such as photographer and/or model identification, exact

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<sup>164</sup> Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 88.

date and location, pricing and distribution records, these images attest to an early underground trade in print pornography before the Tijuana Bibles and the development of mass produced material such as pin ups and the men's magazines.

The 1940s, the decade of bathing suit pin-up was followed in the 1950s by the “period of the demure nude” in the form of men's magazines. With World War II came an increased demand for pornography.<sup>165</sup> While pin ups served to bolster the moral of overseas troops, men's magazines developed after the war to continue to satisfy the desire to gaze at the naked female form as well as cater to a new post war brand of modern American masculinity—a unique blend of hedonism and culture. Thus it is in the early 1950s that we see an emergence of men's magazines, most notably *Playboy* who pioneered the trend of the commercial men's magazine as a lifestyle text for the modern “leisure man” and his consumption of the naked female form. Indeed, the 1986 Meese Commission traces the emergence of the print porn industry back to the 1950s and the presence of adults only pornographic venues, dark spaces located in seedy urban areas, that sold magazines featuring nude or semi-nude photographs of women. Such magazines were often poor in quality with black and white images of seductively posed, partially clothed women. Pubic hair was not shown at this time. Male homosexual magazines, which appeared in the late 1950s, initially featured nude male models in single poses with flaccid penises. Group scenes were also prevalent, but with limited contact between models. This practice did not change until 1970, when the sexual content of these “adults only” magazines became more explicit—specifically featuring the integration of male and female models as well as that of female-female models. In fact, images of two of more female models became quite popular after 1970, a coupling that remains a trend in print porn today. The Meese Commission notes that these couplings were a dramatic shift toward simulating or implying sexual relations in images.<sup>166</sup>

In addition to small, back alley pornographic establishments, the clandestine and illegal sale of hard core sexually explicit print materials also took place through “trunk sales,” sales from the trunk of the seller's car, and other furtive modes and locations of selling such as parking lots and abandoned merchant store fronts. For example, the Meese Commission finds that Los Angeles, now the indisputable capital of the American pornography industry, only had five “adults only pornographic outlets” in the 1950s, each of which were supplied through trunk sales, and maintained a front as a general newsstand to avoid attention.<sup>167</sup> The shift from trunk sales to large wholesale warehouses, storage and distribution sources, signaled an increase in demand for hardcore print materials.

*Playboy's* emergence in 1953 would forever change the dynamics of print pornography cementing its position in American culture and offering a much-emulated framework of the quintessential male lifestyle magazine. As the premier American mens' magazine, *Playboy* illustrates the black female's equivocal position within print porn as a figure simultaneously rejected and accepted, marginalized and privileged.

### ***Playboy Magazine and the Girls Next Door***

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<sup>165</sup> Alan Betrock, *Pin-up Mania! The Golden Age of Men's Magazines 1950-1967* (Brooklyn: Shake Books, 1993), back cover.

<sup>166</sup> Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, Final report. 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1986), 342.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

I now turn toward *Playboy* magazine, the premier mainstream pornography magazine in the United States and a pioneer of American print porn, to interrogate porn's making and marking of the symbolic boundaries of national belonging. *Playboy's* long-lived, lounge-attired inventor, Hugh Hefner, who created the magazine in 1953, envisioned it as more than pornography. He saw instead, *Playboy* as a "sophisticated men's magazine" that offered a cultured mix of editorial content, literature, music reviews, comics and other humorous material as well as interviews with celebrities and other prominent American figures.<sup>168</sup> In addition to photographs of nude and scantily clad women, *Playboy* magazine continues to privilege editorial content, celebrity interviews, and advertising (phone sex and pornographic video were particularly heavily advertised within the magazine in the 1980s). *Playboy* has consistently defined itself by its inclusion of celebrity models and its "soft" nature.<sup>169</sup> But nude and scantily clad images of women, such as the one of Marilyn Monroe that graced the cover of the very first issue of *Playboy* in December 1953, continue to be an undeniable allure to the magazine. In just seven years, by the close of the decade, *Playboy* was selling two million issues per month.<sup>170</sup> The Meese Commission rightly accredits *Playboy* with not only mainstreaming porn, but also expanding the national market for pornography.<sup>171</sup>

Yet it was not until 1965 that *Playboy* Magazine featured a black woman in its pages. The fact that *Playboy* magazine, the first major American pornography magazine, was in existence for eleven years before it included a black woman, Jennifer Jackson, as "Playmate of

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<sup>168</sup> James R. Peterson, *The Century of Sex: Playboy's History of the Sexual Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1999), 229.

<sup>169</sup> *Playboy* magazine shows full-frontal female nudity, but unlike other more hard-core iconic American pornographic magazines, such as *Hustler*, refrains from penetration of any kind. Hefner's more sterile, soft-core pornographic imagination has long separated itself from *Hustler* Magazine porn mogul, Larry Flynt's brand of hard-core, irreverent, gross, even scatological style of sexual fantasy.

<sup>170</sup> Peterson, 231.

<sup>171</sup> The 1986 Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, better known as the Meese Commission (named after Attorney General Edwin Meese), is a government report on the national problem of pornography. Just short of two thousand pages, this legally-focused document seeks to explain pornography's impact on American society and provide recommendations to the Attorney General about how to both assess and handle pornography, as a rapidly growing American phenomenon. The report was mainly concerned with the "question of harm", that is, with discerning pornography's potential for and degree of social harm. Overall, the committee finds a link, a causal relationship, between exposure to sexually violent materials and increased aggressive behavior towards women. However, they find no persuasive evidence supporting the link between non-violent and/or non-degrading porn and acts of sexual violence. The first President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, created in 1967, staffed in 1968 and reported in 1970, concluded, that pornography caused little, if any, social harm. The Committee found that there was no correlation between pornography consumption and wrong-doing (i.e. the committing of evil social acts such as crime, violent crime, sex-crimes, and other types of abuse), or more directly, between image and act. It recommended that federal and state legislation should refrain from interfering with adult's rights to consume explicit sexual materials. Consequently this ruling opened up the doors for pornographic production with little or no fear from authorities. But this freedom was quickly extinguished. The results of the 1967 commission were repressed by President Nixon and committee member Charles Keating who both firmly believed that pornography was type of poison infecting the nation. Under their lead, the senate would, on October 13, 1970, vote to reject the findings and recommendations of the Committee on Obscenity and porn would become again, a national enemy.



the Month” (PMOM), speaks volumes about what pornography does to symbolically erect the walls of national belonging based on sexual desire expressed and accessed by a specialized sphere of a certain heteronormative white male pornographic imagination. The cover of the March 1965 magazine, which depicts a color sketch portrait of a blond-haired blue-eyed woman, reflects the white beauty ideal that *Playboy* magazine continues to subscribe to.

Jennifer Jackson had graced the pages of *Playboy* before, seven months prior in August 1964, along with her twin sister, Janis, both playboy bunnies at Chicago’s Playboy club. The accompanying article, “Portrait of Jenny” to Jackson’s PMOM March 1965 photo spread, aids in her construction of a wholesome, down-home girl who is a free-lance model, college student, and a Bunny at the Chicago Playboy Club. Yet Jackson’s pioneer status as the first black Playmate of the Month is not recognized in the article. The absence of a mention of race reveals *Playboy*’s attempted construction of Jackson as a race-neutral body, a move that shows porn’s ambiguous positionality of the black female body, as a body of sameness and difference, desire and loathing. That is, her appearance as a race neutral body and the absence of mention of her role as not just African American woman but the first African American woman to become Playmate of the Month communicates a highly ambivalent regard for blackness—simultaneously rooted in a recognition of its erotic capital and its erasure and disavowal.

This groundbreaking appearance of Jackson evinces porn’s ability to both racialize and de-racialize, color and uncolor, the black female body in different contexts in different ways. Whereas most American pornography relies on the marketing and commodification of the black female body as different, this *Playboy* feature is deeply invested in the invention of Jackson’s sameness. We have seen a similar phenomenon played out in popular culture before. Sarah Banet Weisner explores the short-lived reign of Vanessa Williams as Miss America finding that her re-racialization, after her “un-coloring” for the demands of Miss American pageant, was a result of the publication of pornographic photos of her in the September 1984 issue of *Penthouse Magazine*.<sup>172</sup> For Banet Weisner, bodies of difference are both welcomed and disavowed depending upon shifting claims of our nation. Initially, Williams provided a “blackness that is crucial to the pageants claim to represent diverse womanhood,” somewhere in the middle her blackness was downplayed and finally, it was restored by the *Penthouse* scandal and the pornographic photos of her body.<sup>173</sup> Yet while for Vanessa Williams “the pornographic photographs immediately and detrimentally inscribed her racial identity,” for Jennifer Jackson, the pornographic photographs serve to her erase her racial identity. Pornography does not always equal the commodification of racial sexual alterity, or strive to make the black female a body of difference; it plays a paramount yet highly ambivalent role in the constructions of American womanhood.

The veneer of sameness painted on Jackson in *Playboy* is one that reveals the imbrication of racialization and characterization, the correspondence of inside to outside. “Portrait of Jenny”

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<sup>172</sup> It needs to be noted that the moment when Vanessa Williams was knocked back into black by *Penthouse*’s 1984 publication of pornographic photographs taken some years earlier, was also a moment in which Williams was simultaneously re-racialized and re-sexually oriented. The photos published depict Williams in sexually suggestive positions with a white female, and this “lesbian” performance functioned concomitantly with her re-coloring to construct her as pornographic body.

<sup>173</sup> For more see Sarah Banet-Weiser, “The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 105, No. 6 (May 2000).

shows how skin color directly correlates to the black female's inner being and morality. As "Portrait of Jenny" reveals, Jackson is a "good girl." She describes herself as the "the proverbial Jack-of-all-trades," stating "I put in enough studying to earn a respectable average and split the rest of my time among volleyball, tennis, and fraternity dances."<sup>174</sup> Some of this wholesomeness is just *Playboy's* signature style—the magazine continues to construct its Playmates as hearty, energetic, and youthful all-American "girls," a type of American womanhood that seems to conflict with pornography, yet enables a total consumption of the woman depicted, not merely in a vicarious and ephemeral sexual relationship, but in a lasting partnership. Indeed, the image of the girl next door is precisely how Hefner has always imagined the playmate—what he calls "the girl next door with her clothes off," evoking again this intelligible familiarity coupled with sex appeal.<sup>175</sup> Jackson's becoming playmate, or girl next door, is predicated her deracialization.

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<sup>174</sup> "Portrait of Jenny," *Playboy*, March 1965, 94.

<sup>175</sup> Joan Acocella, "Girls Next Door: Life In the Centerfold," *New York Times*, March 20, 2006



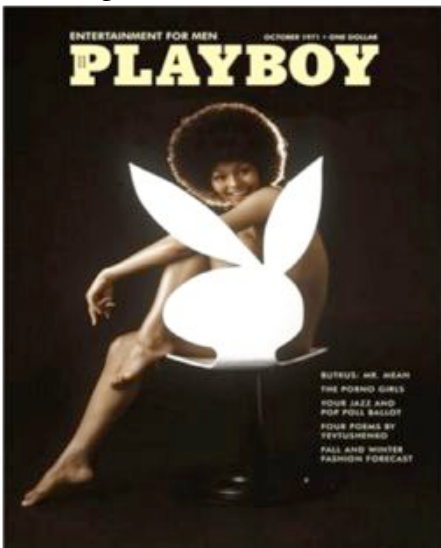


Jackson's article and photo spread are particularly noticeable for their silence toward race in their simultaneous attempt to make Jackson palatable—not merely sexually desirable (as evinced by her frontal-nude centerfold) but attractive in regard to her persona. The viewer's consumption of Jackson, and presumed pleasure, are intimately linked to her as a good, American, and non-black woman. The images work cooperatively with the text to communicate Jackson's "good girl" image. Only one out of the ten photographs of Jackson depicts her in the nude, the rest show her fully clothed frolicking with her twin sister, riding a bicycle built for two, playing tennis, and posing coquettishly in a full *Playboy* bunny costume complete with ears. The only hint of racialization, faintly deployed through the subtle tactics of a generic exoticization, is the article's mention of Jackson's "taste for exotic cuisine." Indeed Jackson's race is further neutralized, and she feminized, by the backdrop of the center pictorial spread itself. With a closed mouth smile and gaze turned slightly down into the eye of the camera, Jackson leans demurely against a micro-striped red and white wallpapered wall, with a matching red and white swiss dotted robe draped suggestively off her body covering her genital region. The complimentary patterns exude a sense of refined femininity. The framed artwork in the corner behind her heighten this sense of class and taste that the image resonates, an image devoid of the stereotypical markers or discredited signifiers of blackness that are all too familiar within pornography depicting black women. We do not see Jackson in context of the oft cited and stereotypical markers of blackness—she is not adorning a grass skirt or animal print clothing, nor is she playing basketball, cooking or devouring soul food, or sprawled out against a lush but artificial tropical background.

Indeed, we can read this image as Jackson's signification of a middle class civil rights era black womanhood. As such, what Jackson's appearance in *Playboy* alerts us to is the work of pornography as representation and its narration of black womanhood in its socio-political and historical moment. Jackson's appearance thus speaks to pornography's brilliant reflection of the social, political, economic and cultural moment. That is, Jackson's role as PMOM shows how

*Playboy* was imparted by the changing national landscape affected by the Civil Rights Movement. It also speaks to pornography's linkages to capitalism as we can understand Jackson's inclusion as a marketing strategy on behalf of *Playboy*, certainly informed by the desire to capitalize on an emerging black audience.

It is fascinating to look at Jackson's appearance as before events like the 1968 NAACP first Miss Black America Pageant which stood to not only challenge to centuries of stereotypical and racist depictions of black women as ugly vulgar, un-feminine, and outside of the category of woman, but to carve a space in which to celebrate the diversity of black female beauty and to reject Eurocentric beauty ideals. As an all black contest, the pageant was both a celebration of black women and a protest to the exclusionary practices of the Miss America Pageant which did not allow black women contestants until the early 1970s. Jackson, as a lighter skinned black woman with straight hair and more aquiline facial features represents a pre-Black Power movement image of black female beauty, that the October 1971 *Playboy* cover girl Darine Stern, for example, evokes.



Stern's darker skin and Afro hairstyle, à la Angela Davis, reflect the changing look of black womanhood heavily influenced by both Black Power and the blaxploitation film genre.<sup>176</sup> This pioneer moment in history of American print pornography in March 1965, a moment of black female mainstream inclusion, communicates porn's creation of conflicting, historically disparate, and oscillating types of American womanhood centered upon the shifting axis of racial, sexual alterity and sameness.

The early absence of black women in major American pornographic publications like *Playboy* speaks to not only the white is right ideal of beauty and American femininity, and the presence of anti-black racism, but to the perverted disavowal of them as always already pornographic objects of sexual desire, yet not fit for inclusion within the pillars of pornography erected by *Playboy*. Not just the magazine, but the brand remains an essential player in the production of the economy of racialized desire that structures white women, specifically blond,

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<sup>176</sup> The blaxploitation film genre and its conflation with pornography is discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

as paramount objects of desire, sexual and platonic. Hugh Hefner's over 50-year act of continuously surrounding himself with such women, testifies to this fact.<sup>177</sup>

While *Playboy* can be considered as catering to a heteronormative white male pornographic imagination's privileging of a white feminine ideal, there emerged other men's magazines that specialized in the black female body as the primary object of desire—magazines which function as alternative spaces in which the black female body is the primary spectacle. So Jackson's appearance as PMOM in *Playboy*, though ambiguous in regard to blackness, speaks to a desire and an audience for images of the black female body, a niche that eventually *Players* magazine would fill.

### **The Black Female at Play: The Black Female in Print Porn and *Players* Magazine**

In its offering of highly sexualized images of black women targeted to a black male audience, *Players* magazine represents a type of alternative to *Playboy* magazine—a forum in which to focus solely on the black female body. *Players* was established in 1973 and published by the America Distribution Corporation, owned by Holloway House Publishing. Holloway was a publishing house known for publishing black urban pulp fiction novels of the time, in particular the works of authors such as Donald Goines and Robert Beck (pen name Iceberg Slim). *Players*, lasting over three decades in circulation, is a significant player in the field. The magazine reveals many similarities with its white counterpart, *Playboy*. Both have, since their inception, privileged celebrity covers. Blaxploitation starlet Pam Grier graced the cover of *Players* during its inaugural year. The magazine catered to black male middle and upper class sensibilities, featuring interviews and articles with and about well-known black male figures on cultural and political matters within the black community—for example, people like James Van Der Zee, Stanley Crouch (Crouch on Jazz), Dick Gregory, Sam Greenlee, and Spike Lee. *Players*, like *Playboy*, in its construction of a lifestyle magazine was then, as one porn historian, Mireille

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<sup>177</sup> For example, *Playboy*'s recent endeavor, its hit television show on the E! Entertainment Television American cable network, *The Girls Next Door*, is a performed narrative of national belonging that speaks to *Playboy*'s continued investment in a Eurocentric ideal of beauty. This “reality” television show stars, in addition to the eternally robe-clad Hefner himself, the three women of the Hefner household: Holly Madison, Bridget Marquardt, and Kendra Wilkinson. Each of these full-breasted, platinum blond women embody *Playboy* magazine's standard for physical beauty, sexual desirability, and intelligible familiarity—their *next-door* quality. The show rests on a number of contradictions and ironies that go beyond its clear performedness and performance as a “reality” television show. These girls next door, are celebrities and commoners and simultaneously and are within our reach available for consumption, yet at the same time, completely inaccessible. As a “reality” television show, *The Girls Next Door* promises to “expose the secrets of the Playboy Mansion.” What it does, is illuminate the physical and physiological bounds for membership in the Hefner's household, and symbolically, citizenship in a larger community of national belonging, to a mass viewing audience. The racially coded-rules of visual membership that *The Girls Next Door* shows, transcend the gates of the Hefner estate, to boundaries of American nation. Specifically in a post 9/11 epoch dominated by heightened fears about national security, the symbolic application of *The Girls Next Door* is even more powerful in its xenophobic commentary on trust, protection and safety via racial (and gender and sexual orientation) sameness. In its construction of “the girl next door” as a blond, white woman, the *Playboy* symbolically alienates black women from the boundaries of not just neighborhood, but Nation and symbolically speaks to the positionality of black women in American print porn.

Miller-Young, notes indeed “more than a nudie magazine.”<sup>178</sup> It was a cultural digest for the modern, heterosexual, or as the cover states “progressive,” black American male instructing him on not just sex with his black female partner, but situating him in a larger dialogue on current events, sports, politics, literature, arts and music.



However, *Players* was not, as Miller-Young identifies as “the first men’s magazine exclusively focused on a black market.”<sup>179</sup> *Duke* magazine, published by Duke publishing in Chicago in 1957 was the first men’s magazine geared towards a black audience. The magazine was short-lived and lasted only for six months.<sup>180</sup> Its demise was most likely not due to a lack of

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<sup>178</sup> Mireille Miller-Young, “A Taste For Brown Sugar: The History of Black Women in American Pornography.” PhD diss. (New York University, 2004), 128.

<sup>179</sup> Mireille Miller-Young, “A Taste For Brown Sugar: The History of Black Women in American Pornography.” PhD diss. (New York University, 2004), 128.

<sup>180</sup> Alan Betrock, *Pin-up Mania! The Golden Age of Men’s Magazines 1950-1967* (Brooklyn: Shake Books, 1993), 26.

desire to see sexual images of the black female, but most probably due to a lack of advertising, the primary income source for print magazines. The magazine featured partially clothed photographs of black women, in benign yet individual poses characteristic of those in the men's magazines of the 1950s. *Duke* maintained a Jazz theme and aesthetic, writing about well-known Jazz musicians including Duke Ellington. Ellington posed, smiling cheekily and waving to the magazine's audience, in front of a piano on the November 1957 cover advertising "Duke Ellington's All-Time Dream Band." In addition to its interest in jazz, *Duke* also featured fiction by established black male authors of the time including Chester Himes, Langston Hughes and James Baldwin. While *Duke* is an ephemeral yet important pioneer in the field of print pornography featuring black women, *Players* magazine, lasting thirty two years in circulation becomes a significant contribution to the field. In its inclusion of articles by and about black writers and cultural figures, as well as black athletes and celebrities, *Players* magazine reflects the sensibility of *Duke* as imagining itself as a cohesive black men's magazine for the well-rounded and cultural heteronormative black male—one who maintained not just a healthy interest in black female sexuality and a desire to gaze at the nude black female body, but to culturally enrich himself through education and information about music, literature, athletics, politics and new products.

It is evident from the abundance of advertisement in the magazine for products like cigarettes, malt liquor, hair tonic and all types of sexual endurance elixirs featuring black men, that *Players* was clearly marketed towards the black male consumer as *Playboy* was towards a white male audience. However imagining *Players* magazine as a black alternative to, or version of *Playboy* becomes problematic for many reasons. As a magazine owned and produced by whites and whose main photographers were also white men, *Players*' black male imagining of the black female is one highly mediated by the white male gaze. So, its positioning or posturing of itself as a black men's magazine is dubious.

My interview with a photographer who shot for *Players* magazine for seventeen years, from 1987 to the magazine's close a few years ago in 2005, beyond offering invaluable inside information about the print pornography industry, lends a critical perspective to *Players* magazine and its gaze and treatment of the black female body.<sup>181</sup> The story of his entrée into the world of porn via *Players* magazine, beyond fascinating, is particularly revealing of the racialization in and through porn—that is, how pornography illuminates the production of raced categories and how these categories are represented, imagined, identified, and how they become meaningful. He also communicates the racialized nuances within porn and the black female's ambiguous positionality as being both desired yet disavowed, rejected and accepted. This photographer (a white American male) began his pornography career serendipitously as a "pretty strait-laced filmmaker" who specialized in documentary filmmaking. Working in New York in the mid 1980s he gained a model agency client, that a hired him to travel all over the world to shoot in "exotic locations." These travels allowed him to build a library of images of not just beautiful female models, but of what he calls "exotic women" which would in turn become the focus of his long time career in porn, from the late mid to late 1980s to just recently. He communicated to me, at multiple times and in many ways throughout our talk his deep affinity for black women as the subject of not only his work, but his own personal appetite. So phrases like "my love of black women that was nurtured during the mid to late eighties" and "I adore black women" were uttered often throughout our talk. Upon return from a photo shoot in

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<sup>181</sup> The interviewee prefers to remain anonymous.



Jamaica where he acquired more material, he was encouraged by a friend to submit his photos to all magazines, *Playboy*. The chunk of our interview where he gives an in-depth explanation of how he began shooting for *Playboys* is worth hearing at length. He states,

So a friend says why don't you send your pictures to *Playboy* magazine. So I did. The very next morning I got a call saying "where did you find all of these girls" and I told them the truth and they said "look, we have, this is the humorous part, we are a publically held corporation in Chicago and we have not run a black centerfold for three or four years and we are talking about the 1985ish/ 86 somewhere in this area." Well I said, "What can I do for you?" And he said, " help us find a black centerfold."<sup>182</sup>

According to the photographer, *Playboy* was suffering from "corporate guilt and they needed to find a black centerfold." "Accept[ing] the challenge" of finding a black centerfold was his entrance into the industry and his career specialization— his "niche market from the beginning which was black women. Exotic women."

Black women, dubbed "exotic women," thus served as his induction into porn, and continued to be his specialization throughout his career. It is clear from his recounting of his fortuitous landing in the adult entertainment industry that black women, dubbed "exotic women," were recognized as an up-and coming minority group, a profitable and desirable market niche within the business of print pornography. So more likely than responding to "corporate guilt" these companies were recognizing the financial profitability of black women. Yet evident in his accepting of "the challenge" is the sense that locating a black centerfold was difficult, i.e. that black models were scarce or the types of black women *Playboy* desired were hard to find. Indeed, he gives both as an explanation to this idea of challenge. According to the photographer, it was not only difficult to find black models to shoot, but even harder to find models who would fit the *Playboy* paradigm, hence solidifying the previously argued racial exclusivity of *Playboy* magazine and its building of boundaries of belonging and desire deeply circumscribed by race.

When asked what difficulties he experienced shooting black women he responds, "[f]inding them in New York was my first challenge. I was living in New York and there was no x-rated model agencies so finding them was also humorous. But being very capable of meeting challenges, I managed to find tons of potential models all of whom were rejected by *Playboy*." *Playboy* stated "they wanted that they wanted a *real* girl next door with a real job. It could not be a dancer or a model or a stripper or anything like that. And that's who most of my potential models were." It becomes clear that black women were not imagined as the "girls next door" privileged to grace the pages or enter the spaces of *Playboy*. *Playboy's* wanting of "an undertaker, a firewoman, a policewoman...somebody who really had a job who was the girl next door" in the context of their inclusion/disavowal of black women, also speaks to the very real exclusion of black women from certain occupations and to their actual employment discrimination.

So more than a decade after the 1972 Equal Employment Opportunity Act was applied to federal, state and local government prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin, black women were still facing employment discrimination. This real discrimination, their actual absence from such occupations, in turn, prevented them from them being imagined within such realms.

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<sup>182</sup> Interview by author, July 31, 2009.

Moving from New York to Los Angeles, now the epicenter of porn production, in the mid 1980s the photographer immediately got his photo sets “picked up” by *Players* magazine, located in LA, beginning what would be an almost two decade long partnership shooting still photography for the magazine of only black female models; he states, “I started shooting for *Players*. The accepted my first *Playboy* rejects.” Resonant in his comment is again the idea of rejection that not only underscores *Playboy*, but also becomes the sort of foundation for *Players*. In being likened to rejects, black women occupy the bottom rung on the ladder of beauty, sexual desire, and American womanhood. Rejected from more than the heteronormative white male pornographic imagination or fantasy and its invention of an ideal woman, their very womanhood (their citizenship in the category of American womanhood) is repudiated. Yet *Players*, as a men’s magazine catering to this desire and devoted to the display of black female bodies, problematizes this, making it contradictory. In a sense, by accepting the rejected, *Players* refutes or invalidates the idea of the *girl next door* and speaks to a kind of black female belonging within the realm of print pornography.

On the other hand, the narrative of rejection that underscores *Players* and its genesis is one that reveals how representations of the black female within pornography have always been highly equivocal hinging upon a shaky negotiation of disavowal and belonging, desire and abhorrence. The magazine’s function as an alternative space where black women are valued and celebrated is questionable. As a stage for the eroticized display of the naked, sexualized black female body, engendered via the rejection of this same body from the mainstream pornography that *Playboy* symbolizes, *Players* illuminates the unstable position of black women within contemporary American pornography—their ever shifting representation between “nappy headed ho” and “girl next door.”

If *Players*’ celebration of the black female body and black female sexuality is equivocal, so too it is positioning of itself as a black men’s magazine. Owned and produced by a white man, *Players*’ black male visualization of the black body and of black female sexuality is one mediated by the white male gaze. Marketed toward a black male audience *Players* reflects white males’ assumptions of black males’ preferences for black female bodies as objects of pleasure and desire. Yet *Players* was successfully marketed toward a black male audience, as *Playboy* was toward a white male audience. The racialized audience demographics are not simply a matter of gaze, but affect more tangible materialities of black women within the print porn industry. The white male audience of *Playboy* was simply larger than the black male audience of *Players*. In turn, the greater size of the audience allowed for higher circulation and higher prices garnered for advertising space within the magazine. More income from both sales and advertising allowed the magazine to pay its models more. The photographer explains:

*Players* which paid a fraction of what *Playboy* did, it was also not just for blacks, black models the adult magazine paid a fraction of what *Playboy* and *Penthouse* could pay because *Playboy* could sell a page of advertising for twenty thousand dollars because their circulation was so high. *Players* magazine had a circulation maybe of one hundred thousand issues a month at their best time. *Playboy* was selling two and three million a month at that time.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Though he is most likely referring to the mid 1980s, the photographer does not specify a particular date so it is difficult to confirm his figures, especially with the dearth of information on *Players* magazine, specifically statistics about its circulation. *Playboy* currently sells about three million copies a month in the United States. However this figure is less than half of the magazine’s circulation in the early seventies. See Joan Acocella, “Girls Next Door: Life In the Centerfold,” *New York Times*, March 20,

But these differences in payment and circulation speak to a lesser desire evinced for black female sexuality and a marginalization of black women as well as the unequal opportunities for black women within the adult entertainment industry in comparison to their white counterparts. Given these differences in circulation and monetary compensation, *Players* can be understood as not just a segregated space of alterity, but a devalued space. This issue of the alternative representation via a separate, segregated space of otherness for the black female body in porn brings us back to Malaria Brown, the “Nappy Headed Ho” cover girl of the *Hustler Alternative* issue October 2007, who introduced this project.

With these discrepancies and obstacles involved one might question the entry of black women into the industry at the time. The photographer posits that black women’s entrance into the adult entertainment industry was only partially financially motivated and has developed his own personal theory as to why black women, in particular, become models for men’s magazines or performers in moving image porn. According to him, “[t]he making of a black woman in the adult industry consisted of three things: number one and the most important element was the lack of a good relationship with a father figure when growing up.” The poor relationship with the father figure could be the result of a physically and/or emotionally absent father during childhood. Abuse from the father or another male relative also contributes to this poor relationship with the father figure. Second, “and stemming out of that was extremely low self-esteem.” This low self-esteem was assuaged by the “sense of fulfillment”, “applause,” and “adoration” that women received from being actors and/or models in the industry. The third element, “the need for money,” further drew young black women into the business of pornography. In his experience, these three elements were “a hundred percent” responsible for black women becoming models.

Working closely, conversing and interacting with black women in the adult entertainment industry for over twenty years this photographer would presumably form an opinion about the personal motivations of black women working in the field of pornography. However, the psychological and racially essentialist underpinnings of his racially and gendered homogenizing assessment resound somewhat disturbingly. Simply put, we cannot assume that all black women, “pretty much a hundred percent,” of black women, share the same history, experience or motivations for joining the industry. Furthermore his assessment leaves out desire altogether and disavows black women models and performers who desire to be a part of the industry because they experience pleasure in doing so. However, regardless of the reasons black women posed for *Players*, the magazine “provided a space for black women models to be seen and work,” becoming a launching pad for the career of one very famous black female performer, “porn star” Heather Hunter.<sup>184</sup>

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2006. In 1960, *Playboy* was estimated as selling two million copies per month; see James R. Peterson, *The Century of Sex: Playboy’s History of the Sexual Revolution*, 231.

<sup>184</sup> Mireille Miller-Young, “A Taste For Brown Sugar: The History of Black Women in American Pornography,” PhD diss. (New York University, 2004), 134.



Heather Hunter is recognized as one of the most renowned back female “porn stars.” Born in New York City in 1969, Heather Keisha Hunter made the transition from stripping to performing in print, then moving image pornography in the late 1980s. She was inducted into the Adult Video Network Hall of Fame in 1993. Hunter was the first black “Vivid Girl,” a very prestigious, highly coveted title within the adult entertainment industry. Vivid Entertainment, primarily a pornography video production company specializing in “high quality erotic film entertainment for the couples market” pioneered the “Vivid Girl” concept.<sup>185</sup> The “Vivid Girl” concept is modeled after the traditional Hollywood contract star system in which the “Vivid Girls,” the fifteen female performers who are registered trademarks of Vivid Entertainment,

<sup>185</sup> <http://vividentertainment.com>

maintain an exclusive contract with Vivid and perform only under their name.<sup>186</sup> In addition to being a celebrated pornography performer, Hunter has had a cameo in both Tu Pac's music video, "How do you Want it?" (1995) and Spike Lee's film, "He Got Game" (1998). More recently, she has released a rap music CD entitled *Double H: The Unexpected* (2005), published an autobiography, *Insatiable: The Rise of a Porn Star* (2007) and opened an art studio, Artcore-NYC, in Brooklyn where her own paintings premiered at the gallery's first exhibition.<sup>187</sup> Such a resume speaks to the crossover potentiality of porn, specifically within the music and film industry and the opportunities for fame and financial success that a career in pornography can bring some black women.

Yet Hunter began her career in print pornography as a "Playboy reject." The photographer states, "[a]nd my first notable, my very first model ever, was a woman to become the most famous black adult star ever and that was Heather Hunter. She was my first reject from *Playboy* and the first girl purchased for *Players Magazine* for a photo set." This remark gives us a sense of and how black women such as Hunter rose to overcome this marginalization during the early parts of their career to gain not just financial profit but a global audience that speaks to the desire for the black female body within porn. When asked why *Playboy* would reject a woman who became a crossover porn star, the photographer replies,

Well number one, there was no verifiable resume of Heather Hunter. A poor Puerto Rican Black girl from 116<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem, hardly had the kind of resume that would make *Playboy* want to select her. Not that she wasn't beautiful enough, in my opinion she certainly was. But *Playboy* does verify all of their choices. They scrutinize their choices and if a girl is found out to have lied or done something to violate the code then she is

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<sup>186</sup> *The New York Times* recognizes Vivid Entertainment group as the nation's leading producer of adult films, while *Details* magazine calls it the Microsoft of the porn industry. A leader in the porn industry, their audience boasts the highest percentage of women consumers in the business—seventy percent male and thirty percent female. Currently, as indicated by the all white cast of Vivid Girls, their films are anchored in a white heteropatriarchal foundation. For more see Stuart Elliott, "Marketing With Double Entendres," *New York Times*, Oct 4, 2004

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/04/business/media/04adcol.html?oref=login>. Steven Hirsch, Founder and President, Vivid Video, started the company in 1984, at the age of twenty-three with co founder, David James. Bill Ascher, the financial strategy specialist, later joined this pair. Vivid is a multi media pornography conglomerate that employs many avenues of distribution—Internet, video, cable channel, and recently in conjunction with Playboy, Vivid Video maintains a pay-per-view cable television service, Adult Vision that offers porn to its consumers around the clock. Vivid is a major distributor of pay-per-view and hotel chain networks across the country. They also maintain a thriving website—3.75 million people visit their website per month. The company distributes its films to a growing overseas market, boasting an internationally recognized vivid "brand". In addition to hardcore production and distribution, Vivid Entertainment Group has licensed its brand for products such as for condoms, clothing, action figures, sex guide books, graphic novels, virility supplements, photographic art, cigars, barware, high performance auto wheels and more. For more see <http://vividentertainment.com>.

<sup>187</sup> The most comprehensive if not authoritative source on Hunter's life and career in porn is Hunter's recent book, *Insatiable: The Rise of a Porn Star*. However, this text reads less like a traditional autobiography and more like erotica fiction—a work soft core porn literary porn. See Heather Hunter with Michelle Valentine, *Insatiable: The Rise of a Porn Star* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007).

stripped of her honors whatever. They were very strict at that time. And she was rejected because there was nothing behind the pretty pictures.<sup>188</sup>

Again we hear the recital of the narrative of rejection underlining *Players* magazine. So it is not enough for black women to be physically attractive and desirable or even legible within the lexicon of traditional white female beauty ideals. A five feet three inches tall weighing ninety seven pounds, Hunter is petite and slender while her long hair and lighter brown skin may, like Jennifer Jackson, align her closer to the ideals of a white feminine beauty ideal. Yet her history and life experience, as a “poor Puerto Rican black girl” do not afford her with the same pornographic capital of a true girl next door. Hunter’s evolution from *Playboy reject* to porn star speaks to not just how print pornography can serve as a launching pad for a career in the adult entertainment industry. It also signals pornography’s schizophrenic gaze toward the black female body, and print porn, in particular as a body simultaneously positioned as grotesque and refined, same and different, rebuffed and privileged.

This chapter has illuminated how through print pornography, we can understand porn’s racially-inscribed making of sexual desire and belongingness. That is, the technology of exclusion, inclusion and erasure of the black female body that porn engenders is imbricated to porn’s construction of a white national narrative. From cartoon images to men’s magazines, there exists an instability in the representation of the black female in print pornography. She is at once repulsive and titillating, desired and deplored, rejected and accepted. Her blackness is grossly and stereotypically accentuated and disavowed. She is included in to mainstream print porn, but also positioned within a segregated space of alterity where she is simultaneously celebrated and devalued. Both *Playboy* and *Players*, as magazines owned and produced by white men, attest to the salience of the white male gaze in this highly ambivalent representation of the black female body and black female sexuality in contemporary American pornography. Black female sexuality as an object of white male desire and a product of the white male gaze is discussed further within the context of the stag genre in the following chapter, where the entanglement of black female sexuality and white masculinity becomes lucid.

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<sup>188</sup> Hunter was the first black *Vivid Girl*.

## Chapter Three

### *The Stag Era: The Black Female in Early Moving Image Pornography*

#### Introduction

This chapter embarks on a socio historical exploration of the black female body within the first half of moving image American pornography, from the 1920s to the 1950s in the stag era genre. This dynamic epoch was a critical time in the development of the black female pornographic image. This chapter first provides a historical outline of stag films and black female participation within this genre. I then read five films that together offer a vivid sense of the diversity of black female performances in early American moving image hard core and the physical, social, political, and symbolic elements that nuance these performances. The black female body within stag films challenges the rigidity of gender roles that the films subscribe to, disrupting and challenging the category of “woman” and “man” that the films reflect and create. In addition to destabilizing standard conceptualizations of gender, stag films also reveal the black female’s ambivalent positionality within early American moving image porn as bodies that are craved and contemned. The stage genre illustrates pornography’s concomitant construction of racial, sexual difference and eroticization of this alterity. This otherness is inscribed somatically and symbolically via stag films.

#### Seeing Stag Films: Black Female Performances in Early Hard Core Film

Stags films, silent, black and white shorts, on average ten to twelve minutes in duration, are the origin of American hard core sex film. They were produced from the period of roughly 1920 up until the 1960s. Until the early 1950s, stag films were shot mostly using 16mm.<sup>189</sup> Due to the existing obscenity laws during the mid-twentieth century, stags were anonymously consumed, produced, and performed.<sup>190</sup> The films were also termed *smokers*, due to the smoky rooms in which they were screened to a clandestine audience of predominately white males. If the production team or performers were assigned names at all, these were pseudonyms or aliases,

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<sup>189</sup> Pornography historian Joseph Slade notes that the earliest stag films were shot in 35mm by semi-professionals. 35 mm was eventually replaced by 16mm which was the choice the “amateur” stag filmmakers as the genre increased in popularity. For more see Joseph Slade, “Stags, Smokers, and Blue Movies: The Origins of American Pornographic Film” The Museum of Sex Exhibition Announcement, entry posted February 7, 2005, [http://www.tomoffinlandfoundation.org/FOUNDATION/Events/ev\\_2005-02-07\\_Museum-of-Sex\\_Stag.htm](http://www.tomoffinlandfoundation.org/FOUNDATION/Events/ev_2005-02-07_Museum-of-Sex_Stag.htm) (accessed July 22, 2008).

<sup>190</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, *Roth v. The United States* (1957) essentially restated that obscenity was not protected by the First Amendment, and therefore upheld convictions for mailing such material through the United States Postal Service. In addition to criminalizing the transportation of moving image porn through the mail, the making and distributing of such material was also grounds for legal penalty. Prior to *Roth* moving image pornography, was under common law rule, as articulated in the British case *Hicklin v. Regina* (1868), most likely to be deemed obscene via the Hicklin Test and its production, consumption and distribution banned by law. The Hicklin Test was the legal standard cited in American court cases throughout the 1800s and early 1900s.

titled paronomastically. As porn historians, Knight and Alpert note in an article written in 1967, just after the close of the stag film era, “[f]or although there are Federal, state and local laws that make the production, distribution, sale and exhibition of stag films a serious criminal offense, they are a familiar firmly established part of the American scene—as likely to be shown next Saturday evening at the local lodge hall as in the pad of a jet-swinger.”<sup>191</sup>

Stag films were then integral, if underground, elements of not just American visual culture, but social culture. In their group viewing experience and mutual consumption of sexuality, stag films engendered a deeply communal homosocial, voyeuristic pleasure. A pleasure that was highly exclusionary. The clandestine nature of stag films, reflected in both their production and consumption, speaks to the paradoxical positioning of American pornography—the complicated and contradictory salience of pornography in American culture and porn’s slippery relationship to nation and nationality as something rejected yet inveterate. The socio-historical context of stag film’s production and consumption evokes pornography’s liminal placement within American culture, its unstable residence somewhere between the real, symbolic and imaginary, mainstream and margins, legal and illegal, urgently desired and highly shunned. Stag films also vividly elucidate the symbolic making of American and manhood and womanhood deeply inscribed by not merely sexuality but race.

Stag films possess an almost educational quality in their rudimentary pedagogy. Providing a watch-and-learn type of hard core sex education, “for generations of Americans, stag films provided their first unfettered view of sexual activity.”<sup>192</sup> Yet the audience for stag films was a very specific sect of a very particular generation of Americans. Consumed predominately by white males, the collective viewing process of stag films functioned to gender and racialize its viewers via the consumption of sexualized and racialized bodies. That is, moving image porn, specifically stag spectatorship, was integral to the construction of white masculinity for this particular audience in the first half of the twentieth century. This section first offers a social historical contextualization of stag films paying special attention to the intersections of race and gender and the representation of the black female stag performer. While we might imagine that performances of black female sexuality within the stag genre are static, an examination of four stag films from different decades allow us to see the multivalence of representations of the black female body. These four stag films reveal that the construction of the black female within stag films serves to challenge the rigidity of gender roles that the films subscribe to, while illustrating the black female’s ambiguous positionality within early American moving image porn as bodies that are craved and contemned, and ultimately othered through a racial, sexual alterity inscribed somatically and symbolically via stag films. Through these readings I elicit the productive relationship between pornography and white heterosexual American manhood, suggesting that constructions of hetero white masculinity are dependent upon the production and performance of black female sexuality.

## **Staging the Stag Film**

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<sup>191</sup> Hollis Alpert and Arthur Knight, “The History of Sex in Cinema: Part Seventeen, The Stag Film,” *Playboy Magazine*, November 1967, 154.

<sup>192</sup> Joseph Slade, “Stags, Smokers, and Blue Movies: The Origins of American Pornographic Film,” The Museum of Sex Exhibition Announcement, entry posted February 7, 2005, [http://www.tomoffinlandfoundation.org/FOUNDATION/Events/ev\\_2005-02-07\\_Museum-of-Sex\\_Stag.htm](http://www.tomoffinlandfoundation.org/FOUNDATION/Events/ev_2005-02-07_Museum-of-Sex_Stag.htm) (accessed July 22, 2008).



Stag films were in a sense, a sort of “traveling show,” put on by a showman who coordinated the show, brought the film to the screening location, set up the projector, and commenced the screening. Pornography historian Joseph Slade, notes that these “amateur pursuits” made little profit because of their limited audience.<sup>193</sup> They were presented in private places and screened covertly at underground locations such as private homes, basements of merchants, lodges and fraternal organizations like Elks’ Clubs nationwide. The Elk’s Club was founded in 1868 as a male fraternal social club to evade prevailing blue laws in New York City. An organization founded on “the principles of Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity,” the Elk’s Club cites its mission as: “to recognize a belief in God; to promote the welfare and enhance the happiness of its Members; to quicken the spirit of American patriotism; to cultivate good fellowship; to perpetuate itself as a fraternal organization, and to provide for its government.”<sup>194</sup> Yet, despite its foundation in the creed of “brotherly love,” the *Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks* did not accept African American members until the 1970s and women until the mid 1990s.<sup>195</sup> So stag viewing within the spaces like the Elks lodges nationwide needs to be contextualized within the logic of white male exclusion and hegemony. While Linda Williams rightly recognizes that women were never the “intended audience for these films,” early moving image American pornography mobilized and produced the racial exclusion from these early *old boy* societies of sexual conditioning, consumption of bodies, and access to pleasure.<sup>196</sup> Stag films both facilitated and were engendered by a deeply racialized and gendered power of looking that reinforced white male heteropatriarchy. The racial and gender segregated audience for stag films was then a very specialized, privileged group of Americans. The collective viewing process that stag films fostered functioned as a type of gendering and racialization itself via the sexualized visual consumption of bodies. That is, the looking at sexual performances and sexualized bodies that happened in and through stag films was integral to the construction of white American masculinity for this particular audience in the first half of the twentieth century.

Linda Williams believes that stag films reflect a unique sort of primitive quality, “[s]tag films offer something of the excitement of all early cinema—the excitement and potential of a time before cinema became streamlined and efficient.”<sup>197</sup> The films are most often crude and unrefined—aesthetically, filmically and in regard to narrative, character development and of course, lack of sound. However stags do not reflect primitivity, but rather a type of rudimentary filmmaking motivated by an assertion of the primacy of the sex act, still a pornographic essential. This privileging of sexual intercourse renders other filmic qualities (such as narrative structure, character development, and general aesthetics) if not obsolete, than extraneous. In stag films, as in a lot of modern moving image porn, narrative and setting, characterizations are absolutely subordinate to sex, the stag film’s *raison d’être*.<sup>198</sup> The short time length of the films

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<sup>193</sup> Joseph Slade, *Pornography In America: A Reference Handbook*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 104.

<sup>194</sup> For more about the Elks’ Clubs and their mission visit [www.http://www.elks.org](http://www.elks.org).

<sup>195</sup> This exclusion of African American men prompted the formation of clack (male) Elks’ cubs in the 1920s.

<sup>196</sup> Linda Williams, “White Slavery or the Ethnography of Sexworkers: Women in Stag Films at the Kinsey Archives,” 113.

<sup>197</sup> Williams, “White Slavery,” 111.

<sup>198</sup> Al Di Laurio, and Gerald Rabkin, *Dirty Movies: An Illustrated History of the Stag Film 1915-1970* (New York: Chelsea House, 1976), 91.

themselves, on average ten to twelve minutes in duration, also lent to the filmic simplicity of the stag film. Yet it is not merely the filmic technology in stag films that feels and looks dated—the plotlines seem outmoded, if not out-played, as well. The storylines often reflect a crude humor, puns, clichés, and dirty jokes. For example in addition to the sexualized naming of actors (Dr. De Pussy and Madame De-Somhole star in *Cuban Interlude* (1936)) the transcribed “dialogue” is loaded with sexual innuendos. Food functions as a common symbol for various sexual acts, especially oral sex. In *Atomic Jazzer* (1947) “Miss Atombomb tries a mouthful of Bologna,” and the film *A Free Ride* (1917-1919) is also called *Grass Sandwich*.

Stags are a peculiar mix of real and unreal; the real hard core sex acts portrayed are mediated by the unreal or over-real. The reliance on exoteric plots, imaginable situations, and possible predicaments—lonely women’s affairs with bell hops, plumbers, and salesmen, horny housewives fucking delivery boys, a woman alone masturbating to a pornographic magazine interrupted by a male attacker who ultimately fulfills her sexual desires—imbues stag films with a bizarre spectacle of the real that is both fantasy and quotidian happening or at least imagined as such. Indeed the element of fantasy in stag films is dependent upon the viewer’s ability to identify, via the imagination, with the acts on screen. The fantasies in stags are both plausible and implausible, yet they are familiar in their everydayness. Yet these obscure storylines also serve to signify women’s libidinal constitution and consequential need of white male authority.

These stock storylines of stag films reflect a trend in American early hard core moving image porn that is centered upon a specific imagining of American manhood and womanhood, a strict delineation of traditional male/female gender roles which corresponds with a gendering of space. Usually in stag films, the female performer waits inside the home for the male to enter. Thus the male’s characterization of the mechanic, delivery boy, bellman, serves one function: “to bring the man into the home,” for the sex acts to take place.<sup>199</sup> In stag films, the outside male is brought inside into the feminine living quarters. The genre conforms to a very traditional heteronormative construction of gendered space. The outside space is constructed as the masculine domain inhabited by the working class male. The inside space, represented by bedrooms and living rooms and kitchens, is the space of the female. In this inside/outside, female/male world of stag films there is an assumption that women, while sexually aggressive, horny and easy, need the pretense of the male’s occupational narrative—the delivery boy who comes to the female’s house with the milk—in order to engage in intercourse. The sex acts in stag films are thus mediated by a type of gendered and racialized sexual etiquette. Sex is explained by a narrative.

While this type of plot is common in stag films with black performers, overall the stag’s strict gender framework is challenged by the presence of the black body. Specifically, black women do not need to perform the archetypal stag female, surprised by her male partner. Sex between black women and black men and between black women and white men, is not altogether consistent with the stag’s construction of gender roles and characterizations of male and female. Black women are typically not the lonely housewives and their performances communicate a sort of agency on their part that speak to the black female’s lascivious nature. The black female performer plays “herself,” an act which speaks to the presumed libidinal nature of the black female as always already pornographic; she calculates the sex act, luring her male prey inside to the female domain. So though women are represented as seducers and deceivers overall in the

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<sup>199</sup> Di Laurio and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 92.

stag genre (hence the need of black female bodies to be disciplined and controlled), black women do not tend to warrant the same characterization or scripting of their libidinality.

The communal spectatorship of stags lent a ritual quality to viewing the films, a deeply communal male sexual séance in which men shared in the images on screen before them. Porn historians Di Laurio and Rabkin communicate the importance of the “stag ritual” in the spaces of fraternal organization like the American Legion meeting hall where men “had to prove to their fellows that they were worthy of participating in the stag ritual. Their sexual ignorance was masked, their private needs socialized through the forced bravado of laughter and collective sexual banter.”<sup>200</sup> The stag viewing events act as homosocial if not homoerotic forums in which white men ostensibly learned not only about female pleasure, or representations of such, but about male pleasure as they watched and sensed other men experiencing pleasure through the events and images on screen. The collective rituals of white masculine bonding, racialized experiences of sex and pleasure pedagogy, need to be recognized as embodying a very particular sort of male fantasy. The popularity and prevalence of stag films reveals how the dissemination of early hardcore pornography was fractured and structured along racial, gender and class boundaries, it also reaffirms the power of the connoisseur’s gaze. Though stag films lack the sort of class and taste value associated with higher types of artistic and cultural productions with which the connoisseur is typically associated, he, as a uniquely raced, gendered, and classed individual still becomes an applicable figure in the consumption of stag films. The middle class white American male was the stag audience. Stag films were celebrations and cementations of heterosexual white American manhood, forums of fostering masculinity. The communal viewing audience of stag films offered a fraternity-like brotherhood of white male hetero-patriarchal power, pleasure and privilege. The communal viewing experience functioned as a type of ritual bonding in and through the collective white male gaze at the sexualized female body.

However while the audience of stag films was primarily white male, the subject matter and bodies on screen did not reflect such a strictly segregated group. Mireille Miller-Young estimates that black performers were not prominent actors in stag films until the 1930s but that their presence was symbolically evoked through racialized themes and exoticism.<sup>201</sup> For example, references to the jungle, safaris, and the tropics become common fetishes for the black body. Turan and Zito contend that black presence in stag films intensified after World War Two and the nature of their participation in the genre changed as well. Before 1945, black people in stag films were primarily symbolic participants, evoking humor via their playing of the familiar black comic or clown-like figure, their roles as servants, and lazy peeping toms. After World War Two, black performers roles intensified within stag films and they became more active performers sexually, while their roles broadened slightly.<sup>202</sup> According to Turan and Zito, post World War Two, blacks became stag performers when filmmakers capitalized on “the shock value of interracial intercourse.”<sup>203</sup> However they were cast against white performers in subservient roles and their inclusion was predicated “on old characterizations (proud, savage

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<sup>200</sup> Di Laurio and Rabkin, *Dirty Movies*, 25.

<sup>201</sup> Mireille Miller Young, “A Taste For Brown Sugar: The History of Black Women in American Pornography,” PhD diss., New York University, 2004, 75.

<sup>202</sup> Kenneth Turan and Stephan F. Zito, *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1974), 91.

<sup>203</sup> Turan and Zito, *Sinema*, 91.

black men who lust after weak white women; cruel white men who abuse black women) and the old situations (black maids are seduced by white employers; black repairman come to fix the phone and fix the Vassar wife instead).”<sup>204</sup> While there certainly existed common roles that black performers within stag films were typically reduced to, stag films were not quite this formulaic or predictable. They varied greatly depending upon the time period in which they were made, the gender of the performers, how the performance was sexually orientated (heterosexual, homosexual and/or group couplings) and the gendered, racialized dynamics of interracial pairings in the films.

Indeed, white stag films (films that only feature white performers) tend to be more formulaic and adhere more strictly to early quintessential pornographic narratives and characterizations; for example, the randy housewife waiting for her husband, delivery boy, bellboy, or maintenance man, the single woman lounging alone who is attacked, succumbs, then enjoys the rape of her assailant. An example of this type of standard storyline within white heterosexual stag films is *Bell Boy 19* (1936), a film just under ten minutes long. In *Bell Boy 19*, a white heterosexual couple (man and woman) enters an apartment. Upon the man’s exit, the woman undresses into sexy lingerie and the bell boy enters. The two proceed to get drunk and have sex after a humorous interlude where the bell boy pretends to pass out the bedroom. Another all white heterosexual stag film, *The Bell Hop* (1936) directed by O. E. Screwder, represents a fusion of both the bell boy and rape pornographic stag fantasy. The just under nine minute film opens with a woman having sex with a bell boy in what looks to be a hotel room. A man with a gun who breaks into the room interrupts their intercourse. The assailant forced the bell boy out at gun point, then rapes the woman. In familiar pornographic fantasy, the woman, who is scared at first, succumbs to her rapist, willingly fellates him, then the two engage in what seems to be mutually desired and pleasurable intercourse. However, the films with black performers did not subscribe as closely to such scripted narratives and characterizations. Repairman, workman, deliverymen, and general serviceman were common roles for black males within stag films when paired with a white female performer in a heterosexual performance. Yet, both the roles of black men and women in stag films were not so fixed or rigid.

Contrary to what Turan and Zito note, black people (both men and women) did perform sexually in stag films pre World War II in a variety of roles and diverse characterizations. And while, as Miller-Young notes, the presence of black actors is stronger in later stag films, there is evidence of black performance in stag pre-1930 with the biggest increase in black performers within the Kinsey archive stag collection, to be post 1947, not 1930. Furthermore, Turan and Zito, Miller-Young and Williams, all under-examine the role of interracial sex in the construction of blackness within stag films, the gendering of the roles of black performers within the stag genre, and the sexual orientation of the performers or performance.<sup>205</sup> Considering the dynamics of representation of factors such as interracial partnerships, and gender and sexual orientation is critical to understanding how stag films construct black womanhood and black female sexuality. Black female participation and sexual performance in stag films is deeply affected by the dynamics of the interracial pairing, time period, and sexual orientation (heterosexual or homosexual and or/group) of the piece.

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> I state both performers and performance here because a “lesbian” stag film in which two or more women are sexually intimate does not equate to their actual sexual orientation for the actor herself. Often within moving pornography, lesbianism is performed or evoked by “straight” women actors.

Stag films offer diverse representations of the black female body and black female sexuality ultimately revealing that her construction within early moving image hard core American porn is an ambiguous one. Black female sexuality is not fixed within the stag genre. Though it is predicated on the construction of racial, sexual alterity (inscribed somatically and symbolically), it oscillates between the binaries of lust and disgust. This contradictory gaze visualizes the black female simultaneously as an object of desire and derision. Concurrently, black female performances within stag films serve to challenge the rigidity of gender roles to which the films typically subscribe. Black women's performances do not adhere to orthodox characterizations and they do not perform the archetypal stag female, who acted a role to *explain* the casual sex in which she engages. Black female sexuality does not typically warrant being surprised by an assailant or engaged in a comic yet steamy affair with her building's bell boy. *Raw* black female identity, the black female performer playing herself, satisfies the stag's mandate of immediate sex, revealing the belief that the black female was always already pornographic. Stag films, despite their brevity and rudimentary filmic nature, are incredibly illuminative of highly unstable American imaginings of gendered-racialized sexuality in early moving image pornography.

### **A Closer Viewing: Black Female Performances in Stag Films of the Kinsey Archives**

Founded in 1947, The Kinsey Institute, the brainchild of sex researcher, Dr. Alfred Kinsey, is an extensive archive of human sexuality. The Institute's vast, global collection of art, artifacts, photography, film, video, audio, and other printed works documents a multi-media representation of sexuality and promotes interdisciplinary study in human sexuality. Yet, on a midsummer's morning, walking towards 313 Morrison Hall, guided by narrow paved pathways through fields of lush grass, crossing quaint wooden bridges over fish-inhabited creeks, under towering pines and fruiting mulberry trees, past clusters of incoming freshman on the Indiana University campus, where the Kinsey Institute has been housed since its conception, one might not expect this much. Such an environment does not conjure graphic sex, and belies the Institute's bank of explicit photographs classified under such headings as *heterosexual analinctus*, *sadomasochism*, *scatology* and *group heterosexual*, stacks of vivid pornographic magazines and graphic hard core stag films.<sup>206</sup>

The Kinsey archive's Historical Stag collection, houses 1697 films from the period of 1913-1960s. The collection includes both 8mm and 16mm black and white stag films. The majority of these films feature all white performers. The number of stag films with black performers is significantly less than that with white performers. Yet this white "domination" of the films does not mean that other races and or ethnicities were not present or signified through use of title, costume, or narrative within the film. While stag films mainly feature white performers, the presence of the racialized others is evoked through signification and a superficially fabricated and imagined exoticization. For example, *An Egyptian Adventure* (1947) a stag film just under nine minutes long advertises in its opening credits that it is "[p]roduced in Egypt by L.C de Rochermont and Jack Glenn." However, the film is clearly set in an indoors in front of a painted stage-like backdrop. The grossly generic markers of an assumed Egyptian

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<sup>206</sup> The documentary collection of documentary photographs at the Kinsey Institute is grouped into forty four categories that seek to describe in detail the nature of the sexual activities depicted in the images. *Analinctus, heterosexual* (ANL HT) describes heterosexual mouth or tongue near the anus.

quality are achieved through the most artificial appendages—title, costume, and makeup of female performer. The film features only a white male and female performer who dons thick black kohl eyeliner and flowing silk clothing that make her look as if she dressed as a belly dancer at a Halloween party.

Another example of the exotic being evoked through the stag's specious gesturing toward other cultures, countries and continents is the stag film *Cuban Interlude* (1936). The film's name capitalizes on the American fascination with Cuba as a tropical tourist locale, already a popular American vacation destination by the 1930s, the time *Cuban Interlude* was made. Yet throughout the nine minutes and eight seconds of the film there is only one direct reference to Cuba other than the title flashing across the screen in white block letters at the commencement of *Cuban Interlude*. But the two "Cuban Fairies" who are textually announced, fail to illustrate even the most artificial costuming of a generically imagined Latina identity. It would seem that stag films did not have to go very far filmically, to instill a sense of exoticism that presumably increased the pornographic punch of the films; often the mere use of the word "Cuban" or "Egyptian" in the title was sufficient. It becomes clear through viewing many such films that it is the female body most commonly used to evoke this sense of exoticism and pornographic titillation value. The male actors in these films, the partners to the exoticized women, were not Othered nor made foreign, either through costume, makeup, or acting. Remaining white illustrates the white male heterosexual pornographic fantasy of sex with an exotic female partner or partners.

Sex between two black performers in early stag films communicates a deeply ethnographic quality, evincing a curiosity and desire to look at Others in the sexual act. The films enable an ethnographic method of participant observation and firsthand observation—the audience symbolically participates with each other and, via the pornographic imagination, visually with the performers on screen. This of course, is underscored by the premise that black is of a different humanity and black sex reveals the truth of this racial sexual alterity. A white male stag audience, could, in consuming these early hard core American pornography films, enjoy an emic perspective on black sex and see how "darkies" do it.

*Darkie Rhythm* (1928) is an early black heterosexual stag film. The title's use of the word darkie captures the prevalent racial consciousness of the early twentieth century—black people were believed to possess more natural rhythm than whites and here, rhythm does not refer to song and dance capability, but to sexual prowess. This logic fits within the racial ideology undergirding both slavery in the Americas and the global colonial missions that situate black people as being not only closer to nature but of the body, not of the mind. This reduction of the black individual to the body resulted in the assumption of arts, music, dance, sports, athletic endeavors, and sex as natural to black people and areas where blacks, as a racial and cultural, group excel. Concurrently, the realm of the mind, a space of higher learning, intellect, and refined brilliance were traditionally believed to be not inhabited or inhabitable by black people, but reserved for whites. The oft—heard phrase "all black people have rhythm" and the title *Darkie Rhythm* both reflect this mind/body discourse.

Just eight minutes and three seconds in duration, the stag film features two anonymous actors, stage-named Iona Hotbox, a black female, and Will B. Hard, a black male. Such raunchy and humorous aliases are very common in stag films. These rhetorical puns serve to protect the anonymity of both production crew and performers and contribute to the comic tone of the stag. Will B. Hard is a double entendre that clearly references the male erection. Iona Hotbox, is an equally vulgar pun that most ironically speaks to the idea of ownership of the black female body

and sexuality. Box, a derogatory term for the female genitalia, is sexually heightened by the word hot. The name Iona phonetically translates into I-own-a, asserting the ownership of this black female's performers vagina. Yet, the subject identity of the owner is vague and problematic, as the performer's ownership of her own body is in question via the consumption of her body by both her male partner and the male gaze of the stag film audience. In other words, Iona's hotbox may be self-owned, but it is *rented* out to others for the purposes of this film.<sup>207</sup> The name thus ultimately speaks to the commodified exchange of the black female body as always already pornographic, interrogating this commodification and her autonomy in and through the visual sexual experience. These names flash across the opening screen in a crude handwritten text that appears to be written in magic marker on a piece of paper or cardboard and simply held before the camera.

The film opens with a middle-aged black woman sitting in a chair reading a magazine while touching herself in what looks to be a small, modestly furnished apartment. Di Laurio and Rabkin note that during the 1920s and 1930s, most female performers in American stag films were over the age of twenty, "due both to the availability of performers (largely from the world of professional vice) and to the middle-aged smoker crowd's aversion to watching girls the age of their daughters cavort sexually."<sup>208</sup> Continuing to masturbate, Iona strips in front of the camera and removes most of her clothing. She then goes over to the sink, fills it with water, makes a phone call, then returns to her seat to masturbate with what appears to be a candle. This act speaks to the black female's libidinal nature as represented in stag films—she plans the sex act, luring her male prey inside to the female domain. Immediately after she makes the telephone call a middle-aged black man enters the living space wearing a three-piece suit and a top hat. His attire seems incongruous with this holding of a large bag that marks him as a fix-it man or plumber. He sits down and they embrace before moving to the bedroom to have sex.

*Darkie Rhythm* is overall fairly benign for a hard-core film; there is no oral sex, not much variation in sexual position, and it features only these two individuals, Iona Hotbox and Will B. Hard. There are no costumes or bizarre characterizations, merely the use of props—the candle that she first masturbates with and uses again later as a measuring stick to his genitals, and the patent leather heels she, in typical pornographic fashion, keeps on during their entire love-making session. This act of measuring the black male phallus must be contextualized within the prevailing mythology of the mythically endowed black male, it is meant to definitively show the audience the "veracity" of this myth. The film's explicitness is also tempered by the rudimentary filmic technology. The picture quality is very blurry and the camera's eye tends to be positioned far away from both bodies, particularly during the first part of the coitus scene. The lighting is also poor so periodically during sex, the actor's dark bodies merge into one obscured mass, particularly when filmed from a distance.

Yet there is a notable moment from *Darkie Rhythm* that speaks to the construction of racialized sexuality, specifically pornographic representations of black female pleasure. A close up of Iona Hotbox's face, towards the end of the film when the couple is engaged in missionary style sex, shows a bizarre expression which is presumably meant to signal joy as Hotbox rolls

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<sup>207</sup> The idea of "rent" here is not to undermine the black female stag performer's autonomy, desire and/or pleasure in the experience of making the film *Darkie Rhythm*. It merely seeks to gesture towards the slippery dynamics of commerce and commodification of the black female body and sexuality in pornography.

<sup>208</sup> Di Laurio and Rabkin, 97.

her eyes around in her sockets at high speed and back into her head. While this melodramatic and comic tone is common to stag films, the extremity of this black woman's expression is notable. Her expression is cartoonish—the contortion of her eyes, bulging and oscillating at unreal speeds is aligned with the all-too familiar racist sambo imagery of the grinning, loony, clown-like black. Iona Hotbox seems to have momentarily become insane with pleasure. The camera's focus on this expression gestures to the degrading and debasing representations of blacks through blackface minstrelsy. But her expression, one of hilarity and insanity, speaks to how black female pleasure is represented as ultimately othered within stag films and how black is configured as excess—outside the bounds of American womanhood. These early stag films depicting black bodies subscribed to the prevailing white racist hegemonic value system that anchors itself in the logic of black female alterity, both racial and sexual. So while women in the stag genre are consumed by natural, libidinal drives, black women reveal a distinctly primitivized sexuality and othered libidinal natured. *Darkie Rhythm*, which shows its white audience how “darkies” do it, reveals that black women experience pleasure differently than white women—their pleasure is all consuming and revealing of their non-human nature and savage core. In her orgasmic catalyzed transformation to caricature, she loses her identity as woman, as human. The diegetic intelligibility of black female sexuality is thus enabled by her filmic representation as not merely alteric, but insane in her sexual bliss. It is made clear that the clandestine forum of the stag films was anchored in popular entertainment and its governing discourse of anti-Black racism. In turn, it would seem that white hetero-patriarchal pleasure, the voyeuristic pleasure the audience enjoys from viewing such stag films, is one dependent on this mode of black female sexuality.

The pleasure experienced through viewing this stag film is a sexual pleasure from the black female body consumed as something other than human. This minstrellesque representation of the black female is commensurate with the title of the film, *Darkie Rhythm*, subscribing to the prevailing racial discourse of the era that framed black people as at once super-human and sub-human, uber-expressionistic, hypergelastic, bodies for the entertainment of whites, a tradition that locates its roots in blackface minstrelsy. The “in-born rhythm and musical talent” which Marlon Riggs rightly notes black people were assumed to naturally possess, not only separated them from whites but marked them as somatically-identified beings, not of intellect.<sup>209</sup> Iona Hotbox's pleasure is over expressed, her eyes roll too quickly and too far back into their sockets, her pleasure is raving and almost frightening in its exuberance. This is not the expression of a lady or even a human, but something other, something definitively different. Thus it is in and through the body of the black female that this stag film ultimately fulfills its ethnographic function, its elucidation of these *Other* human's sexual behavior. The facial expression of the black female reveals to the white stag viewing audience how differently “darkies” do it, and above all, how mad black women get with sexual pleasure. Yet the film also delineates the bounds of American womanhood, situating the black female somewhere on the far side of these symbolic borders.

Though *Darkie Rhythm* does not conclude with the usual “money shot”, the camera's focus on the male ejaculation, the male orgasm is implied because the couple is seen toweling off before Iona Hotbox give his penis, now flaccid and shrunken, one final measure against the

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<sup>209</sup> Marlon Riggs, *Ethnic Notions*, VHS, narrated by Esther Rolle, 1987. Transcribed at <http://www.newsreel.org/transcripts/ethnicno.htm>  
Accessed Aug 1, 2008.



candle.<sup>210</sup> This act serves as a final reinvigoration of the myth of the pantagruelian black penis, another construction of racial-sexual alterity that is summoned in hard-core pornography to elicit a racialized sexual pleasure in its viewers. We can read the measuring of his penis as translating to a measuring of his black manhood, his humanity as a black man. This focus on the black male penis, as synecdoche for subject, signals the genitalization of the black male, or the comprehensiveness of black subjectivity as a function of the genital and/or libidinal, evoking Fanon's resounding statement in *Black Skin, White Masks*, "[i]n relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level."<sup>211</sup> So his measured limp penis becomes not merely evidence of the real pleasure, pleasure spent, but of an authentic black manhood, reinforcing the black as soma.

This act of affirming the black male's racial, sexual alterity also speaks to the ethnographic edge of the film, its mission to see the other side, the dark side, of sex. *Darkie Rhythm* concludes with a crudely scribed "The End" across the screen.

*Rum Boogie* (1933) provides an example of early black lesbian moving image pornography, illustrating that in the early 1930s there was diversity in the types of representations of black women and their sexual orientations. *Rum Boogie* also suggests a desire for black lesbian porn, a type of pre-market niche, in moving image pornography porn dating back in the 1930s. This short stag film, just seven minutes and six seconds in duration, illustrates the ways in which black female participation in stag films is mediated by sexual preference and the gendered coupling of performers. *Rum Boogie* opens with a black woman (Woman One) in a bedroom, sitting fully clothed on a bed. She wears a white sweater with a large crest above her right breast, and a dark shirt. Her hair is styled with heavy bangs framing her face and the rest slicked back into a neat chignon, and she dons full makeup. Reading what the viewers assume is a dirty magazine and smiling to herself, she begins to pull up her skirt, then lights up a cigarette. Another black woman, Woman Two, enters smoking a cigarette. Woman Two is even more elegantly dressed. She wears a black cocktail dress, a hat with feathers that looks almost flapperesque, and a black shawl. The two engage in a passionate, open-mouth kiss that looks more than just platonic. Woman Two joins Woman One on the bed and they begin to embrace and touch, while simultaneously disrobing. They stop caressing for a moment to share a quick drink of what could be rum, before fully undressing and getting into bed naked together. Once in bed, the two females take turns giving each other oral sex, in multiple positions so as to provide maximum visibility to the camera. Next, Woman One briefly stimulates Woman Two with a lubed 7-Up bottle. They have sex, pausing momentarily to wipe each other off with a towel, before continuing to have sex, with alternate women on top and bottom.

Towards the end of *Rhythm Boogie* the choppy editing becomes evident. This roughness has the effect of the disrupting the chronological linearity of the film, which in turn, produces a sense of discontinuity and the sex acts being watched as not those in an intimate bedroom between two women, but that on a screen pre-assembled for the audience's viewing. Yet this unevenness and irregularity lends to the amateur quality and authenticity of the film, and is very characteristic of the stag genre. As Joseph Slade notes, "the technical incompetence (poor lighting, stupid editing, ungrammatical titles, wretched camera angles)" exuded a sense of "realness" of the sex acts on view so that "the more inept the film, the more the performers

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<sup>210</sup> The money shot, the male ejaculation shot, in moving image porn, is discussed in detail in the latter half of this chapter.

<sup>211</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 157.

tripped over themselves, the more authentic the eroticism seemed” to the audience.<sup>212</sup> This sense of authenticity in stag films extended to the genre’s racial representation. Stag films promised an authentic blackness and authentic black sex to their pruriently inquisitive audience. In *Rum Boogie* the viewer enjoys the privilege of peeking into an intimate bedroom where two black lesbians pleasure one another.

After toweling themselves off once more, fondling, then embracing one another, the camera cuts to a close up shot of Woman Two spreading her labia, followed by a “the end sign” that concludes the film. It is almost as if this close-up of the female genitals stands in for the traditional male-centered money shot, as confirmation of female pleasure. Yet this sort of scientific close-up or visual inspection of the opened vagina is very common in pornographic images to satisfy male curiosity and desire for not merely the female body, but its inner secrets and sexual truths. So this final shot represents just as much a confirmation of female pleasure as male pleasure—to satisfy the male voyeuristic audience of stag films.

There is an intimacy in *Rum Boogie* that derives from the fact throughout the hard core sex acts-performed, the women kiss on the mouth and touch each other in an affectionate, endearing manner. Their performance seems not merely for the camera, but for their own mutual pleasure. While I viewed other stag films that featured a coupling of black women in group orgy scenes that also involved a black male, *Rum Boogie* was the only black lesbian stag film that featured only black women throughout the duration of the film. This intimacy in *Rum Boogie* imbues the performers with a sort of multivalency and character beyond their primary function of sexual performance. These tender moments of embrace instill the performers with sort of humanness that many stag films, such as *K.K.K. Night Riders*, for example, completely lack.

*K.K.K. Night Riders* (1939), a ten minute and six second film opens with the title, rustically hand-written written in bold white capital lettering against a black background. Next, a white man’s hands knock on the outside of a wooden door of what looks to be a small cabin. The camera moves inside this living space, and from an interior shot now, the door opens and a man wearing a white Ku Klux Klan hood and white robe carrying a sword-like weapon enters the cabin. His pointed Klan hood casts a premonitory shadow on the wooden door. To add to the foreboding tone and ominousness of his presence, he sways his weapon a bit as he enters the cabin. Though presumably intending to serve as threat, this act casts a slight humorous tone because of the exaggerated movements and the fact that we have not yet seen his prey. An ensuing close up of the KKK crest on his uniform functions as verification of his performance as Klan member. Just in case the audience did not assume from his full Klan regalia, his fellowship in this white supremacist secret society is documented by the camera’s close up on this insignia.

The same editing slips that mark *Rum Boogie* and the majority of stag films are also present in *K.K.K. Night Riders*. The next shot is the Klansman entering through the door again, for the second time, now with no shirt on, yet still wearing his Klan hood. These editing lapses serve to disrupt the narrative temporal flow and the logic of the film. Raising his weapon he approaches a bed where a black woman is lounging, her face is obscured behind the newspaper she reads.<sup>213</sup> Startled and sensing someone enter her living quarters, she puts down her newspaper as he shoves his sword toward her face. There is a fearful expression on her face as

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<sup>212</sup> Joseph Slade, *Pornography In America*,104.

<sup>213</sup> Due to the film quality and distance from the actor, it is impossible to read anything on this newspaper. Yet often props such as newspapers, books and magazines help to provide a clearer context to these films and a socio-historical grounding to stag films. Costume, clothing, hairstyle and other elements of the setting, also assist in grounding the film.

the camera moves into show her eyes widen to signal her panic. The Klansman pulls off her sheets to expose her naked body. From this point onward, the film now moves from just visual narration to textual, with the addition of intertitles, printed in white on a black background. This text serves as dialogue for the only two characters in the stag film, the Klansman and the black woman.

The intertitle reads: “Oh Lordy don’t hurt me I’ll give you my all.” The Klansman fondles her breasts while she trembles in terror, a fear that forces her to submit sexually to this white male intruder. “Here I am Mr. Klansman I’m all yours.”

In a peculiar time lapse or moment of directional indecisiveness, the black female enters through the same wooden door, completely naked and sits down on the bed. She stands while the camera and viewers gaze at her body. The camera zooms in on her flesh, concentrating on her large breasts as she leans over with her right hand on the bed to shake them for the camera. Shots such as this –women demonstrating their somatically inscribed sexuality, and the talent they possess in maneuvering their own body parts, for the camera—split labia shots, fondling their breasts and or making their breasts, buttocks or genitals move—are very typical in stag films as well as modern day moving image pornography. The female body is on display in moving image porn, but it is an active display, one in which the gaze demands to constantly see more, to see around, inside, and to discover the inner workings of female sexuality. This pornographic mandate of maximum visibility, set as early as 1930 with these stag films, maintains a kinetic aspect, maintaining a deep interest in how the female body, and specifically the genital region, moves. This gaze is not only prompted by gender and the underlying recognition that the female body is different than the male body. Race, in particular, the mark of black skin, codes the body as one of racial, sexual alterity that drives this gaze even further. Black women, such as the one in *K.K.K. Night Riders*, perform physical gestures and motions to exhibit their perceived somatically inscribed racial sexual alterity to an audience who sees the black female body as fundamentally different than the white female body, and titillating in this difference.

Our gaze on the black female body is abruptly interrupted by the visual text on screen. Klansman: “All night riders must have their fun.”

The use of the word “fun” here is especially jarring as it is effectively used to describe rape, albeit simulated and/or performed. The word “rider” refers to both the Klansman’s equestrian mode of transport evoked in the title *K.K.K. Night Riders* and his impending sexual intercourse with this black woman. Ironically, the Klansman is taking a break from his *night riding*, a “benevolent” service the white knights performed to protect the white Christian civilization at the hands of violent unruly and self-empowered blacks, to “ride” this black woman. The black woman is then, likened to an animal—the Klansman literally trades in the horse he disembarks at her cabin door for the body of the black woman whom he rides. Yet this *night riding* is rampant with ambiguity and contradiction. The black female represents the familiar amalgam of amativeness and abhorrence. A contradiction heightened by the fact that the white male who is identified as a member of Ku Klux Klan, an organization firmly rooted in an anti-black philosophy and publicly opposed to racial “integration,” is filmed pleasuring himself with the very object of his hate. In *K.K.K. Night Riders*, what is most loathed become most desirable.

Next, there is an abrupt cut to a sex shot as the two engage in intercourse in the rear entry position on the bed, the center stage of the film where all action and sex-acts take place. In fact,

the cabin is itself, little more than the bed—no other entrances, windows or furniture are visible making the space seem incredibly small and stage-like. During this first scene of intercourse, both their bodies are visible yet their faces are obscured. The actors' anonymity is protected at various moments throughout the film. In a later sexual position she covers her face with her raised arm suggesting that either she is not enjoying the sex or she does not want her identity exposed. His head remains covered by his hood which he keeps on throughout intercourse in a variety of different sexual positions.

Klansman : “Your [sic] sure hot I’ll remove my white mask.”<sup>214</sup>

After she stimulates him with her hand, the Klansman removes his hood to expose, not his face, but a dark handkerchief tied around his head still covering his entire face. The Klansman’s identity remains protected. Despite shedding his conic mask, he is effectively, still an invisible emperor.<sup>215</sup> This lone knight of the Invisible Empire continues to remain invisible throughout the film.

“Does you all feel good now Mr. Klansman?” the woman asks.

The woman “speaks” in a black vernacular English that, in addition to functioning as a comedic source for the white male stag audience, serves to accentuate even more, her blackness positioned diametrically to his whiteness. After a brief scene of mutual oral sex, the two lay next to each other on the bed stimulating one other with their hands. This position allows the camera to achieve close-ups of both performers genitals. The audience receives a close range view of both his erection and her vagina, spread by his fingers before the camera. With their two large bodies filling the small single bed, and the bed filling the tiny room, the viewers experience a sense of slight claustrophobia, especially if we are still to believe, as was signaled at the commencement of the film, that this Klansman is sexually assaulting his black female victim. By this point in the film the sense of threat, fear and violence has somewhat dwindled because his behavior is not outwardly violent (he has long dropped his weapon and his white hood, a symbolic weapon) and she expresses no resistance, appearing to voluntarily perform the sex acts.

The temporary nullification of the racial, sexual violence that haunts *K.K.K. Night Riders* typifies a familiar quandary I encountered and continue to confront in looking at pornography featuring black women. The racism of the film becomes almost mitigated by the presence of

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<sup>214</sup> Stag films are marked with grammatical errors, typos and spelling mistakes both in character’s dialogue and within credits and production information.

<sup>215</sup> The Ku Klux Klan was also termed the Invisible Empire, a name that aptly reflects the clandestine nature of the secret society, its vigilante, para-legal force and the regional and federal authoritative ignorance to this force. In October 1915 in Atlanta, Georgia under the leadership of William Joseph Simmons, the Klan took the name *The Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Incorporated*. This post WWII renaissance of the Klan under Simmons’ direction revived the fraternal order premised on the protection and assertion of white male Protestant supremacy, values and identity, yet it was simultaneously supposed to be less aggressive to other races and religion, member of the new society “were to refrain from coercive activity except perhaps to frighten an occasional ‘uppity’ Negro.” The invisibility of the empire (perhaps today much like how whiteness is oft-perceived as raceless and invisible) was essential to this act of instilling fear in persecuted groups such as blacks and Jews. For more see Charles C. Alexander, “Kleages and Cash: The Ku Klux Klan as Business Organization, 1915-1930,” *The Business History Review* 39, no.3 (Autumn 1965): 350.

very familiar sexist and misogynistic pornographic themes, content, and devices, with which the regular pornography the viewer has become largely de-sensitized to. The all too familiar rape myth—the female who in the end, enjoys sex with her male rapist— is reenacted in this film and one’s acquaintance with this myth, as a pornographic staple and seemingly colorblind construction, runs the danger of obscuring the racial motivations and themes behind this particular performed rape.<sup>216</sup> The film’s racism is not enervated, however, by any sense of intimacy, however accidental between the two performers.

Yet *K.K.K. Night Riders* recalls historical post-bellum sexual servitude of the black female slave, and the rampant institutionalized rape throughout slavery. As Linda Williams points out, *K.K.K. Night Riders* evokes the idea of sexual slavery in a way that the term *white sexual slavery* does not, so that the black female slave “reminds us of a history of actual sexual slavery that the term sexworker cannot encompass.”<sup>217</sup> The film is indeed a white supremacist fantasy deeply steeped in post-bellum nostalgia, a longing to return to the good ol’ days of black female sexual slavery.<sup>218</sup> The term white sexual slave or white sexual slavery, as Williams point out is problematic:

The term white sexual slavery first became current in the US in the progressive era to describe the buying and selling of young girls into prostitution. As is well known today, the burgeoning social scientific and reformist discourses defining it were deeply racist. They were racist both in the sense of worrying only about the sexual slavery of white women, never that of women of color, and in the frequent allegations that the sexual traffic of white women was an organized conspiracy run by Jews and foreigners.<sup>219</sup>

While the global slave experience from antiquity to the nineteenth century (and some would argue later) is diverse and complex, the term white sexual slavery cannot help but, align itself with the black sexual slavery of the black Atlantic, that is so absolutely constitutive of current constructions of black female sexuality. White sexual slavery is a term that both reflects and reinforces prevailing understandings of a Manichean dichotomy of white and black femininity. It upholds the chastity and virginity of white women while simultaneously denying the actual history of sexual slavery of black women that continues to frame their sexuality in indubitable and injurious ways.<sup>220</sup> White sexual slavery, by virtue of fact that the term black sexual slavery

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<sup>216</sup> My use of the word colorblind here means simply that the rape myth is one that cuts across all races and ethnicities within pornography.

<sup>217</sup> Linda Williams, “White Slavery,” 126.

<sup>218</sup> Sexual slavery is a term that Williams discusses in relationship to its use by Candy Barr, a well-known early pornography actress (Williams dubs her the first porn star), in a documentary about the actress entitled *The Story of X* (1998). Barr was a stag actress and a star in a stag film, *Smart Aleck*, made in the early 1950s. In the documentary Barr uses the term white slavery to describe the term of sexual servitude that she was obliged to. Barr identifies herself a white sexual slave in what seems to be an attempt to describe her status as a working class woman and prostitute and later stag film actress, an all-around sex – worker. Sex work, for Barr them seems to be not of choice, but of need. Barr, as sex-worker, pornography performer, adult actress, porn star or any other of the myriad of titles referring to those who act on pornography, self-titling of a white sex slave belittles the actual reality of sex slavery and the experiences of those women who are forced to have sex against their and receive no compensation, monetary or other. For more see Linda Williams “White Slavery,” 107-134.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>220</sup> I in no way mean to belittle to doubt the ways in which white women and women of any color have been victim to sexual slavery, however, I wish to call attention to the ways in which the word slavery

is not in circulation despite the institutionalized rape of black women throughout slavery, re-affirms the Manichean dichotomy of white versus black womanhood and the perceived libidinal nature of the black female and her historic inability to be raped. The black woman in *K.K.K. Night Riders*, possibly a slave, is in an actual state of sexual slavery where she is the property, of all white men, not just the Klansmen who rapes her in the film. Indeed slavery for black women held a large component of forced sexual labor, which the term white sexual slavery belittles. The film reveals not just the “tradition of black servitude to white desires” but the complicated and contradictory nature of this desire.<sup>221</sup>

After a brief run through of various sexual positions and acts in *K.K.K. Night Riders*, the much anticipated money shot arrives.<sup>222</sup> Yet it is visibly fake. The sheer amount and force of the Klansman’s ejaculation is comical, as is the fact that it flows down from outside the frame of the film rather than out of his penis. If the spectator had any doubt about the authenticity of this orgasm, watching the scene in reverse slow motion reveals that the white liquid (far too opaque and too abundant for semen), actually descends from the top of the frame. The falsity of the money shot echoes the pretense of *K.K.K. Night Riders* but does not enervate the sting of the film, its blatant racism, commentary on the black female pornographic body, complexity and ambiguity of white male desire for that body, nor the lubricous dynamics of interracial coupling within early hard core pornography. There is a highly staged deliberate feel to the film that derives from the intertitles, the initial weapon-swinging performance of the Klansman, his identity-obscuring costume, the editing lapses, and the slightly comedic, sardonic text.

After the counterfeit money shot there is more sex before a second money shot, equally dubious, as the film cuts to a shot of the woman reclined in bed with a white solution in between her breasts, after the Klansman fucks her chest. The film concludes with a “The end” across the screen, yet there is no finality to visual spectacle of racism and sexism as stimulant in hard-core porn and the pornographic imagination’s entanglement with the racist-sexist anti-black ideologies that cast a tenacious ambiguity towards the black female body, as sex object signifying both disgust and desire.

*Inez* (1952), a late black heterosexual stag film represents a drastic tonal and thematic change from *K.K.K. Night Riders* and illustrates the diverse performances and constructions of the black female body and sexuality within the stag genre. The film, which is ten minutes and twenty nine seconds in duration, features a middle aged black heterosexual couple, male and female. The quality of film is poor, making it look older than some of the earlier stag films. *Inez* commences with a black woman, Inez, walking into an inside space, the bedroom of a house. Sitting down on the small twin bed before a wall covered with floral wallpaper, she looks in a mirror, stares at her reflection and fixes her hair. Standing up, she begins to strip, briefly touches herself then sits down in bed to read some sort of book. The domestic space of *Inez* is very pronounced and highly feminized. The floral wallpaper, the beveled mirror she gazes into as well as the act of her styling her coiffure all communicate a private, feminized space in which the viewer becomes symbolically inserted, enjoying the voyeuristic privilege of looking at this private environment. The bedroom immediately sexualizes Inez. Her body becomes molded by

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evokes a history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery that is unique in its socio-historical nature.

<sup>221</sup> Linda Williams, “White Slavery,” 127.

<sup>222</sup> He mounts her on the rear on the edge of the bed, then gets on top of her again while the camera gets a side view of the missionary position, and she fellates him while he reads the newspaper.

her filmic environment, and the intimate *mis en scène* of the bedroom sets the stage for the hard core sex acts to follow. The bedroom seems to be hers. She appears comfortable in this space, and is familiar with the layout and the location of various items. Authenticity rears its head again here—the sense that this bedroom is Inez’s real bedroom, authenticates the realness of the sex inside the bedroom. This is a real black couple having real (black) sex.

In addition to the spatial location of the bedroom, the temporal significance of bedtime, the time in which we see Inez, is significant. The stag’s positioning of Inez at bedtime follows the temporal and spatial rules of *pornotopia*, Steven Marcus’ term for the “utopian fantasy” that pornography both evinces and is derived from.<sup>223</sup> Marcus invents the term *pornotopia* to describe the visionary ideal fantasy that the pornographic imagination imagines. *Pornotopia* represents the utopic fantasy world of the pornographic imagination. It signifies the wonderland of porn, a spatial-temporal imagined world in which sex rules, thereby the time, space and gendered, racialized bodies are constructed in and through the prevailing mandate of the absolute salience of sex. In *pornotopia*, Marcus notes, “[i]t is always bedtime.”<sup>224</sup> *Inez*’s commencement at bedtime then abides by the logic of *pornotopia*’s temporal order. Bedtime is a time in which women in pornography are feminized and sexualized simultaneously. They are commonly depicted naked, in a nightgown or slip that signifies not that they are ready for sleep but that they are ready for sex.

In *pornotopia*, men and women are sexually inexhaustible and always ready to engage in sex acts. Marcus imagines *pornotopia* as a kind of *pornocopia* due to the copiousness of its fantasy, its imagining of “physiological abundance and sexual plentitude.”<sup>225</sup> Both men and women are constructed as over-endowed physically, specifically with regard to their genitals which function indicatively, of their inner libidinal nature. So man is not man, “he is enormous erect penis, to which there happens to be attached a human figure.”<sup>226</sup> Woman is then legible as woman in *pornotopia* via her breasts, curvaceous figure, and round and/or large, buttocks. This somatic dynamic of *pornotopia*, the sexualization of male and female bodies through the camera’s concentration on their large genitals and body parts, is clearly active in current pornography.

It is impossible to make out the text on the book Inez reads, but though the title is blurry, the image of a naked couple is visible inside the pages. The nude image and Inez’s ensuing masturbation cause the viewers to infer that it is some type of erotic text. As evident in *Darkie Rhythm*, the use of pornographic print media, particularly magazines, within stag films as stimulatory props is very common among the films in the Kinsey archives. The layering of different pornographic media—print within moving image—speaks to the multiplicity of porn and the manifold modes of representation working simultaneously in pornography to sexualize the black female body. Yet what is also interesting about the consumption of pornographic magazines, books and postcards and photographs within stag films is that they seem to be often utilized by women, despite the fact that the such magazines were generally termed *gentleman’s magazines* or *men’s magazines*, and geared towards a male audience. Stag films such as *Inez*

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<sup>223</sup> Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*, (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 268.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Marcus, 273.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

suggest a female audience for pornographic print material, in particular books and magazines. The book Inez glances at is small in size, judging by its placement within her hand, approximately four by five inches. It is kept next to her bed much like current porn's quintessential hiding spot under the generic, anywhere mattress, suggesting its illicit character and clandestine nature. It is material meant to be consumed in private space of her boudoir and used for a masturbatory function.

Inez's reading activities are abruptly interrupted by a male visitor. A black male, fully clothed a button down shirt, sweater vest and trousers enters from another door. Slightly startled, Inez grabs a blanket from the bed to cover herself. The man approaches Inez on the bed, removes the blanket to expose her naked body, then begins kissing her breasts and touching her vagina. The camera cuts to a close up shot of Inez's nipples while she caresses them, yet the shot does not provide the viewers with the intimate close gaze upon her body—it is marred by the grainy, blurry quality the film. After he unclothes, Inez stimulates him with her hand then performs fellatio on him. The audience views the quintessential pornographic peek of both performer's genitals, a close up of his erect penis, followed by the camera's probing of her vagina, held open widely with her own hands. Even these close up penetration shots offer little satisfaction for the voyeuristic viewers as pubic hair and poor lighting (unlike today's brightly fluorescent lit settings and completely shaved genitals) obscure the action. Inez and her partner go through various sex acts and positions including 69, missionary style sex, woman astride, rear entry, and reverse cowgirl. Recording these sex acts, the camera remains at a distance also as to allow the viewer to see the entirety of both their bodies on the bed. The couple switches from position to position rather quickly and as if on command from the cameraman and/or director.

Most of these positions last in duration well under a minute and are filmed from a distance, causing the sharpness of the picture to rapidly decline. There is a darker, grainier, almost green tint to the images as the camera pans out for a full body shot of both partners, leaving Inez's face immersed in shadowy blackness that erases her features entirely. Yet the *reverse cowgirl* position, a popular sexual position recognized within the pornography industry for producing maximum genital visibility of both male and female simultaneously lasts the longest and is the most noted.<sup>227</sup> The salience of sexual positions within stag films as part of their titillation and hence, market value, become clear in films such as *Inez* that demonstrate a series of different positions, performed consecutively one after another. This rapid-fire progression of positions allows the spectator to satisfy his/her desire and to feel like he/she has gotten his/her money's worth.<sup>228</sup> After a close-up of penetration in this position the camera moves to Inez's face. This privileging of the face is refreshing after a long span of genital

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<sup>227</sup> The reverse cowgirl sex position, often-abbreviated RC, is when the female sits on top of the male with her back facing him. It is a popular position within porn because it allows for both the male and female genitals to be filmed simultaneously during penetration. Also when filmed from a low height and using a fish-eye lens for example, it is possible to get both male and female genitals and the female's face together in one shot. As is noted by pornographer (cameraman) and writer David Jennings, "Showing face and penetration in the same shot is dynamite... You get both pussy and personality. Gives the boys a double whammy to jerk off to." See David Jennings, *SkinFlicks: The Inside Story of the X-Rated Video Industry* (Bloomington, Indiana: 1rst Books, 2000), 33.

<sup>228</sup> I use a masculine pronoun here to refer to the exclusively male audience of stag films. Here pornography's monetary or economic rhetoric resurfaces. Multiple sexual positions demonstrated within a short stag film attested to the quality of the film. "Good" films, were those that packed in a lot of sexual action; in turn, these films were the most popular and also the most profitable.



concentration from the camera. It captures Inez's seemingly genuine expression of pleasure—her face relaxes, her eye lids flutter and she utters something to her partner that, still knowing the film is silent, the viewer strains to hear.

There is no money shot in *Inez*. Instead, the ending of this film is actually quite endearing. After their rigorous sexual session, the two embrace, hug and kiss, then sit next to each other on the bed, still naked, and light up cigarettes. It seems at this moment, they are unaware that the film is still rolling. There is a level of comfort that they have with one another that becomes apparent and suggests that if not actually a couple, Inez and her male partner have performed in front of a camera together before. Sitting close to one another on the bed, smoking, they speak to each other while making eye contact. They are in no rush to put their clothes back on and/or leave each other's sides. Inez places her head on her partner's shoulder and he leans his head toward her before the screen goes dark to read: "The End."

This ending lends a humanistic quality to black female (and male) performers in stag films that is not typically present—Inez and her lover become, at the film's end, more than just bodies. They are emotional and complete in their intimate communication of something other than just sexual desire. Their un-performance at the finale of the film heightens their sexual performance in the first ten minutes of the stag, and actually takes away from this initial performance by revealing its nature as performance, as orchestrated, directed and executed. The "realness" of the un-directed performance at the end of the film serves to brand "unreal" *Inez* which attempts to anchor itself in a flooring of reality. It shatters its fragile casing of authenticity. The last thirty seconds of *Inez*, in which the performers are filmed "of duty," challenges the audience's perception that we are watching real black people have real sex in a real scenario and is by far the most captivating part of the short film.

## Conclusion

The stag genre illustrates that black women were a foundational part of American pornography from its inception. Their performance in stag films further elucidates a conflicted sexual desire for the black female body as a site of racial, sexual alterity. The ambiguous positionality of the black female within the pornographic imagination that the stag genre reveals is one that would define black female's representation in American moving image porn to come. Black women were passengers on porn's ride from the margins to the mainstream with the transformation from the stag era to the 1970s, the so-called golden age of pornography. Yet though this movement out of the private spaces of lodges, basements, and into the public arenas of adult theatres and mainstream cinemas, black women would maintain a sense of marginality and most of all difference. Pornography illustrates the somatic, symbolically and thematic, inscription of sexual racial, alterity on the black female body. Yet the transition from stag to golden era evinces a mainstream sexual desire for the black female body in porn. The move from stag films, the "exclusive preserve of fraternity men and legionnaires" to golden age porn films, a larger, less restricted, and more diverse audience is one that signals a change in spectatorship of American pornography, and the form of the representation itself.<sup>229</sup> The audience for and of the black female pornographic body diversified and expanded immensely in the transition from stag to golden age, an epoch of pornography's prolificacy. This shift in turn,

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<sup>229</sup> Di Laurio, and Rabkin, 121.

greatly affected how the black female body was portrayed in moving image porn. So it was not only how black female bodies were looked at, the nature of their representation transformed from the stag era to the golden age. By the 1970s, black women would become mainstream sex symbols consumed by mass culture. The American pornographic market for the black female body would be established.

## Chapter Four

### *The Black Female in the Golden Age of Pornography*

The golden age was porn dreaming. Dreaming of becoming a regular movie genre just like any other, free from legal hassle, social opprobrium. Dreaming also of picking up a broader, more affluent cross-gender audience as a big-time boost to the revenue flow from regulars—presumed to be ‘loners’ and ‘raincoaters’.<sup>230</sup>

Pornography’s golden age, the decade of the 1970s, was a critical time when the presence of the black female body in the landscape of American pornography is vivid and undeniable. She becomes a mainstream pornographic body, her image, in particular her cinematic representation, not merely highly sexualized but mass-marketed for national consumption. This chapter first considers the social, political, cultural, and technological forces behind the pornography’s golden age. It then interrogates the mutually constitutive nature of blaxploitation genre and pornography, and their parallel construction and projection of black female sexuality. I read blaxploitation, a golden age creation, as not merely aligned but consanguineous with the golden age’s depiction of the black female body as pornographic subject. There was during this time period, a mainstream desire for the black female pornographic body on screen elicited by both blaxploitation and the early black hard core of the golden era through films such as *Lialeh*, the first black hardcore feature-length pornography film. This chapter concludes with a discussion of porno chic, a golden age term referring to the aesthetic, cultural trend porn engendered and its oft ignored linkages to racialized sexuality, entanglement with blackness and indebtedness to the black body within American visual culture. How we understand black women, particularly our cinematic imagination and visual conceptualization of the black female body, is very linked to this significant moment in film. The golden age is a critical juncture where hard core pornography, blaxploitation, and these two genres’ analogous pornographic gaze—a heteronormative and sexualizing sociality—constructed the black female body as intelligible in and through not merely her pornographication, but her representation as pornographic body produced and consumed for a mainstream mass market audience.

By the 1970s stag films were, as pornography film historians Al Di Laurio and Gerald Rabkin note, an “endangered species” replaced by the golden age of pornography feature length films.<sup>231</sup> The so-called golden age of pornography, a period spanning the decade of the 1970s that marked pornography’s transformation from underground, budding commodity to industry, was enabled by a number of political, economic, socio-cultural and technological conditions in American society. The 1986 Meese Commission reports, “the real proliferation of sexually explicit materials in the United States took place in the 1970s. During this period, distribution centers in Los Angeles alone increased from eighteen to over four hundred.”<sup>232</sup> Despite the quixotic hopes of porn performers and producers that pornography would become another mainstream genre, this dream of the golden age was never fulfilled. However, porn did diversify

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<sup>230</sup> Laurence O’Toole. *Pornocopia: Porn, Sex, Technology and Desire* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1988), 76.

<sup>231</sup> Al Di Laurio, and Gerald Rabkin, *Dirty Movies: An Illustrated History of the Stag Film 1915-1970* (New York: Chelsea House, 1976), 111.

<sup>232</sup> Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, Final report, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1986), 345.

and expand its audience during this time, creating a vibrant American market for pornography that absolutely thrives today.<sup>233</sup>

Pornography also reinvented itself, modeling a Hollywood film-like sensibility— narrative structure, character development and far-improved cinematography. In a 2001 interview for CourtTV, former porn star Sharon Mitchell states, “[c]lassic porn had plots, was shot on 35mm. Rehearsals took several weeks to shoot, and I would have sex in character. I don't think that's the standard today by any means.”<sup>234</sup> Many porn stars from this generation share Mitchell’s nostalgia for the golden age of porn when quality was said to have reigned over quantity and moving image porn was more than just a looped series of “meat” shots. The golden age of porn is usually discussed in existing literature in reference to pornographic film, which, because of leaps in pornographic cinema and the feature-length porn classics of the 1970s may be the most noticeable domain of porn’s growth. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Two, print pornography also developed during the golden age, particularly we see a growth in men’s magazines as well as an improvement in the quality of the images and an increased sexual explicitness of the images. This increase in quality and explicitness was also fueled by technology. Technological advancements in the printing field facilitated print pornography’s increased production and made it less expensive.<sup>235</sup>

Pornography also occupied a more legitimate space in golden age. The basements, back alleys, and behind-the-curtain merchants were replaced by larger movie houses and theatres where people could go to enjoy pornography in a more accessible and less threatening place. Women, middle class couples, and literati replaced so called “raincoaters,” men who adorned raincoats while watching porn allegedly to protect their clothes from other patron’s ejaculation and semen already covering the seats of the theatre. The pornography of the golden age was believed to be an improvement over earlier pornography, specifically the stag genre. This improvement is most visible in the arena of pornographic film. In the early 1970s there was a plethora of pornographic feature length films released such as *Deep Throat* (1972), *The Devil in Ms. Jones* (1973), *Johnny Wadd* (1971), *Debbie Does Dallas* (1972), *Behind the Green Door* (1972), and *The Opening of Musty Beethoven* (1976). These films are now considered pornography classics. They have been reissued on DVD, are top sellers, and are even taught in university level pornography courses as classic golden age cinematic pioneers.

Despite the fact that pornography has always maintained an intimate relationship with politics, the golden age was a politically tumultuous time for pornography. The politics of porn has largely been a question of not just the leadership and direction of our nation, conservative versus liberal, but also of its law enforcement priorities.<sup>236</sup> Pornography, as a medium, has always been about the politicization of not just sexual images, but of sex and sexual practices. The golden age was marked by political turbulence; porn, despite or because of, enjoying a

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<sup>233</sup> See statistics on porn revenue in both the Introduction and Chapter One.

<sup>234</sup> Sharon Mitchell, a former porn star from pornography’s golden age, began her adult film career in 1975 at 17 years of age, and has since made over two thousand pornographic films. She is now a health activist and director of the Adult Industry Health Care Foundation, a non-profit working maintain and secure sex workers sexual health. For more see Court TV, [http://www.courtTV.com/talk/chat\\_transcripts/2001/0723mitchell.html](http://www.courtTV.com/talk/chat_transcripts/2001/0723mitchell.html) (accessed April 9, 2008).

<sup>235</sup> See Alexander Downs, *The New Politics of Pornography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 22.

<sup>236</sup> Nicholas Confessore, PBS, “Porn and Politics in a Digital Age,” <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/porn/special/politics.html> (accessed June 9, 2008).

period of significant evolution and growth, occupied a contested, politically and legally, space in our nation. The golden age of porn, like porn itself, was riddled with conflict and ambiguity. First, the abatement of American obscenity laws allowed for the increased production of pornography. The 1957 landmark Supreme Court Case, *Roth v. United States* ruled that works could not be obscene unless they are "utterly without redeeming social importance."<sup>237</sup> The "redeeming social importance" acted as a loophole for many pornographers who produced works with a semi-coherent narrative structure, character development and a type of art-house flavor, often mimicking the style and cinematic structure Hollywood films to imbue pornography with a sort of cogency and justification that the law required.

The 1967 President's Committee on Obscenity the prequel to the 1986 Meese Commission discussed in chapter one, concluded, that pornography caused little, if any, social harm.<sup>238</sup> The Committee found that there was no correlation between pornography consumption and wrong-doing (the committing of evil social acts such as crime, violent crime, sex-crimes, and other types of abuse), or more directly, between image and act. It recommended that federal and state legislation "should not seek to interfere with the rights of adults who wish to read, obtain, or view explicit sexual materials."<sup>239</sup> Consequently this ruling further opened the doors for pornographic production with little or no fear from authorities. But this freedom was quickly extinguished. President Nixon and committee member Charles Keating, who both firmly believed that pornography was a poison infecting the nation, repressed the results of the 1967 commission. Under their lead, the senate would, on October 13, 1970, vote to reject the findings and recommendations of the Committee on Obscenity.

The liberalism of the golden age of pornography was further stifled with the Miller ruling (1973), which set a legal definition for obscenity.<sup>240</sup> The Miller ruling happened at a time when pornography was enjoying a massive explosion from underground pleasure to not merely mainstream presence, but booming American industry. The Miller ruling also occurred at a moment when pornography was facing both a legal and civic battle, largely launched by the anti-porn feminists and organizations such as Women Against Pornography (WAP). This anti-porn movement, linked to the reigning conservatism of the time, signaled the desinence of the golden age. The Reagan era, an epoch of American conservatism largely fueled by the New Right, launched an overall purity crusade against the perceived social and moral ills moldering the nation. Such "evils" included homosexuality, drug use, prostitution, feminism, abortion, HIV, atheism or more specifically a lack of Christian faith, and of course, pornography. These right wing, often-evangelical, "purity crusaders" of the 1980s were reinforced at a federal level by President Reagan (1981-1989) who, in addition to nominating "federal judiciary men and women sympathetic to the New Right," authorized the Attorney General, Edwin Meese, to establish a second commission to study pornography and its presumed social harm.<sup>241</sup> Indeed, President

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<sup>237</sup> Refer to Chapter One for a detailed discussion of *Roth v. United States*.

<sup>238</sup> The President's Commission on Obscenity and Pornography was initially created in 1967, staffed in 1968 and reported in 1970. The Commission was staffed during Democratic President Johnson's term but concluded under Republic President Nixon's conservative rule.

<sup>239</sup> David M. Edwards, "Politics and Pornography: A Comparison of the Findings of the President's Commission and the Meese Commission and the Resulting Response,"

<http://home.earthlink.net/~durangodave/html/writing/Censorship.htm> (accessed July 1, 2008).

<sup>240</sup> The Miller ruling is also discussed in detail in Chapter One.

<sup>241</sup> John d'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman, *Intimate Matters* (New York: Harper and Collins, 1988), 350. The 1986 Meese Commission is discussed in chapter one.

Reagan's double term in office, from 1981-1989, marked a politically troubled time for pornography despite a number of technological advancements that propelled its development and consumption in the face of its social contest. Pornography symbolized and often acted as an umbrella for a variety of complex issues and anxieties surrounding an idea of American purity not just sexually delineated. Purity was not only viewed as a sexual battle or struggle regarding sexuality, it was also a racial, religious and moral fray. More often than not, these fronts overlapped. In particular, conceptions of racial and sexual purity have always been thickly imbricated in our nation's history.

The financial hardship of Hollywood also influenced the porn industry, spawning rapid growth by providing both an audience and production workers. In 1945, the Hollywood film industry enjoyed a zenith, with a large consumer audience of over ninety million per year.<sup>242</sup> However, less than four hundred Hollywood films were produced from 1973 to 1975, while one hundred hard core porn films were produced in America.<sup>243</sup> By 1980, the audience had dropped to a mere nineteen million spectators, a shift attributed to a changing viewing audience. Film historian Ed Guerrero, for example, attributes Hollywood's decline to the transformation of the traditional Hollywood audience, noting that the new post-war audience was younger, more educated and ready for more challenging subject matter beyond mere entertainment.<sup>244</sup> Pornography offered this and more, attracting new audiences to theatres in the 1970s. Indeed, Seth Grahame-Smith contends that the Hollywood audience was actually recovered by the porn industry in the early 1970s with the release of the feature length box office hits like *Deep Throat* (1972) and *Behind the Green Door* (1972).<sup>245</sup> In addition to capitalizing in regard to audience, golden age pornography also capitalized on out of work film production workers, specifically lighting and editing specialists, who worked on feature length porn films to support themselves during the Hollywood drought. So the Hollywood paucity pushed both the consumption and production side of porn in the golden age.

There was also a shift in sexual discourse, a cultural transformation of society's opinions about sex, sexual activity and representations of sex in the public sphere. In *Intimate Matters* Emilio and Freedman note that the 1960s was a time of "sexual liberalism," which had replaced the "civilized morality of the nineteenth century as the dominant ethic."<sup>246</sup> Though we have, as Foucault has brilliantly argued, long recognized the relationship between sex and pleasure, American opinions regarding sex, sexual representations and their place changed in the golden age. This shift was certainly engendered by the sexual liberalism of the preceding era, the 1960s. The free love movement of the 1960s vividly represented in the hippy movement for example, inspired many young Americans to practice less-restrictive sex—casual sex, sex with multiple partners, and sex outside the bounds of a monogamous, and often state-sanctified relationship. This new publically enacted perspective toward sex and sexuality helped to pave way for the golden age of porn, and created an audience for its consumption. It is also reflected in the contraception revolution, a revolution that vividly indicates the shift in American social-sexual

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<sup>242</sup> Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 26.

<sup>243</sup> Mireille Miller-Young, "A Taste For Brown Sugar: The History of Black Women in American Pornography," PhD diss., New York University, 2004, 118.

<sup>244</sup> Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 26.

<sup>245</sup> Seth Grahame-Smith, *The Big Book of Porn: A Penetrating Look at the World of Dirty Movies* (Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2005), 26.

<sup>246</sup> D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 242.

propriety.<sup>247</sup> In 1960, the FDA approved the birth control pill and contraceptive technology was becoming a part of modern American family planning. The availability of contraception, in turn, allowed for a greater degree of sexual liberalism. Concurrently, sex for pleasure's sake both inspired pornography and was encouraged by it.

Finally, the political and cultural atmosphere collided with a number of critical technological advancements that propelled porn's golden age. But, ironically the same technology that fueled porn's growth into American industry was responsible for the decline of the golden age of pornographic cinema. The introduction of VHS (Video Home System) technology in 1976 profoundly changed the face of pornography. This new technology not only drastically altered the way people were able to consume pornography, but also provided an easier, cheaper way for pornographers to meet the American market demand.<sup>248</sup> The pornography industry is recognized by many scholars as not just responding to, but prompting change in visual technologies. The so-called formatting war of the early 1980s, in which Betamax and VHS were competing for control of the American industry, was won by VHS because it was the choice medium for porn. In 1980, at the close of the golden age, there were a million VCRs sold in the United States and over eight hundred thousand households had VCRs.<sup>249</sup> This increase in home viewing devastated the adult film theatres. In 1980 there were an estimated fifteen hundred adult film theatres, by 1985 only seven hundred, and by 1989, a mere two hundred and fifty, thus closing the curtain for porn on the big screen.<sup>250</sup>

The golden age of pornography, fueled by a number of political, cultural, social and technological forces in the United States in the decade of the 1970s, illustrates the strong presence of porn in American society and pornography's marriage to politics, culture, and technology. It is a critical moment that reveals pornography's illuminative narration of the nation's socio-political climate. In addition to boasting what are now recognized as cinematic pornography classics, the golden age also engendered a social sapidity for porn that is highly visible into another, coeval film genre of the era, blaxploitation.

### **Blaxploitation: Recasting the Black Female Pornographic Body**

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<sup>247</sup> This contraception revolution was deeply racialized. D'Emilio and Freedman note that racial prejudice was a prime motivating factor in the 1930s push for birth control, particularly in the south where the fear of a rising, empowered black population was most strong. For more see John D'Emilio and Estelle B Freedman, *Intimate Matters* (New York: Harper and Collins, 1988), 247. Deeply entwined in a eugenicist ideology, black women's reproductive freedoms (along with Latina women and those of the lower class) have of course, long been challenged and stifled. For more on the national domination black American women's reproductive rights and the racialization of reproductive politics, see Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

<sup>248</sup> Nicholas Confessore notes that this demand was largely prompted by the change in sexual discourse, specifically the type of sexual liberalism discussed above. Confessore states that "increasingly relaxed attitudes about sex and curiosity about explicit material had created a new appetite for adult films, especially among Baby Boomers." See Nicholas Confessore, PBS, "Porn and Politics in a Digital Age," <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/porn/special/politics.html> (accessed June 9, 2008).

<sup>249</sup> By 1985, at the onset the video age of pornography, the number of American households with VCRs exploded to reach seventeen million. For more, see David Jennings, *Skin Flicks The Inside Story of the X-rated Video Industry* (Bloomington, IN: 1rst Books Library, 2000), 149.

<sup>250</sup> *Inside Deep Throat* Online Archives

<http://worldofwonder.net/insidedeepthroat/archives/2005/Feb/18/pornology.wow#mail>

The blaxploitation films of the 1970s, riding the pornographic wave of the golden age, represent some of the first mainstream filmic pornographic displays of black female sexuality. Like the hard core films from porn's golden age, they too, as sexually explicit representation, benefited from the lax obscenity laws. Also, like pornography, blaxploitation films were both fueled by and used to uplift the decline in the Hollywood film industry. The blaxploitation genre capitalized on this new and more explorative, post-war audience as well as its recognition of a black, inner-city audience (an audience largely influenced by the socio-political moment marking a more militant black consciousness); it was therefore instrumental in helping Hollywood recover from its repression. This same economic crisis is the one that fueled pornography's golden age. Pornography and blaxploitation were thus consanguineous cinematic occasions in American visual culture.

Blaxploitation also reveals how pornography pushed the boundaries of mainstream Hollywood film. This stereotype-rich genre offered vivid representations of a distinctly pornographic black sexuality to a mainstream cinematic audience, beginning in 1971 with Van Peebles' legendary, iconic *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, the film credited by most film historians and scholars as initiating the genre. Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback* was, in fact, made under the guise of a pornography film. In *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song: A Guerilla Filmmaking Manifesto*, Van Peebles writes, "one of the security measures I had adopted was telling everyone I was making a nudie film."<sup>251</sup> Using the pornography label, Van Peebles was able to employ non-union personnel as well as attract a certain type of performer willing and skilled in performing sexual acts in front of a camera and acting in the nude. In *Sweet Sweetback*, Van Peebles took on the role of writer, director and main actor, also greatly cutting production costs. This practice is common in modern pornography where the filmmaking process is often a one man or one woman production. Peebles' statement, "telling everyone I was making a nudie film," reveals the alignment of porn and blaxploitation was more than just symbolic and/or ideological and also speaks to the presence of pornography within the culture of cinema and film-making during this golden age era. Yet despite *Sweet Sweetback's* narrative centered upon a pornographically-rendered black male body, blaxploitation and pornography converged in and around the image of a commodified and sexualized black female body. *Foxy Brown* (1974) for example, re-casts tropes from a familiar and quintessential pornographic narrative—a "naughty" nurse played by Pam Grier herself, pimps, prostitution, exotic dancers, and references to girl-girl scenes (flirtatious gestures to lesbian sexual relationships are made at various moments throughout the film). As a genre, blaxploitation offered a pornographic representation—highly sexualized and mass commodified for the titillation and pleasure of a voyeuristic public audience—of the black female body. Blaxploitation films did not merely co-opt hardcore pornographic aesthetics, themes and subject matter they represent and need to be read as early hardcore pornographic representations of black women in mainstream American film.<sup>252</sup>

In addition to the success of mainstream pornography feature films of the early 1970s like *Behind the Green Door* (1972) and *Deep Throat* (1972), the space for the emergence of the blaxploitation genre was carved by the early 1970s socio-political moment—a time heavily informed by black nationalist discourse and what could be called a lingering black revolutionary sentiment. Stuart Hall notes that the genre of blaxploitation was the fruit of a post Civil Rights

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<sup>251</sup> See Melvin Van Peebles, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song: A Guerilla Filmmaking Manifesto* (New York: Thunders Mouth Press, 1971), 91.



cultural *counter-revolution*, an “aggressive affirmation of black cultural identity, a positive attitude toward difference and a struggle over representation.”<sup>253</sup> The revolutionary possibilities of blaxploitation as a genre of black self-representation and self-liberation have been largely derived from the genre’s assertion of black power through the codes of black male heterosexuality, physical strength, and triumph against the system (whites and police)—i.e. blaxploitation’s birth of a mythic black hero. William Lyne notes that from 1970 to 1972, fifty feature films were made with black audiences in mind.<sup>254</sup> Yet many of these films were not self-representations, but rather white constructions or citations of a certain type of imagined blackness. Such is the case with one of blaxploitation’s star actresses, Pam Grier. Two of Grier’s most recognizable films, *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974) were written and directed by Jack Hill, a white male. Grier’s work, which I discuss in detail below within the context of the blaxploitation genre, needs to be re-viewed within the context of pornography and black women’s place in this history. Grier’s work will be recontextualized within the canon of early pornography, and Grier’s performances, read as exemplary of some of the first mainstream filmic pornographic representations of the black female body.

Blaxploitation’s narratives of black empowerment are multi-dimensional— social, political, economical, ideological and of course, sexual; yet they are also questionable. That is, the extent of black empowerment and/or liberation in the films is ambiguous, and the films may be read alternatively as narratives of empowerment and/or repression. Often in blaxploitation, this empowerment/ repression dynamic is inscribed on the body of the black male hero, the protagonist of the film, and is intimately grounded in a sexual foundation. Jacquie Jones locates a repressed black male heterosexuality in the genre, positing that “black male heterosexuality itself is a repressed discourse currently characterized by powerlessness and reaction in the mainstream cinema.”<sup>255</sup> For Jones, the imagining of black male sexuality in mainstream American film is a prime force in the denormalization of the black body in film. Many critics have also questioned the normalization of the black male as uber- virulent heterosexual, violent hero, represented in these films, and the ambivalence of black empowerment via blaxploitation’s reciting of dominant racial sexual stereotypes about black body, both male and female. Stuart Hall notes that the use of stereotypes in blaxploitation, a possible reversal, does not necessitate the subversion of the stereotype, thus the genre “has not escaped the contradictions of the binary structure of racial stereotyping.”<sup>256</sup> Nor, I would add, has the genre evaded the complex contraventions of sexual stereotyping. Furthermore how are these strong, heroic, black male characters objectifying their black female counterparts? So while the liberation of the black subject is questionable, the pornographic representation of black women in blaxploitation films is undeniable.

Blaxploitation works to expose the myth of white virtuosity that previous film genres portrayed. For example, *jungle films* (such as *King Kong* (1933)) serve as anti-miscegenation

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<sup>253</sup> Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 270.

<sup>254</sup> William Lyne, “No Accident: From Black Power to Black Box Office,” *African American Review* 34:1 (Spring 2000): 44.

<sup>255</sup> Jacquie Jones, “The Construction of Black Sexuality: Towards Normalizing the Black Cinematic Experience.” In *Black American Cinema*, edited by Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 247-257.

<sup>256</sup> Stuart Hall, ed. *Representation: Cultural representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 272.

texts and rest on the premise of white protection from the sexually dangerous black body, typically male. The *plantation genre* (for example, *Birth of a Nation* (1915)) also shares this foundation of white virtue, but employs the plantation as a structural device to evince white moral philanthropy towards blacks.<sup>257</sup> However, blaxploitation's representation of whiteness as corrupt, hateful and racist, is not paralleled by the genre's presentation of concurrent black virtuousness, specifically in regard to black femininity and sexuality. Cedric Robinson states, "[b]lack women were impersonated (to use Griffith's term for acting) to display the hidden perverse nature of blackness, and the essentially savage impulses of Black women."<sup>258</sup> Yet the existence of these "women-centered" films such as *Coffy*, *Foxy Brown* and *Cleopatra Jones*, evince a mainstream cultural desire, however conflicted, for a black female star, a black heroine.<sup>259</sup> We can understand black women and the black woman's body in these films as signifying the location of blackness in the state of nature, a state of perversity and primitivity.

Pam Grier is one of blaxploitation's leading female actresses, starring in *Coffy* (1973), *Foxy Brown* (1974), *Friday Foster* (1975), and *Sheba Baby* (1975).<sup>260</sup> These films, particularly the blaxploitation hits *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown*, depict a similarly characterized Grier—highly sexualized, physically aggressive and strong. Grier's stunning combination of striking physical beauty and corporal action has captivated many audiences. Cedric Robinson believes that Grier can be seen as performing an impersonation of Angela Davis.<sup>261</sup> Yet the nature of this impersonation, as Robinson notes, is problematic—it sexualizes Davis, reducing her many real-life accomplishments and continued political activism to Grier's questionably ambivalent on-screen victories. Therefore Grier's performances need not, as Robinson notes, be viewed as appropriations of Davis, but cinematic citations of a collective imagining of Davis, effectively phantasms of Davis. The Afro donned by Grier in some scenes (she wears many different wigs and hairstyles throughout the film) aligns Grier with a Davis style of black militancy, but political assertion via aesthetic and material expression is shaky. As Angela Davis, herself comments on the problematic nature of our collective memory's depoliticization of her bodily image, often reduced to the afro, and its co-option in the name of glamour:

I am remembered as a hairdo. It is humiliating because it reduced a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion; it is humbling because such encounters with the younger generation demonstrate the fragility and mutability of historical images, particularly those associated with African American History.<sup>262</sup>

Grier's *impersonation* of Davis via the Afro and the aesthetic aura of black militancy (generated through clothing, speech, backdrops), needs to be understood as selling what Davis terms "a seventies fashion nostalgia" more than a seventies political viewpoint. Furthermore Grier's

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<sup>257</sup> For more about the jungle and plantation genres, see Cedric J. Robinson, "Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation," *Race & Class* 40:1 (1998): 1-12.

<sup>258</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, "Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation," 5.

<sup>259</sup> Blaxploitation film, *Cleopatra Jones* (1973), stars the late black female actress Tamara Dobson and was directed by Jack Starrett.

<sup>260</sup> Before these blaxploitation films, Grier also starred in a series of *prison exploitation* films also directed by Jack Hill, *The Big Doll House* (1971) and *The Bird Cage* (1972).

<sup>261</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, "Blaxploitation," 6.

<sup>262</sup> Angela Y. Davis, "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia," *Critical Inquiry* 21:1 (Autumn 1994): 37.

unabashed sexuality, lucidly visible in blaxploitation classic, *Foxy Brown*, seriously undermines the historical and political components of her acting out of Davis.

*Foxy Brown* (1974) offers a distinctly pornographic representation of Grier. The very opening credits of the film set the pornographic stage for Grier in *Foxy Brown*. The film opens to Grier dancing seductively in different costumes and wigs (an afro wig worn with a bikini, and a Cleopatra wig donned with a long cream, colored gown), against a brightly colored, animated background that recalls the introduction to either *Austin Powers* or a later Connery *Bond* film, depending on one's generation. The first scene of Grier, asleep in her bed, immediately situates her within the sexually-encoded space of the bedroom.<sup>263</sup> The use of space here is important and recalls the stag genre's strict delineation of traditional male/female gender roles via a gendering of space. Usually in stag films, the female performer waits inside the home for the male to enter. The outside space is constructed as the masculine domain inhabited by the working class male while the inside space, represented by bedrooms and living rooms and kitchens, is the space of the female. In this inside/outside, female/male world of stag films there is an assumption that women, while sexually aggressive, horny and easy, need the pretense of the male's occupational narrative—the delivery boy who comes to the female's house with the milk—in order to engage in intercourse. The sex acts in stag films are thus mediated by a type of gendered and racialized sexual etiquette that is underscored by space.

Grier's opening situation inside the bedroom thus serves to immediately mark her as not just a pornographic body, but as a female pornographic body. As she awakens, after an urgent telephone call that summons her to get up and get dressed, the viewers are flashed a gratuitous boob shot as she strips from her orange fur nightgown directly in front of the camera. This boob shot, the first of many throughout the film (and not all Grier's) commences her role as Jezebel and cements her pornographic position within the film.<sup>264</sup> In *Foxy Brown*, Grier, embarks on a sexual vendetta against a deeply corrupt white underworld of organized crime, drugs, and prostitution to avenge the death of her undercover narcotic agent boyfriend. In her unflinching devotion to devote her own body to the cause of bringing down the bad guys, Grier gives the term *revenge sex* a new meaning. Grier, recognized as the *queen* of the blaxploitation drama, played the sexy heroine in *Coffy* (1973), a similar vixen, one year earlier, suggesting that the writer-director, Jack Hill, (a white male) recognized this formula, and Grier, to be a success. Prostitution is a theme in both films, *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown*, in which Grier's character performs a prostitute in order to access clandestine information and get one step closer to justice. Grier's prostitute alias in *Foxy Brown* "Misty Cotton" even resounds like a porn name. The pornographic tintinnabulation of the name Misty Cotton is further compounded by its evocation of the pornography of labor in its connotation of plantation slavery. Beyond is uber-feminineness, the word misty references the dewy wetness of skin and genitals enhanced in moving image pornography as well as the mystique and allure of the female sex performer.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Patricia Hill Collins identifies the Jezebel as one of four controlling images that work cooperatively to subordinate the black female, "The fourth controlling image—the Jezebel, whore, or sexually aggressive woman—is central in this nexus of elite white male images of Black womanhood because efforts to control Black women's sexuality lie at the heart of Black Women's oppression." See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 77.

<sup>265</sup> *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976) was a classic porn film from the golden age. The choice of the name Misty here also attests to the imagined pornographic quality of the name Misty.

The black female as prostitute is a familiar characterization in blaxploitation films. As a young boy, Sweetback, in Van Peebles' *Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, is initiated by a black prostitute. Pam Grier's character in both *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown* plays a prostitute to effect a sort of sexual espionage central to her triumph against evil in both films. So the figure of the black female prostitute also speaks to black female's functionality to the initiation of black (and white) manhood.

While *Foxy Brown* in its entirety reflects a highly sexualized construction of Grier as uber-libidinous, voluptuous, and perpetually glossy-skinned, the scene at the ranch is the most pornographic, in a sadomasochistic-like manner. Yet the ranch scene is also a familiar coupling of the pornographic and the colonial fantasy. The ranch is the space of white male racist projectionality and fantasy on the black female body. It is also the space of rape, a very specific, eerie historical reenactment of antebellum institutionalized rape of the black female



slave. The peculiarity of the ranch scene lies its almost science fiction-like act of instantaneous time and space transport. Entering the ranch, we enter a space of anachronistic time, and are transported from what was an urban setting (although the movie is primarily set in various indoor settings, the aura of urbanity is clear as demonstrated through language, fashion, a street fight, an opening car chase, window vistas and the like) to the good ol' South. This feeling of the rural South is intensified by the sprawling nature, the dry grass field, the red plaid shirt of one of Foxy Brown's rapists, and the use of non-diegetic sound—a twangy, electric instrumental country music plays intermittently. The dilapidated wooden building, inside which Foxy is held captive tied to a bare mattress, reverts to a slave shack. The ranch, the viewers are told in a previous scene, is supposed to be an off-premise drug lab for the extensive crime ring/drug trade; however, we see only two men, one of whom, when he is not raping Foxy, is working on broken automobiles that litter the lawn surrounding the shack, and the other is primitively cutting heroin and weighing the drugs on an antiquated scale mechanism. The utterly unscientific, unsterile and overall archaism of the “drug lab” (a makeshift table in a tiny wooden shack and an old metal scale) enhances the falsity and artificiality that is characteristic of the genre of blaxploitation, while further constructing this scene as one that steps back into space of anachronicity. Kara Keeling's contention that the ranch scene is a “violent sequence that attempts to ‘feminize’

Foxy,” is premised upon the idea that Foxy is not already recognized as woman and that act of rape accomplishes this function of gendering her as such.<sup>266</sup> Yet this acrimonious scene illustrates the imbrication of feminization and racialization and its complicated and contradictory implication for the black female; if Foxy’s blackness situates her outside the bounds of womanhood and her rape puts her back within the category of woman, it is also an act that re-racializes her. That is, through this rape scene, as a cinematic reenactment of historical institutionalized rape of the black female slave, Foxy does not become only female she becomes black female. The processes of feminization and racialization are entangled with one another as well as the violence of rape itself. The rape and bondage of the Foxy is another mechanism through which race is mapped onto the sexualized black female. This critical scene, emplaced in rurality and evoking nostalgic referents to slavery, also allows us to see the employment of the black female body as a signifier of the primitive, “out of time” location of blackness to be used by the white “colonizing” male.

As is evident in the opening scene of the film, setting and the use of space in *Foxy Brown* is important to its reading as pornographic. Jennifer Devere Brody notes that “Grier’s characters almost always appear in closed interiors that suggest nineteenth century domestic realism.”<sup>267</sup> This confinement of Grier to inside, private space is an essential part of her overall construction as pornographic. So her literal binding to the bed inside the ranch in *Foxy Brown* becomes her figurative restraint to the boudoir, as a space not only of nineteenth century domestic realism, but of twentieth century pornographic realism. The makeshift bedroom of the ranch, little more than a bare mattress on a metal frame, again serves to sexualize Grier. The anachronistic space of the ranch mirrors the anachronistic construction of the black female sexuality.

While the black male is oft-depicted as stud, blaxploitation films, though undoubtedly sexualizing the black female, offer an ambiguous representation of black female sexuality. The audience is constantly and consistently aware of Grier’s sexuality—her slinky, tight attire, lines, and actions all exude sex. Yet, sexuality is both empowering and the cause for victimization. Foxy is at times, using her sexuality as the most effective weapon while at other moments trapped by it. The ambiguity of sexuality is well evinced through the prostitute, a familiar blaxploitation trope. The figure of the prostitute encapsulates this sort of ambivalence as both sexual agent, satisfying her own desires, and sexual muse playing to the desires of others. Blaxploitation films present an utterly pornographic formula of black female sexuality—authentic black female sexuality is one that is all-encompassing, hard, violent and never satiated. Indeed, sex and violence converge in and through the black woman’s hyper-heterosexual body in the genre of blaxploitation.

According to Keeling, Grier’s hyperheterosexuality serves to mask the ambiguity produced from the fact that she is both feminine and masculine—her femininity derived from the fact that she is anatomically woman, and her masculinity from her revolutionary sensibility and role as fighter and hero. Therefore the actual physical battles that Foxy enacts with lesbian characters in the film (a lesbian bar brawl scene) signify her battle against an inner homosexuality, a “disciplining of the butch lesbian that threatens to appear with her.”<sup>268</sup> Foxy

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<sup>266</sup> Kara Keeling, *The Witches Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 109.

<sup>267</sup> Jennifer De Vere Brody, “The Returns of ‘Cleopatra Jones,’” *Signs* 25:1 (Autumn 1999): 95.

<sup>268</sup> Kara Keeling, *The Witches Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 113.

cannot be homosexual because the male heteronormative gaze that constructs her is one that calls for her sexual availability to them. Yet her flirtation with lesbianism, however artificially and offensively constructed in blaxploitation films like *Foxy Brown* and *Coffy*, is a testament to this same gaze, a gaze that is also pornographic in its making of Grier as a hyper-sexualized, heterosexual female, perennially available to the male heterosexual spectator, titillated by an added bonus of lesbianism, or girl-girl, as it is typically called within the adult entertainment industry. This girl-girl performance, with an ultimate and final allegiance to the male sexual fulfillment is an established and platitudinous pornographic fantasy.<sup>269</sup> Grier's "ability to beat the butch and remain heterosexual" is then, a pornographic edict.<sup>270</sup>

With Grier, we move from "Bad Nigger" (who was the macho male hero of blaxploitation classics like *Sweet Sweetback* and *Shaft*) to "Bad Negress." She represents a female counterpart to the previous blaxploitation male protagonists. Yet this sex change in the "sexploitative construction of a hero" has serious reverberations beyond just gender bending.<sup>271</sup> The politics behind black men and women's sexploitation was and remains very different. Women characters in *Sweet Sweetback* and other blaxploitation hits like *Shaft* (1971), for example, were non-complex, shallow, characterizations—de-politicized, dis-empowered, nutrimental sexual objects for the specific diet of a most macho brand of heterosexual black manhood, on which blaxploitation, as a genre, thrived. As Guerrero notes "a politicized black women's agenda was generally submerged under a male-focused black nationalist discourse aimed at rediscovering and articulating the mystique of a liberated 'blackmanhood' during the late 1960s and 1970s."<sup>272</sup> Grier offered a bittersweet solution or answer to this problem of black female representation within the genre of blaxploitation. As lead actress, she dominated the screen with a strong physical and moral character, yet she was still haunted by many of the characteristics that marked women actresses.

Cedric Robinson argues what he terms *The Bad Black Woman Narrative* emerged along with the genre of blaxploitation, as sub-genre. In the very title bad black woman narrative, the word bad, gestures back to ambiguous positioning of the black female within visual culture, a nambiguity that flutters between the polar points of disgust and desire.<sup>273</sup> Bad has, in African American Vernacular English, been a lexical misnomer—meaning appealing, cool or attractive. Grier's characters are bad in both senses of the word—capable of murder and physically attractive. Yet with the many black female protagonists dominating the screen of blaxploitation films, like Grier and Dobson, I would suggest that this *bad black woman narrative* should not be

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<sup>269</sup> Girl-girl, or girl-on-girl, is a pornography term for scenes, films, or images (in print pornography) that depict sexual action between two females. The term can refer to "real" lesbians and/or bisexual women, but more often the girl-girl is a performance for the male heterosexual gaze that dominates porn. Girl-girl scenes of films are also viewed as more introductory than girl-boy, and many female porn actresses get their start in the business, performing in girl-girl videos or scenes, before moving onto boy-girl, though girl-girl pays less. This rigid gender structure— girl-girl, vs. boy-girl illuminates the heteronormative bias of pornography, and its subscription to traditional, essentialist, and rigid modes of conceptualizing gender.

<sup>270</sup> Kara Keeling, *The Witches Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 111.

<sup>271</sup> Guererro, *Framing Blackness*, 90.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>273</sup> Cedric J. Robinson, "Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation," *Race & Class* 40:1 (1998): 11.

understood “sub-genre,” but as formulative to blaxploitation itself. *The Bad Black Woman Narrative*, according to Robinson, is one that offers a critique of the realness of the genre of blaxploitation,

The sub-genre of the Bad Black Woman thus negotiates its exaggerated unreality by its display of the Black female body. The false, Hobbesian depiction of the Black community, the procrustean social consciousness of its protagonists, the bluntly pathogenic and unrelievedly pure malevolence of its villains, the outrages perpetrated on the flesh of friend and foe alike, are all spun into credible artifices by the single truth of the Black woman’s body. And that body is transformed into that of destroyer, a fascination with violence overtakes and converges with sexual voyeurism.<sup>274</sup>

But it is the body of the bad black woman, as authentic body exuding the real sexuality of black women, that negotiates not the unreal, but the surreal world of blaxploitation. This surreality is represented in the cartoon-like nature of the over-exaggerated characters, the over-constructed yet simplistic quality of the settings (the bar scenes in *Coffy* for example seem very formulaic and fake as well as the street scene which evokes more set than street), the dramaturgic representation of violence through the many theatrical fight scenes and the overall, over-the-top, artificiality that crystallizes the genre. This sur-reality is one that becomes coherent in relation to “the single truth of the black women’s body,” a pornographic body—highly sexualized and commodified for the pleasure of a voyeuristic mass audience.<sup>275</sup>

According to Cedric Robinson it is the truth of the black female as pornographic body, and the viewer’s voyeuristic consumption of her as sexual spectacle, that anchors the blaxploitation genre in a coherent reality; blaxploitation thus “negotiates its exaggerated unreality by its display of the black female body.”<sup>276</sup> But the role of violence in the construction of this blaxploitation brand of hypersexualized black womanhood is critical. Black woman’s “badness” is distinctly marked by a violent sexuality. In the blaxploitation genre, violence and sexuality amalgamate to compound blacks as racial Others. So that as Robinson states the black woman’s “fascination with violence overtakes and converges with sexual voyeurism.”<sup>277</sup> Blaxploitation’s cinematic invention and imaging of the pornographic body paved the way for the black female presence in hard-core feature length moving image porn. Blaxploitation, though conflicted in its construction of a *new* black image and the ambiguity of its thematics of black empowerment, moved visual representations of black sexuality from the margins to the main screen, simultaneously enticing a spectatorial desire for pornographic representations of black women. The genre thus laid the foundation for the first black hard-core pornography film in the United States.

### ***Lialeh*: The First Black Hardcore Feature Length Film**

Produced in New York in 1974 by director Barron Bericovichy, *Lialeh* is recognized by many including the Adult Video News (AVN) to be the first feature length black hardcore film.<sup>278</sup> Seventy-six minutes long, in full color and with sound, the film represents a vast

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid.

<sup>278</sup> <http://avn.com/video/movie-reviews/56716.html> (accesses June 14, 2008)

departure from the short silent films of the stag era. The film stars black actress, Jennifer Leigh, as the main character, Lialeh, an inexperienced yet hopeful performer who wishes to sing and dance her way into stardom. With her musical talent deficient and voice weak, Lialeh is able to make up for this lack of skill with her sexual prowess. In fact, when singing and dancing Lialeh does not exhibit confidence, her voice is quiet and shallow, her movements are hesitant and awkward. Yet while performing sexual acts, such as giving a blow job on stage as part of an audition to a talent-show organizer/pimp, Arlo (played by Lawrence Pertillah), Lialeh is absolutely emulous. She is indeed in her element when performing oral sex on various black male characters, having phone sex while masturbating with a flute, or mounting another male character backstage just before the big show.

There is an overall lack of clarity in the film, particularly in terms of narrative cohesiveness. That is, the story-line is often unclear, and strange situations are unexplained in the name of sex. Read as a blaxploitation the film seems incoherent, but as hardcore pornography it is completely legible. *Lialeh* subscribes to the pornographic mantra of hard-core sexual action; dialogue, character development, and storyline fall by the wayside while the sex act is cardinal. This lack of clarity in the film is compounded by a number of comic filmic blunders most notably poor editing or Jennifer Leigh's ability to give head and carry a note at the same time.

The film opens with what looks today like an MTV unplugged music video—a small group of performers closely positioned, jamming on a simple stage in an intimate, dimly lit setting in front of a small, close audience—yet set the 1970s. An all-black male band led by vocalist and drummer, Bernard “Pretty” Purdie plays while one black, topless female dancer donning a long straight black wig, dances seductively amongst them.<sup>279</sup> The camera's attention is split between the dancer and the band, while it flashes intermittently to the small, racially and gender mixed audience for whom they are performing the cover song “Lialeh.” Bernard “Pretty” Purdie sings the Chorus “Sweet, sexy Lialeh, she's warm to your touch, affectionate to your desire” over and over again over a funk beat.

The next scene introduces Jennifer Leigh as Lialeh and cements the hardcore nature of the film. This is Lialeh's audition scene where, in addition to singing a sexually explicit song with the choral lyrics “touch me again where it feels good...,” Lialeh finishes her routine, a rather bizarre combination of singing and stripping, and finally performing fellatio to Arlo on stage. A black male piano player watches with a quintessentially pornographic voyeuristic gaze which mirrors that of the viewing audience. The fact that the same piano player later engages in sexual intercourse with Lialeh reinforces the consumptive voyeuristic gaze of pornography, communicating that Lialeh is not only available for the characters sexual gratification, but for our own. This scene ends a rather typical pornographic money shot. Leigh rubs the ejaculation around her mouth while camera zooms before the scene ends abruptly.

Linda Williams identifies the money shot as one of the most salient aspects of hardcore pornography. The money shot, the visual shot of male ejaculation outside of the body,

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<sup>279</sup> In a letter written by J. F. Weidenmann, General Manager of Byran Records to “The “The Distributors”, Weidenmann praises the musical talents of Bernard “Pretty” Purdie in his overall promotion of the commercial appeal of the *Lialeh* soundtrack; he writes, “The film has been extremely successful and received rave critical reviews. The music is not another background score but plays as an important ingredient to the picture content”. A lot of films from porn's golden age, distinguished themselves from previous less sophisticated, poorer quality, pornographic works, as films that boasted original soundtracks. To read the letter in its entirety visit <http://www.lightintheattic.net/releases/lialeh/index.php> (accessed June 15, 2008).



sometimes called the cum shot, represents proof, empirical confirmation, of male pleasure, “visual evidence of the mechanical ‘truth’ of bodily pleasure caught in an involuntary spasm; the ultimate and uncontrollable—ultimate *because* uncontrollable—confession of sexual pleasure in the climax of orgasm.”<sup>280</sup> In hardcore pornography, the money shot is usually performed so that the male ejaculates not inside, but on the body of his female or male partner— usually the face, mouth, buttocks, stomach and/or breasts, offering the viewers visual proof of male pleasure. The money shot is lexically anchored money to economic foundation—it is both the money-making shot of a film, and it is rumored that male performers would not be paid, or would be paid far less, without producing one. The term money shot, is then very much aligned with pornography’s commodification of sexualized bodies. Though the money shot was present in the stag genre, it became a pornographic staple within the golden age. The money shot prevails today as, if not the “sine qua non” as Williams terms it, then at least a salient feature that identifies current pornography, still symbolizing the zenith of male (and female) pleasure that terminates if not the entire film, than usually the specific scene.<sup>281</sup>

This spectacularization of pleasure via the money shot is highly gendered and situated within a phallogentric economy of pleasure that structures most pornography. The fact that the money shot signals the end of the film or specific scene communicates the salience of male pleasure over female pleasure—essentially the buck stops with male ejaculation. Male and female orgasms are differently performed and choreographed in pornography. Male pleasure is represented visually via the money shot, while female pleasure is communicated through a host of devices such as moans, facial expressions, language, etc. This embodiment of female pleasure in a host of audible and visual forms makes it difficult to discern whether or not female pleasure is genuine or simulated.

Corbett and Kapsalis argue that the audible ejaculation has become the indicator of female pleasure rather than the liquid marker, or money shot, for the male. In their article, “Aural Sex: The Female Orgasm in Popular Sound,” they explore the representation of sexual bliss, specifically the aural manifestation of climatic sexual pleasure and/or the orgasm, asking the question “[w]hat happens to this seemingly untenable presentation of bliss when it takes the form of a recording?”<sup>282</sup> So while Williams interrogates the “frenzy of the visible,” Corbett and Kapsalis discuss what they term the “frenzy of the audible.”<sup>283</sup>

The manifestation of an ultimate sexual pleasure translates into a type of not just somatic evidence, but evidence about the truth of ourselves as revealed by a highly gendered demonstration of pleasure,

At the base of economy of pleasure is a biological truth-claim about the nature of women’s and men’s sexual behavior. Men’s pleasure is absolute, irrefutable, and often quiet, while women’s pleasure is elusive, questionable and noisy. This gendered opposition augments another biological construction that configures the male and female

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<sup>280</sup> Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 101.

<sup>281</sup> Linda Williams, *Hardcore*, 93.

<sup>282</sup> John Corbett and Terry Kapsalis, “Aural Sex: The Female Orgasm in Popular Sound,” *TDR* 40:3 (Autumn 1996): 102.

<sup>283</sup> Corbett and Kapsalis, “Aural Sex,” 103.

orgasmic economies differently; male orgasm is seen as singular and terminating; female orgasm is heard as multiple and renewable.<sup>284</sup>

So, if the manifestation of sexual pleasure is gendered, we must also think about how it is racialized, dependent upon sexual preference, and/or classed. For example, do black female actresses perform their orgasms differently than white female actresses within contemporary American pornography? How is the spectacularization of bliss also racialized, not merely gendered?

The liquid versus sonic dialectic of the Corbett and Kapsalis/Williams framework is challenged in *Lialeh* and a host of other pornographic films that use music as well as other non-diegetic sounds such as moaning to reinforce the visual charge of the money shot. It is not so simple as the “liquid vs. sonic volume” male/female measuring framework that Corbett and Kapsalis present for male versus female orgasms.<sup>285</sup> Often money in shot scenes in which the male is pleased orally, there is no aural evidence of female pleasure. Such is true in *Lialeh* where over-dubbed male moaning is heard, yet Leigh remains silent while the non-diegetic sound of her singing “Touch Me” continues to flood the scene. Yet, despite *Lialeh*’s singing “touch me again where it feels good...,” we ultimately do not sense *Lialeh*’s bliss, her pleasure is not made audible nor visible. The voice-over song of her singing obscures her representation of her own bliss. She sings, “Touch me again where it feels good...,” but the viewers watch her masturbate, touch herself, while performing oral sex. The song, is as much for the male heterosexual ear as the camera’s close-up of her masturbation, and rubbing ejaculation around her mouth, is for the male heterosexual gaze—it is a processed and produced bliss, not a raw expression of *Lialeh*’s pleasure and the words of the song actually serve to express not *Lialeh*’s own pleasure but her giving of pleasure. This money shot scene illustrates *Lialeh*’s conformance to a phallogocentric economy of pleasure. The scene also reveals how *Lialeh*’s pornographic character derives from both physical act and song—her expression of sexuality is both physical and audible. Multiple modes of representation work together simultaneously in *Lialeh* to construct her as pornographic.

Coeval with the blaxploitation genre, the film *Lialeh* is stylistically, aesthetically, thematically aligned with blaxploitation. The similarities are numerous—the funky, soul soundtrack, the ostentatious 1970s style of dress, and the plot. Arlo is a black pimp-like talent show organizer who conquers all the women in the film with his magnificent sexual powers. Donned in a black and white zebra stripe jacket, tight white flared pants, and a bright red Fedora, he stylistically and attitudinally mimics the standard male blaxploitation hero. The DVD cover hails him as “‘the Shaft’ of xxx movies.” *Lialeh* reinforces my earlier discussion of blaxploitation as early black hardcore. The same brand of black sexuality is presented—over abundant, uncontrollable, insatiable and public. There is even a striking scene that directly references the hit blaxploitation film, *Superfly*, a 1972 blaxploitation hit directed by Gordon Parks Jr., starring Ron O’Neal as the quintessentially black male macho hero named Priest.<sup>286</sup> Priest and his girlfriend, black female actress Sheila Frazier (as Gloria) star in the infamous

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>285</sup> Corbett and Kapsalis, “Aural Sex,” 103.

<sup>286</sup> Ron O’Neal’s character, Youngblood Priest, is a pimp-like cocaine dealer. *Superfly* demonstrates the ambivalence that characterizes the genre of blaxploitation; despite depicting blacks as pimps and drug-dealers, and quasi-nymphomaniacs, the film grossed eleven million dollars within its first two months playing. For more see Donald Bogle, “Superfly,” Turner Classic Movies (TCM), <http://www.tcm.com/thismonth/article.jsp?cid=133221&mainArticleId=133204> (accessed June 18, 2008).

bathhtub scene, where the two engage in passionate love-making, scantily cloaked in a lacy, glistening foam of bubbles. Film historian Ed Guerrero lauds the scene as a shining example of Parks' directorial vision and talent, as well as "one of the finer expressions of black sexuality from this period."<sup>287</sup> In *Lialeh*, the filmic caliber is questionable, and the ersatz bathtub scene lacks the aura and emotion of *Superfly*'s. In a characteristically pornographic fashion, the *Lialeh* bathtub scene fails to deliver the intimacy that the *Superfly* scene emanates, a void illustrated through the camera's focus of the backs of the two lovers, its distance from their bodies, and the audience's knowledge that these two individuals met only moments ago.

The film's "authentic" blackness as a black hardcore film derives from the black protagonists, Lialeh, the star, and Arlo the male lead, its mostly black cast as well as the scattering of stereotypical and offensive markers of black American culture throughout the films' storyline. For example, there are two references to quintessentially black American culture and/or cultural institutions: soul food and the black church.

In one scene, Arlo arrives at his apartment to receive a phone call from Lialeh and the two engage in phone sex. Naked while arousing himself on the telephone, he is interrupted by an unannounced, unexpected, black woman who enters his apartment. She announces that she is with the "International Black Cookers Manual and Entertainment Quarterly" and is performing a soul food survey. While asking him what type of soul foods he likes to eat, Arlo tackles her to the floor while performing oral sex on her. In signature pornographic manner, despite her initial struggle and alarm, she gives in and begins to enjoy the sexual experience. This scene is followed by the bathtub sex scene previously discussed.

Another scene takes place in what appears to be a Black Baptist church. Lialeh and an all-black female gospel choir are singing under the direction of a black male reverend. After the choir practice ends, Lialeh stays to talk to the reverend about her performance anxieties about her upcoming show. After asking her to wait for a moment because he "heard the Lord a-calling" him and running outside of the room, he returns in state of unexplained panic and in what seems to be pain. His jumping and moaning make it unclear if he has been injured or caught by the spirit. The audience soon finds out he has merely gotten his penis caught in his zipper and his pain is assuaged by the three black women choir members who stimulate him— Lialeh performing oral sex, before having sex with him in multiple positions on the floor of the church. This church scene illustrates the film's affirmation of the pervasiveness of sex for the black body, so that it is even present in the most seemingly revered of black activities—the church.

In a film review of *Lialeh* for the Adult Video News (AVN), writer Mark Kernes praises the last scene of *Lialeh*, in which the final talent show occurs on the same stage we witnessed both Bernard "Pretty" Purdie and Lialeh perform, as the best scene in the entire film. During this last scene, Lialeh performs once more as part of an all black singing and dancing group, three males and three females. There is again, a small, mixed audience who has paid to come to enjoy the show. The ensemble wears 1970s, disco-like costumes— tight, silver sequin-trimmed pant suits for the men, and gold dresses edged in sequins paired with fluffy, yellow-feathered boas for the women, who seductively sing "I am all pink on the inside, I'm all black on the outside, so won't you come, come inside my love, my love, my love." The lyrics of this song speak to the complicated dynamics of racialized-sexual alterity expressed in and through pornography. The black female singing ensemble is asserting blackness via their black skin, then contradicting this same claim to blackness singing they are essentially all the same on the inside, that is, that the

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<sup>287</sup> Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 95.

technicalities of vaginal sex, which this song is meant to fantasize, are such that regardless of the race of one's female partner, it is "all pink on the inside." Sex is and is not racially-inscribed activity/phenomenon. Yet the lyrics of the song seem to reference white male penetration of the black female body, assuring the white male that the black female Other, while she looks different on the outside is indeed the same on the inside. So again we see black womanhood becoming coherent through its primitivity and availability to white male sexual penetration. The men simulate sexual movements and take their genitals outside of their pants before both groups begin to strip signaling what the viewers expected to be the end of the performance. However, the film actually ends with a "sex" scene, featuring a white female audience member, not with Jennifer Leigh.<sup>288</sup> This woman, who holds the "winning ticket," is the recipient of forced oral sex from Arlo, who drags her away from her partner, and up on stage, before engaging in oral sex with her, then handing her to the three black males from the ensemble for a final, dramatic on-stage orgy. In typical pornographic fashion, this woman seems to be forced into sex, then eventually yields to experience ultimate sexual pleasure. The aggressive black male seduction of the white female character at the film's finale suggests a kind of sanctity of white female sexuality in comparison to that of black female sexuality, as always already willing and a more passive object of black male sexual pleasure.

It is this final on-stage orgy scene featuring a white woman that Kernes hails as the best of the film; he writes:

But even with her wig, Leigh isn't that good-looking, and her sexual energy fluctuates between acceptable and lackluster. Fortunately, when she does her striptease at the end, a bit of fire shows itself –but the best scene in the movie is the finale, where (white) audience member Andrea True crashes onto the stage and begins pleasuring three black guys.<sup>289</sup>

This comment also reveals just how much pornography, especially early pornography from the golden age, is about male pleasure—it is centered upon the woman pleasuring the man, not her pleasure received from the sex act. Furthermore, Kernes' review reinforces the allure of the black male rapist fantasy and pure or unexpecting white female that is rampant within pornography. His remark, in addition to insulting Jennifer Leigh's physiognomy and performance, locates the best scene of the film, a film with a black female star that situates itself in the genre of black hardcore, as one in which a white female leads. Consequently, black female sexuality, even in its own forum or niche of black hardcore, is somehow second place. This contradictory positionality of the black female body is characteristic of her space within American pornography as something always already pornographic that radiates a distinct pornographic aura or *porno chic*, yet delayed in her inclusion into mainstream porn and/or included as a discredited signifier.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> I put the word sex within quotation marks because I read this scene as more of rape scene. Sex ideally should conjure a certain sort of agency or initial desire on the behalf of those engaged that this scene, at first, lacks.

<sup>289</sup> Mark, Kernes, *Lialeh* Film Review, AVN.com, Jan 1, 2005, <http://www.avn.com/movies/56716.html> (accessed,

<sup>290</sup> For example, in Chapter One, I explore *Playboy's* making of American womanhood via its practice of racial and physiognomical exclusion and Jennifer Jackson's (the first Black Playmate of the Month) inclusion in the magazine years twelve after it was in existence.

## Porno Chic: Golden Age Classics and Race

The term *porno chic* is traced back to a 1973 *New York Times* article of the same name about the immense popularity of the feature length pornography film *Deep Throat* (1972), which in addition to having record ticket sales that solidified the mainstream profitability of porn, sparking a highly publicized obscenity trial and having purported financial backing in organized crime, had become, as *New York Times* writer, Ralph Blumenthal states “a premier topic of cocktail party and dinner table conversation in Manhattan drawing rooms, Long Island beach cottages, and ski country A-frames.”<sup>291</sup> While Blumenthal concedes that a mere stroll down Manhattan’s Forty Second Street would reveal that this “sexploitation gone beserk” was pre-*Deep Throat*, he rightly credits the film with bringing an improved and more decorous pornography to the mainstream.<sup>292</sup> *Deep Throat*’s bringing of porn, its induction of porno chic, is highly underscored by prevailing notions of class and culture.<sup>293</sup> *Deep Throat*, with its humor, linear plot line, social commentary, original musical score, and much-improved cinematography, sold a classier version of sex than 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, one that wider audiences could more safely consume. The article’s very publication in the *Arts and Entertainment* section of the *New York Times*, a newspaper oft-regarded as a literary arbiter of culture and taste, also speaks to the possible shifting of the high/low cultural divide that porno chic endeavored. *Deep Throat* engendered a type of “porno chic,” a mainstream co-opting and celebration of pornography.

*Deep Throat* is the golden child of pornography’s golden age. Directed by Gerard Damiano, *Deep Throat*, as indicative of the new improved porn of the era, was a feature length porn film (sixty two minutes long) with its own musical score, an apparent yet shallow story line, elements of humor, characterizations, and far-improved sound and camera work. *Deep Throat*, shot on location in Miami, took just six days to shoot and three days to edit.<sup>294</sup> It is the story of a woman, Linda Lovelace, who cannot find real pleasure in sex until she discovers, with the help of a whacky quasi-doctor, Dr. Young played by Harry Reems, that her clitoris is actually located, deep inside her throat. The solution: deep-throated fellatio performed by Lovelace to many male partners on screen. The film is then a commentary on pleasure and reveals what is ultimately the phallogocentric economy of pleasure that pornography is centered within. Lovelace can only obtain sexual bliss through giving male pleasure. The film, as Linda Williams notes, also cemented in popular heterosexual film pornographic film, the ever-enduring popularity of the blowjob, as the pornographic pinnacle of male and female pleasure.<sup>295</sup> The central money shot in

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<sup>291</sup> Ralph Blumenthal, “Porno-Chic,” *New York Times*, Jan 21, 1973.

<sup>292</sup> Porn star Sharon Mitchell notes a distinct change within the pornographic environment that was 42 street in Manhattan; she states, “The years 1975, 1976, 1977, were the beginning of the great era of smut on Forty-second Street because that’s when it changed over from those old burlesque strippers to porn stars and rock and roll girls”. Legs McNeil and Jennifer Osbourne. *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 144.

<sup>293</sup> John Waters notes that the path to *Deep Throat* was in many ways paved by its predecessor, *Pornography in Denmark*, which was shown commercially at New York movie theatres in 1969. See *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry*, 52.

<sup>294</sup> Ralph Blumenthal, “Porno-Chic: ‘Hard-core’ Grows Fashionable— And Very Profitable,” *New York Times*, Jan 21, 1973.

<sup>295</sup> *Inside Deep Throat* DVD. Written, Produced and Directed by Brian Grazer and Fenton Bailey, and Randy Barbato. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2005.

*Deep Throat* is comically spliced with footage of rockets launching and fireworks displays to symbolize this ultimate bliss that Lovelace discovers via fellatio. In *Deep Throat* and in many porn films to come, fellatio would be the symbolic pinnacle of both male and female pleasure. *Inside Deep Throat*, a documentary-style film, released more than three decades later, explores the making of the movie and the controversy surrounding the obscenity charges it incurred and the lead actress, Linda Lovelace's claim that she had been abused and coerced into making the film, attests to the film's impact and pornography's larger salience in American culture.

The film opened at the World Theatre on June 12, 1972 on Forty Ninth Street in the Times Square district in Manhattan which was, in the early 1970s, recognized as the capital of pornography. Times Square was then a seedy, red-light district filled with peep show booths, porn merchants and strip clubs. New York's Mayor Lindsay (1966-1973) launched a campaign to clean up the area by exterminating the porn business as well as the crime and drug trafficking. *Deep Throat* spear-headed the controversy surrounding pornography and obscenity in the golden age. It was for some, as John Waters states, "a badge of the new freedom," symbolizing the sexual liberalism of the moment that allowed one to view, in a mainstream cinema within her/his own community, a hard-core pornography film. For those within the pornography industry the success of *Deep Throat* signaled a mainstreaming of porn and legitimization of their careers. Yet, despite these high hopes there was never, nor is there still, a merging of Hollywood and the porn industry and actors rarely move from pornography into mainstream cinema stardom. *Deep Throat* did not extirpate the high/low divide nor carve a space of acceptance for hard-core pornography within the mainstream culture. For others, like Mayor Lindsay and anti-porn groups, censorship champions and evangelicals, the film was evidence of society's ultimate demise. Both *Deep Throat* and its reception spoke to the tumultuous sexual-political climate of the 1970s. The movie was banned in twenty-three United States and the lead male actor, Harry Reems, was federally prosecuted on obscenity charges.<sup>296</sup> This legal controversy surrounding the film proved the most successful public relations campaign much to the dismay of protestors and prosecutors alike. *Deep Throat* is estimated to have grossed over six hundred million dollars and is hailed as one the most profitable pornography films of all times.

Yet *Deep Throat* can very much be watched as a representation of white sexuality, a white-washed representation of sexual pleasure. The stars, Linda Lovelace and Harry Reems, and their multiple screen partners are all white; in fact, not a non-white body graces the screen. However, *Behind the Green Door* (1972), its predecessor, also a renowned feature length film from pornography's golden age, reveals that the pornography of this era not only included the black body, but incorporated African Americans as main actors and subjects engendering the first black porn stars. Curiously, *Behind the Green Door* is absent from Blumenthal's article on porno chic despite its huge box office success and release a few months earlier than *Deep Throat*. *Behind the Green Door* is not credited with ushering in the arrival of porno chic. Perhaps this oversight has to do with the interracial sex scenes between two main actors in the film, Marilyn Chambers, a white female and Johnny Keyes, a black male. Despite a sexual revolution, the socio-political climate of the 1970s may not have been ready to embrace interracial sex, especially that between a black man and a white woman, as engendering any type of chic. *Behind the Green Door* recalls racial, sexual fantasies and fears that were evident on the big screen back in 1915 with D.W Griffith's epic film, *Birth of Nation*.

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<sup>296</sup> The charges against Reems were later overturned due in large part to a celebrity movement in his support, thus reinforcing the linkage of celebrity culture and porno-chic.

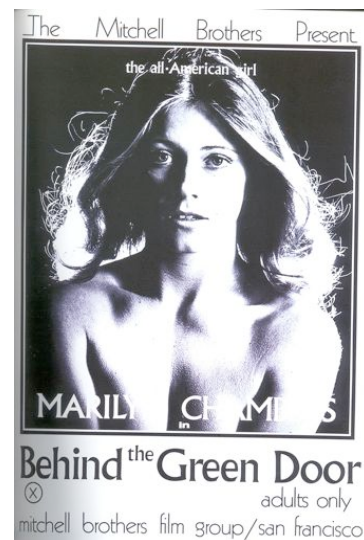
In *Behind the Green Door*, Keyes ultimately plays the role of Mandingo, a quintessential black buck, mythically endowed. Keyes himself is fully aware of the historical script he is citing in playing this role, he states:

I was fucking the hell out of this chick—I was acting like I was ten thousand Africans making up for that slavery shit. Here's this white woman that the African is fucking to get revenge on all those white motherfuckers that used to rape our mothers and aunts all those years ago, right? That's what I used as an incentive to fuck Marilyn chambers.<sup>297</sup>

His performance as one of a revenge is one neither noble, nor entirely convincing. Keyes was well compensated for his role in *Behind the Green Door* and the role launched his very profitable career as a pornographic actor. But his remark speaks to the racially-coded narratives enacted and re-enacted, both consciously and subconsciously within contemporary American pornography.



(Left) Johnnie Keyes; (Right) Marilyn Chambers



Emerging from an illuminated green door on the otherwise dark stage, Keyes wears the arbitrary markers of an offensively generic Africanity or tribal quality—a long bone necklace and war paint on his forehead and surrounding his eyes, as well as white chap-like leggings (with feet!) that leave his penis exposed. The white of the fabric starkly contrasts with his dark skin to accentuate his large genitals. Slowly moving on stage towards Chambers against a soundtrack of trippy tribal jazz music, he is made to be walking primitivity. The audience, both today's viewers and the 1971 on screen-audience in San Francisco's O'Farrell Theatre where *Behind the Green Door* is set, is pre-warned by an anonymous male announcer, "Ladies and Gentlemen, you are about to witness the ravishment of a woman who has been abducted, a woman whose initial fear and anxiety has mellowed into curious expectation." This announcement serves to make benign what would otherwise be incredibly threatening—a black man having sex with a white woman, and not just sex, but "ravishment." *Behind the Green Door's* taboo of black/white sex on screen was intensified by not merely the African construction of Keyes, however artefactual and inaccurate, the biography of Marilyn Chambers also contributed to the thrill of the racially delineated forbidden.<sup>298</sup>

<sup>297</sup>McNeil and Osbourne. *The Other Hollywood*, 93.

<sup>298</sup> *Behind the Green Door's* on screen interpretation of the taboo of black/white sex on screen is discussed in more detail in chapter seven, in the context of interracial pornography.

Twenty-six years later the *New York Times* revisits porno chic in a 1999 article discussing the mainstreaming of porn through the co-opting of a pornographic aesthetic in mainstream cultural production such as film and magazine and fine art, an “appropriation of the conventions of pornography—its stock heroes, its story lines, its low-budget lighting and motel-room sets...”<sup>299</sup> Author William Hamilton, contends that it is pornography’s *look* that has become popular amongst modern filmmakers and photographers, who have by the inspired by the aura of porn and its mood.<sup>300</sup> To bring the porno-chic into their work, artists are experimenting with lighting, color, and texture as well as the high/low cultural divide that demarcates pornography from other cultural production. What is perceived as the overall poor quality of pornography—its tackiness, bad lighting, choppy camera work, over-stylization, and a high saturation of color— is being emulated by photographers.<sup>301</sup> Today, the omnipresence of highly explicit sexualized images and the endurance of the sex tape as a most promising form of celebrity capital (Pam Anderson, Paris Hilton, and more recently Kim Kardashian) show, that more than three and a half decades later, porno is still chic. Hardcore remains in fashion and is in fact now made easier, both to produce and to consume, with current visual technologies such as web cams and hosting sites like youtube’s pornographic cousin, redtube.com.<sup>302</sup>

Brian McNair argues that porno chic, or the “pornographication of the mainstream,” has intensified since the mid 1990s reflecting a larger cultural attraction in pornography and representations of sexuality and sexual activity in popular culture combined with a commercial market equipped with the technology to satiate this interest.<sup>303</sup> However for McNair, porno chic remains distinct from porno, he states,

Porno-chic is not porn then, but the representations of porn in non-pornographic art and culture; the pastiche and parody of, the homage to an investigation of porn; the postmodern transformation of porn into mainstream cultural artefact for a variety of purposes including, as we shall see, advertising, art, comedy and education.<sup>304</sup>

McNair’s comprehension of porno chic is then dependent upon the strict delineation between pornography and non-pornography. But this conceptualization is problematic in that these lines are not so easily drawn, recognized, nor respected. It has become increasingly difficult in our current society’s omnipresence of graphic highly-explicit sexual images used to sell everything

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<sup>299</sup> William Hamilton, “The Mainstream Flirts with Pornography Chic,” *The New York Times*, Mar 21, 1999.

<sup>300</sup> Doug Liman, director of *Swingers* (1996) and *Go* (1999) is interviewed in the article as a director who incorporates pornography into his film, using not merely pornographic subject matter like strippers and three-way sex scenes, but the look and attitude of porn using “a disconnected, disaffected distance between emotional involvement and physical act that prevails in the faces of the performers; the uncorrected color, and the bad lighting of the environments.” For more see William Hamilton, “The Mainstream Flirts with Pornography Chic,” *The New York Times*, Mar 21, 1999.

<sup>301</sup> Photographers include Susan Choi, Malerie Marder and Jeff Burton and Ken Probst.

<sup>302</sup> [www.redtube.com](http://www.redtube.com) is a pornographic website featuring free clips of amateur and professional hard-core pornography of many types—heterosexual, homosexual, fetish and “ethnic”. The site is updated daily and viewers rate the clips from one to five stars. Redtube.com also advertises for paid viewings of live sex cams and online live sex chats in one’s own area.

<sup>303</sup> Brian McNair, *Striptease Culture: Sex, Media and the Democratization of Desire* (London: Routledge, 2002), 61.

<sup>304</sup> McNair, *Striptease Culture*, 61.



from music to anti-perspirant to blue jeans, to discern the difference between pornography and the rest. It is certain that pornography and a pornographic aesthetic, as a “commodification of sex” has and continues to be prevalent. But the ubiquity of sexual representation is nothing new. What has changed is how we see this, how we are able to consume pornographic images—the ways, modes of delivery, platforms, speed of access, method of financial exchange, availability and sheer variety of visual stimulation. Also for McNair, what has changed is the audience, as opposed to a previously commercial interest in porn, there is now a grander public interest in seeing sex that fuels the porno chic—I would question whether this commercial interest in sex could ever really exist without an overwhelming public desire to see it. Porno chic then, continues to speak to the co-option of pornographic devices, a pornographic aesthetic, and porn’s main subject—sex, by the mainstream cultural production.

Yet porno chic may have been and may continue to be most visible in black popular culture. Hamilton’s 1999 article, discussed above, opens with a brief mention of black female rapper Foxy Brown and the provocative music video for her hit song “Hot Spot.”<sup>305</sup> The very song title, “Hot Spot,” gestures to the porno chic with its reference to the sexual organ as “hot spot.” But above and beyond a lexical alignment with porno- chic the video itself is graphically sexual in a pornographic manner. Brown’s solo shots in the video depict her, sitting spread eagle in a metal chair, provocatively touching her crotch. According to Hamilton, Brown “straps on the persona of a star of pornographic movies appearing in a chrome bikini, then a fur bikini—standard costuming in adult films as she pumps and postures her way through the rap, touching herself frequently shot from below and between the legs.”<sup>306</sup> The video is indeed pornographic in its construction and commodification of Brown’s highly sexualized body to a mainstream consumer audience. Set in an ice- themed club, Foxy Brown and her back up dancers, also sporting metallic bikinis, dance seductively in tandem, their bodies producing heat to warm up the frozen environment.

Yet it is not just the “Hot Spot” video that engenders a certain kind of porno chic, Foxy Brown herself, needs to be recognized as creating and capitalizing on a specific brand of porno chic that, above and beyond the skimpy bikinis, dramatic make-up, and knee-high stockings, utilizes the black female body as its chief tool. This brand of hip hop porno chic is distinctly more modern, deeply intertwined with the culture of hip hop that achieved mainstream popularity in the early 1980s and thrives today. It is the blaxploitation films of the 1970s that pioneered porno chic, a golden age term. The black body’s erasure from the historiographic foundations of porno chic speaks to the unstable positionality of black female within porn as a body that is integral to its development, yet not recognized as such. Always already pornographic, the black female body occupies a peripheral yet pivotal role in mainstream American porn.

## **Conclusion: Closing the Golden Curtain**

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<sup>305</sup> “Hot Spot” is the first single released from Foxy Brown’s second album, “Chyna Doll,” released on November 17, 1998 under the label of Def Jam records, II Na Na Entertainment. The music video, also released in November 1998, was directed by Joseph Kahn and Foxy Brown herself. Kahn, who has been making mainstream music videos since the early 1990’s, has received numerous music video production awards including a Grammy, and multiple MTV Video Music Awards.

<sup>306</sup> William Hamilton, “The Mainstream Flirts with Pornography Chic,” *The New York Times*, Mar 21, 1999.

The 1970s was a decade in the US when the black female image was constructed as pornographic, highly sexualized for mainstream consumption and commodification. During this period, her viewing audience transformed greatly, expanding and in turn, facilitating a whole new market for the pornographic black female in American visual culture. In other words, the change in spectatorship of the black female body engendered a transfiguration in the types of spectacles being produced, the kinds of bodies being looked at, and the types of performances enjoyed. The golden era was therefore a time when the dynamics of African American spectatorship of pornography changed. This shift is most visible through an exploration of blaxploitation, a genre indebted to the patronage of a new black, urban audience. In the golden age of pornography, the black female image moved from the margins to the mainstream, or *mainscreen*. This shift was largely facilitated by the blaxploitation genre and actresses like Pam Grier whose performances both elicited and evinced a desire for the black female as a pornographic body. Yet as this chapter's exploration of the black female body within the golden age reveals, images of the black female body have always been fraught with contradiction. The black female body's pornographic representation is a highly ambiguous one, framed by the dialectics of lust and disgust and anchored in a vacillating belief in her racial, sexual alterity. The transformation from stag era to golden age is also one of private to public—from private basements and backrooms to the main screens of public theatres nationwide. Ironically the next phase of moving image porn, the video age, would bring the black female back into the space of the home to be consumed once again in the private sphere. With the advent of the video age in the mid 1980s, a paramount development in the history of moving image pornography, images of black female sexuality were revolutionized again to an even more diversified viewing audience. Pornography reinvents itself once more.

## Chapter Five

### *The Video Age of Pornography*

Video changed everything for better or for worse.<sup>307</sup>

The question of change that video engendered is itself an ambivalent one, revealing the tension in the development of pornography between technological advancement, economic growth, and an expanded broadened audience across time, versus the reiteration of familiar myths and repetition of tired tropes of black female sexuality. Thus it is not, as the above epigraph constructs, a question of “better” or “worse.” We need only to return to Michele Wallace’s foundational theorization of positive and negative that opened this project to be reminded of the futility of such a value framework for not just pornography, but for all representation. For Wallace, the terms positive and negative are not just insufficient adjectives to describe the complex, polyvalent and often ambiguous or contradictory language of visual images, but also serve to stifle their intertextual dialogue. That is, pronouncing an image as “positive” or “negative,” “good” or “bad,” closes the discussion on the work that the image performs in regard to its making and unmaking of racialized identities, its political commentary, its feeling, tone, and a host of other possibilities. These words also fix an image on one spectrum of a Manichean dialectic, denying the continually changing context’s effect on visual images, the shifting realities of their viewers, and the hybrid possibilities of an image’s meaning. So rather than making porn “better” or “worse” the technology of video had critical, polyvalent effects on porn and the black female’s space within it. In addition to revolutionizing how Americans consume porn, broadening and expanding this audience, and serving as catalyst for the materialization of the adult entertainment industry, video engendered the development of racialized niches of pornography with the black female as primary actor of a deeply eroticized and often satirized, “authentic” blackness.

Into the so-called “silver age” of video, the 1980s through the 1990s, pornography continued its hypersexual, hyperracial treatment of the black female body as a cipher of racial, sexual alterity. The recycled tropes of debased, excessive black female sexuality playing in video porn were still largely narrated by white men. What the video age did change however, is the rapidity and force with which these images were brought into the living rooms, bedrooms and intimate spaces of American culture. The technological dynamics of video enabled the mass production of pornographic moving images of the black female body, which in turn spiked American consumption these images, and further engendered an adult entertainment industry that thrives today. In this expansion of porn, the audience for black female porn was broadened and diversified to extend beyond the predominantly white male audience of the early moving image porn of the stag genre, to include a large black fan base and increasing amounts of women viewers. In its recapitulation of highly stereotypical representations of black women to an even larger and more diverse audience, video was an ambiguous development in the history of black women in contemporary American porn, simultaneously changing everything and almost nothing at all.

We may thus re-read O’Toole’s epigraph as “Video changed nothing for better or for worse.” That is, pornography continued its treatment of the black female body as a site of racial, sexual alterity to be mined and to eroticize this difference. While it drastically altered how we

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<sup>307</sup> Laurence O’Toole, *Pornocopia*, 103.

look at porn, how we make it, and porn's place in the American economy, visual culture, and entertainment media, it did not, despite establishing a market niche for the black female performer, drastically alter the types of representations of black women being offered in and through porn—i.e. more humanistic, holistic, heterogeneous and less anti-black racist, abject, stereotypical and excessive.

This chapter first outlines the rise of the video cassette as the preferred mode of moving image porn in the silver age and its catalyzation of the adult entertainment industry before tracing the development of a black ethnic niche and discussing two foundational videos in the history of the black female in contemporary American pornography *Hot Chocolate* (1984) (all black) and *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* (1985) (black/white interracial).<sup>308</sup> Produced at the dawning of the video age, these videos reveal pornography's reiteration of familiar tropes of black female sexuality as other, anchored in a sexual and somatic nimity. The eroticization of racial sexual difference and abjection at work in both videos is highly irresolute, oscillating between the poles of lust and disgust. Despite the fact that *Hot Chocolate* purports to reveal, as its box cover promises, the essential "erotic and exotic" nature of black sex, both videos speak to the cross pollination of black female and white male sexuality. That is, video porn further exposes black female sexuality as product of white masculinity and the figure of the black female as signifier of white male sexuality. Both videos also signal the salient, though unstable place of black women at this incipient stage in contemporary pornography and the adult entertainment industry.

### **Video and The Business of Pornography**

In 1975 Sony introduced the Betamax yet, fearful of the social stigma and ironically the possible financial ramifications of aligning themselves with pornography, refused to license the formatting technology to video pornographers. One year later JVC introduced the first ever Video Home System (VHS) video recorder and licensed the format to pornographers. The VHS became synonymous with not just the pornographic video cassette but with the home movie. Betamax quickly became extinct. While there are many contributing factors to the VHS's thriving and Betamax's demise, pornography is recognized by many, including porn historians, to have influenced the new direction in home entertainment technology in the mid to late 1970s.<sup>309</sup> Since then, the adult entertainment industry has maintained a pivotal role in the direction of American home entertainment and visual technologies. This "format war," as it is so often referred to in the historiography of porn, at the dawn of the 1980s, signaled more than pornography's linkage to VHS technology, it catalytically enacted a revolution in how Americans consumed moving images, not just pornographic ones.

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<sup>308</sup> *Hot Chocolate*, VHS. Directed by Drea. JV Productions, 1984; *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks*. Directed by the Dark Brothers, VCA Pictures, 1985.

<sup>309</sup> See Seth Grahame-Smith, *The Big Book of Porn: A Penetrating Look at the World of Dirty Movies* (Philadelphia, Quirk Books, 2005), 27. Also see Bryan Gardiner, "Porn Industry May Decide DVD Format War," *Fox News* Jan 22, 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,245638,00.html> (accessed July 22, 2008) and Jonathan Silverstein, "Porn Factor: Why Erotic Movies Won't Decide Next Gen DVD War," *ABC News/Technology* Jan 31, 2007, <http://abcnews.go.com/Technology/story?id=2835806&page=1> (accessed July 22, 2008)

VHS technology also revolutionized the production of pornography. Towards the end of the golden age of porn, the pornography industry rivaled the Hollywood film industry in terms of production. While Hollywood averaged less than four hundred films a year from 1973 to 1975, more than one hundred hard core feature films and five hundred eight millimeter shorts were filmed during the same time two year period.<sup>310</sup> The technology of the VHS allowed for not just the continuation of moving image pornography after the extinction of golden age cinema-screened feature films, but its development into a thriving American industry. Video facilitated pornography, both its production and consumption. Video is simply less expensive to produce than film. The Meese Commission reports in 1986, that “the average cost of making a sixty–nine minute feature length movie on film is seventy-five thousand dollars” while “the same movie shot directly on video tape costs between \$4,000 and \$20,000.”<sup>311</sup> Additionally, video is a more immediate medium than film as it lacks the time for processing that film requires. In 1980, at the close of pornography’s golden age, there were a million VCRs sold in the United States and over eight hundred thousand households had VCRs.<sup>312</sup> This increase in home viewing devastated the adult film theatres. In 1980 there were an estimated fifteen hundred adult film theatres, by 1985 only seven hundred, and by 1989 a mere two hundred and fifty, closing the golden age’s curtain era of porn on the big screen.<sup>313</sup> Indeed in 1986, the date of publication of the Meese Commission, the committee adumbrates that the “adult only pornographic theater business” had been steadily declining and would be obsolete by 1990.<sup>314</sup> Admission to view a pornographic film in a theatre was more expensive than a porn video rental. Furthermore due to the illicit and often “interactive” nature of pornography films, many consumers preferred to view them in the privacy and comfort of their own homes. By 1986, VCRs were used in approximately twenty eight percent of all American homes.<sup>315</sup> With the increase in VCRs in American homes nationwide, “video specialty stores” generated to supply the videos cassettes themselves.

Pornographic video dominated the sales and rental market of all home video cassettes. With the rise in demand for porn videos, nationwide rental retailers opened and thrived during the 1980s and 1990s. During the six-year period from 1980-1986, the number of video

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<sup>310</sup> Joseph Slade, *Pornography In America: A Reference Handbook*, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 107. The Meese Commission reports that in 1985 alone, about one hundred pornography films were distributed to almost seven hundred “adults only” pornographic theatres in the US, who sold approximately two million tickets per week generating an estimated annual box office revenue of five million dollars. See the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, Final report, 2 vols.(Washington, D.C.:U.S. Department of Justice. 1986), 355. The pornography industry remains still more prolific than Hollywood; more recently in 2001, there were eleven thousand adult titles released versus four hundred released in Hollywood. For more see Frank Rich, “Naked Capitalists,” *New York Times*, May 20, 2001.

<sup>311</sup> Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, Final report, 2 vols (Washington, D.C.:U.S. Department of Justice, 1986), 353.

<sup>312</sup> *Inside Deep Throat* Online Archives

<http://worldofwonder.net/insidedeepthroat/archives/2005/Feb/18/pornology.wow#mail>. (accessed April 24, 2007).

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Meese Commission Part 4, Section 8.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., David Jennings notes that in 1979, American homes had approximately seven hundred and fifty thousand VCRs and by 1985, the number skyrocketed to seventeen million. See David Jennings, *Skin: The Inside Story of the X-Rated Video Industry* (David Jennings 2000), 149.

“specialty retailers” jumped from just below five thousand to over twenty five thousand.<sup>316</sup> The Meese Commission reports that “in the late 1970s, ‘X’ rated video tapes, which were retailing for over one hundred dollars, constituted half of the pre-recorded industry sales.”<sup>317</sup> In addition to the cheap production costs and immediacy of the medium of video itself, the markup for porn video was large, making it an especially lucrative investment for video store owners. David Jennings notes that in 1978 nearly seventy percent of all pre-recorded tapes were porn and that “[a] blank tape that cost \$14 would be worth \$55 wholesale with sex recorded on it.”<sup>318</sup> Nicola Simpson reports that “[b]y the late 1980s video porn was a godsend for rental retailers, as they could purchase a movie for around \$35 (the best bulk rate) and then rent it out 200 times at \$5 a pop.”<sup>319</sup> The number of hard-core video rentals continued to rise from seventy five million in 1985 to four hundred and ninety million in 1992 to a record of high six hundred and sixty five million in 1996.<sup>320</sup> Pornography videos increasingly, throughout the 1980s and into the mid 1990s offered fast profit for producers, distributors and retailers.

The silver age was also a time of geographic change for pornography. If Times Square was, in the golden age, a sort of barometer of pornography’s vitality as a national cultural medium, then in the 1980s the view looked rather dismal.<sup>321</sup> Times Square was, in pornography’s silver age, before New York City Mayor Rudolph Guiliani’s famed “Disneyfication,” a sleazy mass of fledgling sex shops, peep show booths, strip clubs, crime and prostitution. Since the June 12, 1972 opening of *Deep Throat* at the World Theatre on Forty Ninth Street, the Times Square district of Manhattan was recognized as a sort of national capital of pornography and sex commerce. A campaign launched by New York’s then Mayor Lindsay (1966-1973) to clean up the area by exterminating the porn establishments, crime, and drug trafficking functioned cooperatively with the shift in modes or visual technologies for the consumption of porn, quashing Times Square porn, and shifting the epicenter of its production

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, Final report, 2 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, 1986), 352.

<sup>318</sup> Jennings, 71.

<sup>319</sup> Nicola Simpson, “The Money Shot: The Business of Porn,” *Critical Sense* (Spring 2005): 20. Pornography video became even cheaper to rent in the 1990s and more profitable investment for video rental retailers. Pornography video was cheaper to purchase than traditional video and could be rented at a higher cost, therefore proving to be a lucrative investment for video rental retailers. In 1997, Hollywood video cost sixty dollars per tape and rented for three dollars, while a porn video cost thirty dollars per tape and rented for four dollars. For more see Eric Schlosser, “The Business of Pornography,” USnews.com, February 2, 1997, [http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/articles/970210/archive\\_006163\\_10.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/articles/970210/archive_006163_10.htm) (accessed June 23, 2008), (4)

<sup>320</sup> Eric Schlosser, “The Business of Pornography,” USnews.com, February 2, 1997. [http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/articles/970210/archive\\_006163\\_10.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/biztech/articles/970210/archive_006163_10.htm) (accessed June 23, 2008).

<sup>321</sup> FBI Special Agent, Roger Young, the FBI’s former lead obscenity investigator in the late 1970s through the 1980s confirms this lifespan of Time’s Square as space of commodified sex, stating “Times Square was at it’s peak in the sex industry—about 1974 or 1975—.” AVN Hall of Fame, porn performer Sharon Mitchell notes a distinct change in the climate of the locale noting that after 1975, marked “the beginning of the era of great smut on Forty-second street”, a transformation from “old burlesque strippers to porn stars and rock and roll girls.” See, Legs McNeil and Jennifer Osborne, *The Other Hollywood: The Uncensored Oral History of the Porn Film Industry* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 110; 144.

and consumption. The video age shifted the location of porn's consumption from public cinemas in urban locals such as Times Square to private living rooms and bedroom across the nation. It also shifted the location of porn's production and distribution to the sunny San Fernando Valley in southern California.<sup>322</sup> This move in the geographic nucleus of the industry was, as many scholars and historians note, including Nicola Simpson, financially motivated, due to the San Fernando Valley's reasonable real estate prices and affordable equipment rentals and sales. It was also affected by climate differences. California's San Fernando Valley, as opposed to New York, offers year round tepid weather and sunshine, enabling outside filming. In the first decade of the twenty first century, approximately seventy five percent of all hard-core films made in the US come from the Los Angeles Country in Southern California.<sup>323</sup>

But more than the shift from East to West the technology of the video cassette moved pornography from the outside to the inside, so that as pornography filmmaker and writer, David Jennings notes, "the porn monster had escaped its cage. Home video has taken x-rated movies out of red light districts and put them into suburban shopping malls."<sup>324</sup> Inherent in the name "home video" the Video Home System (VHS) is a visual media designed for home consumption. The illicit nature of pornography lends itself well to video because one can watch the tapes in the privacy of her/his own home, use the tapes as a precursor for masturbation or sex, and rely on the buttons of pause, rewind and fast forward to cater the video to her/his own personal and immediate desires. Video cassettes also enable repeat visual experience, allowing the viewer to watch the entire tape or certain sex scenes over and over again. Video also opened the door for other markets of pornography that would heavily contribute to the development of the adult entertainment industry and solidify porn's salient place both within the American home and the fabric of our national economy.

The union of pornography and cable television further fueled pornography's *inside* place in American homes and hotel rooms nationwide, shifting the space of consumption of hard core porn and fixing a space for pornography within the American economy of popular visual media and entertainment. It is this quality of discretion that video and cable offered to pornography consumers which greatly increased the potential market for hardcore pornography. Because cable television could show materials network television could not it was an apt place for the distribution of porn. The advent of cable television was somewhat belated in comparison to VCRs. In the late 1980s an estimated sixty percent of Americans owned VCRs while roughly twenty percent subscribed to cable television.<sup>325</sup> Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s the link between pornography and cable strengthened. In 1995 Americans spent more than one hundred and fifty million on pornographic movies through the cable option pay-per-view.<sup>326</sup> Pay per view was an especially profitable realm of video pornography for cable retailers who were able to keep approximately seventy percent of the revenue generated from the sales.<sup>327</sup> By 1997,

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<sup>322</sup> It needs to be recognized that his east-west shift during the video age is a reversal of the previous Golden age era geographic shift. Pre 1970, when a "wave of films" first began to be produced New York City, most of the hard-core films in the US were made on the West coast of the United States. For more see Kenneth Turan & Stephen F. Zito, *Sinema: American Pornographic Films and the People Who Make Them* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 131.

<sup>323</sup> Schlosser, 3.

<sup>324</sup> David Jennings, *Skin: The Inside Story of the X-Rated Video Industry* (David Jennings 2000), 1.

<sup>325</sup> Frederick S. Lane III, *Obscene Profits* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 34.

<sup>326</sup> Schlosser, 6.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

approximately sixty seven percent of Americans were cable subscribers and “adult” material on cable constituted roughly one hundred million dollars in revenues.<sup>328</sup>

Besides greatly increasing the number of Americans consuming pornographic images inside their homes and hotel rooms across America, the technology of cable fueled the industry of pornography and reveals pornography’s salient place in the national economy. Profits from pornography via cable are a major source of revenue for major cable companies like Time Warner, Cablevision Systems Corp, Continental Cablevision, and TeleCommunications, Inc. Some of the main channels that offered pornography through cable in the video age were Playboy, Spice, Adam & Eve, Hot and Adult Vision (Playboy’s pay per view service).<sup>329</sup> A particularly large market in the mid to late 1990s (that continues to thrive today), was the hotel industry, which offers pornography video to its guests through their television screens in the privacy of their own hotel rooms. Pornography becomes perhaps more acceptable in the confines of a hotel room, in which an individual or couple is outside of her/his own realm, norms, and restraints, etc. In 1995 Schlosser notes that hotel guests nationwide spent over one hundred and seventy five million dollars on porn at large, at upscale hotel chains like Hilton, Hyatt, Holiday Inn and Sheraton. He estimates that hotels receive up to a twenty percent cut for providing pornography to their guests.

This brief history of the video age’s catalytic fueling of an industry of American porn allows us to see that pornography has indeed moved out of its “cage” and is now part and parcel of non-pornography industries and businesses nationwide. That is, thanks to video, pornography is not only an inveterate American “pastime,” phenomenon or even mainstream cultural product. Rather, it is firmly lodged into the national economy beyond the economic spheres of mass communications, entertainment media.<sup>330</sup>

Having recognized the technology of the video’s engendering of pornography’s salient place in the national imagination, economy and realm of visual culture, it becomes critical to explore the type of knowledge created by porn during the video age. Specifically what was this new video porn revealing about the racialized bodies it represented? How did video porn’s making of the black female body and of black female sexuality both challenge and reinforce prevailing trends of racialized representation in early moving image porn? This project has delineated that since the sixteenth century with the invention of the printing press, pornography has always maintained a critical relationship with technology, continually relying on the ever-evolving visual technologies to re-invent itself. Yet the technology of video enabled the growth of an American industry of pornography that was previously unparalleled. Video’s revolutionizing of porn’s production and consumption would ultimately establish a fixed market niche of black female porn within the adult entertainment industry, and mass produce pornographic images of the black female body.

Yet the silver age spike in porn production and consumption within the US was not without protest. The anti-pornography feminist campaign, discussed in detail in chapter two, attests to this organized resistance against pornography specifically as an endangerment to women’s safety, liberation and a more general societal ill. With the rise in national consumption of pornography during this time, porn also became a concern of the federal government which

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<sup>328</sup> Richard Winton, “Porn Goes Mainstream,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1998.

<sup>329</sup> In 1998 *Playboy* purchased its top competitors in supplying porn via cable, Spice Entertainment and Adam & Eve.

<sup>330</sup> Another example of pornography’s penetration of mainstream media conglomerates is its relationship to the telecommunications giant AT & T.



launched nationwide surveillance campaigns. Similarly, as we have seen before in the history of pornography, the advancement of porn was often matched by its attempts at suppression.

What is known as pornography's "Valentines Day Massacre" February 14, 1980 is the largest simultaneous federal prosecution of pornography in our nation's history—four hundred FBI agents indicted fifty-four pornographers nationwide. The two and a half year FBI sting, dubbed MIPORN operated out of undercover mail order pornography business in, Miami Florida, named Gold Coast Specialties.<sup>331</sup> Though former FBI special agent, Gordon McNeil claims "the real emphasis of MIPORN was getting to organized crime—Pornography was just the vehicle we used to do it," many in the pornography industry at the time viewed the raid as a societal assault on the blossoming porn industry.<sup>332</sup> MIPORN (Miami and pornography) was activated in 1977, when the FBI held a special meeting to select the targets of porn investigation in Miami. The two central targets, Michael "Mickey" Zaffarano and Robert DiBernardo, were two video pornographers who held alleged ties to organized crime. Zaffarano, whose life in porn narrates porn's trajectory from the golden gate the video age, as he moved from owning several pornographic cinema houses in Times Square, New York, to maintaining one of the largest and most profitable video distribution networks in southern California, was alleged tied to the Gambino crime family out of New York.<sup>333</sup> While this "Valentine's Day Massacre" certainly made a big media splash perhaps satisfying those who felt like the federal government ought to do more to protect American society from the evils of porn and may have dissolved and/or discouraged links between porn and organized crime, it did little to arrest the escalation of pornography. Video pornography not only continued to thrive, but flourished from the mid 1980s throughout the 1990s.

Ironically, the same technology that "saved" pornography, imperiled it. Another obstacle facing porn in the silver age, was a direct result of the same technology that spawned its advancement. So that if, as Nicola Simpson notes, "[h]ome video was a key technological innovation for the industry because it made films easier to produce, transfer and distribute," the same benefits of video industry pornographers enjoyed were available to "pirates," those who did not produce their own material, but simply reproduced the materials of others for sale. Pornographer David Jennings in his semi-autobiographical "inside" story of the pornography industry at the height of the video age details the absolute rampancy of piracy in the silver age, and notes that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, trading in "dupes," illegally reproducing other's material and selling it, was unbridled within the industry.<sup>334</sup> Jennings dubs this period "the time

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<sup>331</sup> MIPORN was officially started in under the name "Operation Amore" by Florida's Metro-Dade County Police Detective Wayne Clark, Al Bonanni and undercover FBI Agent partners Pat Livingston and Bruce Ellavsky and Bill Kelley. MIPORN, which stands for Miami Porn was the deep undercover ring set up in Miami through their mail order business front, *Gold Coast Specialists*.

<sup>332</sup> McNeil & Osborne, 199.

<sup>333</sup> Zaffarano also had ties to VCX which was one of the largest pre-1980s pornographic video manufacturer. David Jennings reports that the company went bankrupt in 1985 while the Meese Commission notes that VCX, in 1985 controlled forty percent of the US porn market. See Jennings, 5.

<sup>334</sup> David Jennings is a twelve year veteran of the adult entertainment industry, who describes himself as enacting the "roles of pioneer (the guy with the arrows in his back), producer, manufacturer, distributor, videographer, actor (pants-on), and mini-porn king." Jennings worked for VCX, Inc. a pornographic video production company backed my MIPORN target, Michael Zaffarano, from 1978-1979. Despite Zaffarano's death in 1980, VCX Inc. stayed a float another five years until hitting bankruptcy in 1985.

of the outlaw, consumer video's 'Wild West' era" lamenting, "[m]y biggest clients would knock off my tapes; my ex-boss would steal my masters; the FBI would decimate the adult industry ... Ripoffs were happening in all sectors of the new home video industry, as its decade of Reaganomics began with the year of the Pirate."<sup>335</sup> In the height of the video age, piracy threatened the pornography industry.

One final challenge to pornography in the silver age was HIV and AIDS. In the mid 1980s the disease was referred to as GRID5, Gay Related Immunodeficiency Disease, thus evoking its perceived ideological and physical link to homosexuality and the gay male body. Indeed legendary porn performer, Annie Sprinkle, recounts how this disease was first referred to by many working in the industry in the mid 1980s as "gay cancer."<sup>336</sup> Schlosser refers to HIV as an "occupational hazard" of the industry, but given the fatality of the virus, the definition of hazard does not suffice to describe HIV.<sup>337</sup> Other treatable Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), which are also commonly spread through sex work, including Genital Herpes, Chlamydia and Gonorrhea, may be considered occupation hazards, but not HIV. In order to protect their performers, some producers required the use of condoms during filming while others did not.<sup>338</sup> Many producers also began to require performers be tested monthly for HIV in order to continue working. The most visible case of HIV related death within the industry was golden and silver age legend, white male performer John Holmes (stage name Johnny Wadd), who died in 1988 of HIV/AIDS related causes. Despite the figures citing high rates of HIV/AIDS among African American women in the United States, and despite the rare usage of condoms in majority of the hardcore videos I watched from this era, there have been no visible deaths of black female porn performers.

Throughout this rapid rise in the video, black performers during this time were relegated to the margins of both the production and the performance side. Black owned and operated pornography production and/or distribution was not actualized during the video age. Yet increasing numbers of black performers were in front of the camera. Specifically the performances of black women helped to engender a specialized niche of black hardcore video pornography.

### **The Roots of a Black Hardcore Genre**

The onset of video is regarded in the historiography of porn as a salient moment of technological change. Video revolutionized the consumption and production of moving image

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VCX according to Jennings, "bullied its way into being one of the largest pre-1980 video movie manufacturer in the world". For more see Jennings, xiii; 5.

<sup>335</sup> Jennings, 123.

<sup>336</sup> For more see McNeil and Osborne, 397.

<sup>337</sup> Schlosser, 8.

<sup>338</sup> The issue of protection and STIs in the adult entertainment industry is still stratified by sexual—orientation and gender. In heterosexual moving image pornography, it is highly common not to see condoms being used. Despite the use of condoms in gay male moving image porn following the mid 1980s explosion of HIV/AIDS, the recent surge in popularity of the niche of "bareback porn," a term for moving image porn featuring gay male anal penetration using no condoms, attests to the declining use of condoms within gay pornography. *Bareback* porn currently comprises sixty percent of the gay pornography market. For more see Madeline Holt, "HIV Scandal in Gay Porn Industry" *BBC News*, March 4, 2008.

porn and further fueled the development of an American “adult entertainment industry.” Indeed, Nicola Simpson notes “[i]n the end, the impact of videotape and DVD technology was threefold—it spurred growth in production, brought industry costs down, and lured a whole new audience to adult entertainment.”<sup>339</sup> Yet the technology of video not only greatly expanded the audience of porn via decreased production costs and cheaper product. It allowed this audience to satiate their own specific sexual desires and catered to the fantasies of specific niches in spectatorship, ultimately leading to the development of specialized *genres*, markets, and styles within contemporary American pornography. Black and interracial porn were two of these racialized niches that evolved into stable market niches within the adult entertainment industry during the video age.

Though there is almost no recorded information about the racial dynamics of the sales and/or rentals of early pornography videos, Jennings does note that in 1977, “black on black” was “currently outselling black on white loops.”<sup>340</sup> This comment suggests an early development, maybe even predating but certainly overlapping with, the video revolution, of racialized markets of pornography as well as an established desire for the black body in video pornography. The early engendering of a market for “diversity” is also confirmed by stag film historians Di Lauro and Rabkin who note in 1976, a “recent emergence of a large black urban market for the porn and the peep” and that overtime, hardcore films reflected “an increased toleration of sexual diversity.”<sup>341</sup> The film *Lialeh*, discussed in chapter four, also testifies to an early, maybe even pre-video age, emergence of a genre of hard core moving image black pornography.

Mireille Miller-Young, however, traces the genre of black and interracial porn back to the mid 1980s and the adult entertainment industry’s organization of its product.<sup>342</sup> Indeed while the presence of black and interracial porn is evident back in the stag genre, the silver age is when these films became a market niche in the field of the adult entertainment industry. Miller-Young notes that in the 1980s, trade publications began instructing pornography retailers to categorize their product to ease the consumer shopping experience. This organization was especially helpful given the rapid increase in product. It also facilitated the customer shopping experience—consumers could follow the titles instead of asking, perhaps shyly, for their own specific preference choices. As Miller-Young points out, this categorization was largely dependent upon the box as a kind of coding and “market strategy.” Yet just as it is not possible to judge a book by its cover, a porn video was often inaccurately represented by its box. So that often consumers “were enticed by a flashy box that nets them a mediocre movie.”<sup>343</sup> Nevertheless, with the sudden surge in product, video cassette boxes became an important way for store owners to organize product and for customers to select video of interest to them.

The black tape’s popularity in the mid 1980s was evident in articles published in the trade magazines at the time, which hyped the profit potential of black video. In an article titled, “How to Sell Adult Tapes: Marketing All-Black or Interracial Cassettes” Paul Fishbein recognizes black video as a “specialty item” that is “very saleable.”<sup>344</sup> Fishbein’s statement “the market is

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<sup>339</sup> Simpson, *The Money Shot*, 20.

<sup>340</sup> Jennings, 61.

<sup>341</sup> Di Lauro and Rabkin, 101.

<sup>342</sup> Mireille Miller-Young, Talk given at University of California, Berkeley, Feb 18, 2009.

<sup>343</sup> Barru Rosenblatt and John Paone, “Adult Marketing 101: Special Report: Biting The Hand That Feeds Us –Part 2,” *AVN* 1, no.27(May 1987).

<sup>344</sup> Paul Fishbein, “How to Sell Adult Tapes,” *AVN* no.21 November 1986, 18.

definitely there and exploitable” functioned as a recommendation to video sales and rental retailers to stock black product.<sup>345</sup> Organizing the product via race in rental and retail outlet also functioned to ease the anxiety of white customers self conscious about buying black video, enabling them to not have to ask for black tapes allowing the customer to “pick and choose discreetly.”<sup>346</sup> This organization is still common practice in pornographic video and DVD retailers, in store and online.

An important article written by Susie Bright scheduled to print in the December 1986 AVN magazine confirms a mid 1980s industry recognition of the genre of black and interracial porn. In the article, which never went to print, Bright sketches the movement of black pornography from a marginal type of porn, to an important niche within the burgeoning video industry and a financially appealing specialization for adventurous pornographers. Black video became a “fringe theme that quickly graduated from risky to mandatory requirement in every video store.”<sup>347</sup> Despite a pervasive fear of black video in the industry in the 1980s, the “healthy sales” garnered by those who did venture into the racialized market stimulated the development of a black niche in video porn. Susie Bright posits that there were two different types of “black/white theme tapes” in the mid 1980s: one approach was characterized the work of the Dark Brothers and VCA in the video *Let Me Tell Ya ‘Bout Black Chicks*.<sup>348</sup> The Dark Brothers, Gregory and Walter Dark, were a white male duo of pornographers working during the video age.<sup>349</sup> Their work focuses primarily on interracial heterosexual porn-couplings of black women with white men, as well as the reverse. Bright conceptualizes this style as “one part National Lampoon, a heaping tablespoon of we-are-the-people-your-parents-warned-you-about, and a sprinkling of every racial cliché in the American psyche.”<sup>350</sup> Indeed, *Let Me Tell Ya ‘Bout Black Chicks*’ is a highly satirical video, but its attempts at “humor” are undercut by a highly ambivalent construction of the black female that feeds the video’s narrative and scripting of black female sexuality.

The second approach, Bright terms the “‘Dis Here is Black Folks’ approach” was pioneered by white female director producer Drea, in *Hot Chocolate* (1984), a video on which she collaborated with actor, director and long time porn persona William Margold, who

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<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Susie Bright, “Inter-racial and Black Videos.” Scheduled to be printed in AVN December 1986, but never printed. Article given to author by Susie Bright.

<sup>348</sup> Walter Gernet, pseudonym Walter Dark, was a pornography producer and distributor with whom Gregory Dark partnered with in the mid-to-late 1980s, before the pair split when Gernet attempted to focus on mainstream films. VCA Pictures, was a pornography distribution and production company that specialized in big-budget pornography feature films and videos during the 1970s and 1980s. VCA maintained an integral relationship with *Let Me tell Ya ‘Bout Black Chicks*’ co-director, Walter Dark, an early VCA Partner. The company is also recognized as the force behind many Dark Brother’s classics as well as the video licensing and distribution of many golden age hits like *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976) and *The Devil In Ms. Jones 2* (1982). In 2003, the company was bought by Hustler Video but maintained its brand name due to industry wide recognition of VCA’s status as a “high end adult entertainment company hosting a stable of legendary and award-winning directors.” See Tim Connelly, “It’s Now Official: Hustler Acquires VCA; Deal Comes a Year After Vivid Pact, Cementing Hustler As...” *AVN Online* May 22, 2003.

<sup>349</sup> Gregory Dark, who is largely recognized within the adult entertainment industry as the mastermind behind the Dark Brothers is discussed in detail in the following section.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 1.

functioned as a writer for the video.<sup>351</sup> As an all black video produced by whites, *Hot Chocolate* offers an attempt at a constructing a view black sex—of how black people “do it.” Both videos, though very different in content, style and narrative, cast an ambiguous gaze at the black female body as simultaneous site of lust and disgust.

### **The Darkside of Video: *Let me Tell Ya ‘Bout Black Chicks***

*Let Me Tell Ya ‘Bout Black Chicks* (1985) is an intensely stereotypical, hard core feature length video that eroticizes not just the racial sexual, alterity of the black female body, but her anomic nature. It relies on the stock palette of oppressive images of black women as primitive, hypersexual, animalistic, and utterly insatiable. The just over sixty-six minutes long, award winning video written by Gregory Dark and directed by the Dark Brothers is inundated with debased images of the black female body—capitalizing specifically on the oppressive images of the mammy and the jezebel, but modernizing these figures into the more contemporary archetypes of “maid” and “ho.” Ultimately these occupations in the video function as two corollary positions of servitude of the black woman to the white male.<sup>352</sup>

The video is largely heteronormative, focusing on sex between black women and white men. There are no black men in the video. There is only one scene in which two women performers interact sexually where the two females, one white and one black, kiss and grope another while engaged in a threesome with a white male. However, the final scene of the video, a group sex revelry—not quite an all out orgy because each performer remains in single heterosexual partnership and there is no switching of partners nor combos of more than two people at a time—emanates both a homoerotic and lesbian feeling because of the number of couples having sex in such a small, intimate space in close proximity to one another.

*Let Me Tell Ya ‘Bout Black Chicks* quasi-comedic filmic style and rawness—its exceedingly blunt, aggressive approach to sex and race, bizarre yet carefully contrived and creative stylization (use of costumes, set design and music), and blatantly offensive nature is quintessential Dark Brothers. The video is particularly indebted to the imagination of writer Gregory Dark. Born July 12, 1957 and raised in Los Angeles, California where he lived until completing high school, Gregory Dark is one of a handful of individuals to have made the crossover from hardcore pornography into mainstream moving image production. Beginning in 1980, at the dawn of the video age of porn, Dark has directed and produced almost fifty hard core pornography videos throughout the mid-to late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> After he retired from porn in the late 1990s, Dark has since directed music videos for renowned pop musicians Britney Spears and Snoop Dog. In 1996 he directed the horror film, *See No Evil*. Dark has also directed under the name Alexander Hippolyte, Gregory Brown and Dark Brothers. As Mireille Miller-Young

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<sup>351</sup> White female performer, director Drea was active through the mid- to-late 1980s directing and performing in almost forty films during that time. White male veteran pornographer –performer William Margold co founded XRCO in 1984 and is a member of the AVN Hall of Fame and has acted in over one hundred and fifty films. He remains today, an important persona within the adult entertainment industry and an avid advocate of pornography.

<sup>352</sup> The video won the X-Rated Critics Organization (XRCO) Best Picture Award in 1985. The X-Rated Critics Organization, founded in 1984, is an organization founded “to give writers and editors from the adult entertainment industry a voice in selecting the yearly best in X-rated movies.” It gives annual awards in a diverse range of categories. For more about the XRCO visit <http://www.xrco.com/>.

rightly notes, *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks* watches like a kind of “extreme theatre of racial fetish,” a racialized bacchanalian carnivalesque, that “delve(s) deep into the mythologies of black sexuality as hyper visible, hyper-available and hypersexual.”<sup>353</sup> Yet in addition to its making of black female sexuality as “hyper visible, hyper-available and hypersexual” the video aggressively hyperracializes its black female performers, over dramatizing and eroticizing their blackness, which is continually played up in highly stereotypical modes.

One of the most egregious examples is a scene in which black female performer, Cheri Lei-Me, eats from a large bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken, actively sucking and licking the bones clean while having sex with a blind white man. The camera catches her staunchly clinging to a chicken wing throughout a session of rough sex in multiple positions. The man’s blindness aptly symbolizes the film’s overall ambiguous treatment of the black female body as revolting yet sexually desired. The scene is thus highly metaphorical. A blind white man can presumably fuck a black woman without seeing her blackness, enacting a perverse sort of “safe” sex — safe in the sense that, unaware of her blackness, he is liberated from the contamination and self-devaluation resulting from his sexual relations with a black female. Yet this sex, as captured in a hard core porn video and documented by the camera, testifies to the (cross racial) erotic capital of the black female body and to the titillation value of interracial sex. And, if he cannot see Lei-Mei’s blackness as he mounts her on the kitchen table, we, the audience, are acutely aware that there is a white man having sex with a black woman and seemingly delighting himself immensely.

In its making of the black female as a hyper visible and sexually available body of racial, sexual nimety, *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* is deeply situated in what feminist theorist Rosemarie Garland Thomson calls the “realm of hyper-representation,” a space of and for the anomalous body. In her genealogy of modernity’s narration of the freak discourse, Thomson explains that bodies who look different visually have always evoked the imaginations of those who don’t. The anomalous body is then always something more than itself; she states, an “exceptional body betokens something else, becomes revelatory, sustains narrative, exists socially in a realm of hyper-representation.”<sup>354</sup> So more than exhibiting Gregory Dark’s signature crass, indelicate style of moving image pornography, the video watches like circus like freak show in which Greg Dark, invisible behind the scenes ring leader, exploits, accentuates and eroticizes the spectacle of racial difference at the site of the black female body. But as Miller – Young notes the “the spectacle of black people as sexualized freaks” in the video carries on a “legacy of the pornographic gaze in subordinating black bodies as fetishes for visual (and other) consumption.”<sup>355</sup> Thus the Dark video, important in its own right as a gutsy pioneer in the video age of pornography and its consideration of figure of the black woman, becomes a salient text within the archive of visual representation its gaze at the black female body. Dark admits or perhaps boasts “you will not find one sensitive moment in any of my work.”<sup>356</sup> Dark’s approach

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<sup>353</sup> Mireille Miller Young, “A Taste For Brown Sugar: The History of Black Women in American Pornography” (PhD Diss., New York University, 2004), 213.

<sup>354</sup> Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error—A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>355</sup> Miller-Young, 213.

<sup>356</sup> Susie Bright, “Inter-racial and Black Videos.” Scheduled to be printed in AVN December 1986, but never printed. Article given to author by Susie Bright.

to race is not “sensitive” either, but rather most incendiary, blatantly racist and communicative of a sharp but ambivalent misogyny. Indeed, part of the formative development of his video making style during the mid eighties is deeply indebted to his exploration of the black female body and black female sexuality.

That is, his approach to blackness is not diffident; Dark himself notes when discussing the genesis of *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* that he set out to make not just a black tape, but to perform and enact a specific type of racialization in the video; he states, “when I decided to make a black tape, I wanted to approach it as a street movie, black street culture.”<sup>357</sup> Dark’s desire to approach the video as a black street movie, to exploit the spectacle of the black street, reflects an almost ethnographic methodology in its quasi-scientific interest in the discursive and pedagogical relationship between sex and blackness. The film’s motivation may thus be considered as a kind of ethnographic fieldwork. Dark’s desire to capture the behavior of blacks in the wild, the concrete jungle of “the street,” is inflected with the empirical aims of an ethnographer. The video employs a pseudo ethnographic methodology to probe the sexuality of black women, telling (showing) its viewers about the social, cultural, behavioral, and most of all, sexual nature of “black chicks.” This inside knowledge of the intimate sexual experiences of black chicks is propagated from the outside, as a white male gaze (that of the Dark Brothers) on the black female body.

Indeed *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* needs to be read as an ethnographically framed narrative of black female sexuality approached from the “street” as a kind of everyday level in which the woman in the film thrive (i.e. the niche of the hotel room where they work). The Dark Brothers go beyond employing a mere participant observation approach, but produce active involvement in the experiences of these black women, via the acts of sexual intercourse between the black women and the white men. So if we agree, with Linda Williams that the Dark Brothers produce “blatantly misogynist films which reproduce in their narratives, the atmosphere of the smoker—the place where men talk sex without having to worry about what women think” then *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* reveals the atmosphere of the smoker to be a definitively racialized space in which white men not just dialogue but physically and symbolically enact racialized sex without having to worry about what black people think.<sup>358</sup> That is, the fantasies enacted by the Dark Brothers in the video are seemingly without regard for the black female body as a human body.

The ethnographic edge of the video further emanates from the black female body subjected to a quasi-scientific lens. *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks* purports to be a video about black female sexuality as inherently, biologically and socially distinct from whiteness and white sexuality. It aims to show how black women are a different type of woman, eroticizing this difference mining it for pornographic titillation value. In this quest it reveals the colonialist

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<sup>357</sup> Dark’s presumed knowledge of black street culture arises from part of his college years in Oakland California. In an 1986 interview with Susie Bright, he states “When I was going to college, I lived in Oakland, California. I’d go play tennis on the community courts there, and these black guys from the neighborhood were there playing too, and they had a lot of stories to tell.” It is more than fascinating that Dark’s inspiration stories come from black men. However, probing the black male oral narrative’s inspiring of the white male pornographic imagination of Greg Dark is simply beyond the scope of this project. For more see *Ibid.*

<sup>358</sup> Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, 162. Though Williams does correctly capture the narrative style and tone and of the Dark brother’s, she incorrectly summarizes the plot of *Let Me tell Ta' Bout Black Chicks* (1984) as white men who “sit around telling tales of their sexual escapades” when in fact, the sexual escapades are those of black women (with white men) narrated in their own voices. For more see Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power Pleaser and the Frenzy of the Visual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 162.



and sexist pith of early anthropological visual studies of racialized others. The video, albeit in a comedic and satirical manner, seeks to capture not just the ontology but also the sexual reality of the black female. It is reminiscent of the stag film, *Darkie Rhythm* (1928) from the Kinsey archives. Both communicate the deeply ethnographic quality, evincing a curiosity and desire to look at *others* in the sexual act. Both are underscored by the premise that black is of a different humanity and that black sex reveals the truth of this racial sexual alterity. Just as in 1928, a white male stag audience, could, in consuming these early hard core American pornography films, enjoy an emic perspective on black sex and see how *darkies* do it, in 1984, the still majority white male audience of video porn could see how “black chicks” do it. *Let Me Tell Ya’ Bout Black Chicks* thus illuminates ethnographic cinema’s imagining and visual construction of race gender and sexuality as natural and fixed categories.<sup>359</sup>

The strange and revealing relationship between the Dark Brothers and blackness is one that needs to be explored in order to contextualize *Let Me Tell Ya’ Bout Black Chicks*, and understand how race figures into the pornographic imagination in the video age and how blackness was tangibly and symbolically used in the in the nascent budding porn industry. If Dark’s approach to blackness in his work is not reluctant, neither is it haphazard, coincidental and without “research.” The ethnographic perspective visible in the video is more than likely, encouraged by Dark’s personal biographical experience. Dark’s father, an anthropologist who maintained a special interest in the occult, the practice of Voodoo and “black magic,” is reported to have “mysteriously disappeared” during a trip to Haiti when Dark was just ten years. This interest in voodoo figures directly into not only one of the most fascinating scenes in *Let me Tell Ya’ Bout Black Chicks*, but other videos Dark writes and directs such as *Black Throat* (1985), *Sex Freaks* (1996) and *Snake Pits* (1996). Dark also reveals an early interest in the black female body outside of his mysterious interest in Voodoo and black magic. During the early 1980s at the beginning of his industry career, Dark and partner, fellow “Dark Brother” Walter Gernert, co-opted the black female body as part of their self image. Porn historian Anthony Petkovich writes “the Darks portrayed themselves as garishly dressed white pimps sitting in extravagant

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<sup>359</sup> *Let Me Tell Ya’ Bout Black Chicks* within the realm of ethnographic cinema, a practice of moving images that represents its subjects, often colonized subjects, as absolute others, primitives and savages fixed in an anachronistic temporal realm behind the civilized European culture.

Magazine ad for the Dark Bros., circa 1986.

Courtesy: VCA Pictures



wicker chairs, surrounded by stuffed iguanas, rubber snakes, while causally retraining black women by collar and chain.”<sup>360</sup> The women in these photographic media advertisements, which were printed in adult magazines at the time functioned on the same inanimate level as the plastic reptiles and wicker chaises to construct a tropical- esque quasi-colonial landscape on which to flaunt the white patriarchal power.<sup>361</sup> Indeed, the image symbolically re-enacts the hegemony of privilege of the white slave master over his black female subject. If the power relationship was not already lucid, the semi-naked black female partially kneeling behind the fully clothed white men who sit reposed with legs crossed in regal looking rattan thrones substantiates the white male domination over the black female. Gregory Dark holds a long leather whip in his right hand which alludes both to the performed eroticized violence of S & M pornography and the actual history of violence the black female slave body has been subjected to by her white male master. The carnal accessory of black female skin is contained and controlled on a leash. Walter

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<sup>360</sup> Anthony Petkovitch, *The X Factory: Inside The American Hardcore Film Industry* (Manchester: Great Britain, Headpress, 1997), 43.

<sup>361</sup> While it probable that these black female models were also pornography performers, there is no information existing regarding the identity of the model in this photograph. Yet these photographs speak to the overlap of media again print and moving image collide, a recurrent theme in the history of pornography.

Gernet holds a cigar in left hand, while his right hand closely grasps the wrist the black woman in a possessive manner that further evokes her double position as slave to these two men—both chattel slave and sex slave. The blackness of the almost naked woman is heightened, positioned in stark contrast to full bright white suits that highlight and intensify the whiteness of the Dark Brothers. The artificial banana trees in the background of the image complete the tropical and jungle themes the reiterating the image as a colonial one, deeply reminiscent of ethnographic photography in colonial Africa in the early late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This photograph offers critical insight into not just the work of the Dark Brothers and how they construct the black female body in their hard core porn videos such as *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks*, but it also speaks to the signification, symbolization, and figurative representation of the black female body in the early age of video as a product of the white male sexual imaginary who occupies a central yet marginal position in the then embryonic adult entertainment industry. That is, she embodies an equivocal space within the sexual economy that contemporary pornography reflects and engenders, as a figure simultaneously disavowed yet revered, de-valued and abjectified as outside the realm of womanhood, and at the same time estimable, as a body of great value. She is both wanted and unwanted.

As budding white male pornographers creating a name and an image for themselves in the blossoming adult entertainment industry during the 1980s, it is striking that the Dark Brothers relied on the black female body as a salient, congenital part of their advertised and marketed self-image. The black female body, as Dark Brother's mascot as illustrated in this cogent image, reveals her salient, if ambivalent space, in the sphere of video porn. Indeed her actual physical position in the photograph symbolically speaks to this very ambivalence—she is the nucleus of the image, centered in between the two men, suggesting her dominance and importance in the vista of video porn, yet her captive nature, nakedness, and semi-kneeling stance reveal her subordinate and nugatory status. This photograph thus vividly narrates pornography's tergiversatory making of the black female body.

Dark himself acknowledges his own self-perceived role as anthropologist his work making pornography videos stating, "I always approached those movies like I was some kind of anthropologist performing these experiments—to see what human beings would do, how far they would go."<sup>362</sup> Indeed, Dark's work reveals a continuous pushing of the limits of not just what the human body will perform sexually in front of the camera or on videotape, but about testing these limits to explore a deeper and more widespread fascination with the boundaries of the human condition. He states, "that's what I was good at getting on film—that moment when human beings become something else, other than human."<sup>363</sup> What Dark does not acknowledge but what is lucid from watching *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* and other videos Dark produced during the silver age such as *Black Throat* (1985), is that race is an essential element of his anthropological or quasi-scientific pornographic visual study of humanity. Specifically, blackness and the black female body are central to Dark's testing of the human condition and to his empirical questioning of the boundaries of humanity—the question of what makes one human. So if he uses the visual medium of pornography video to explore and probe the human condition, he also employs the black female body as foil against which to demarcate the margins

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<sup>362</sup> Tom Junod, "The Devil in Greg Dark: Former Pornographer Now makes Music Videos for Teenage Girl Pop Acts," *Esquire* Feb.1, 2001 [http://www.esquire.com/ESQ0201-FEB\\_Greg\\_Dark\\_rev?click=main\\_sr](http://www.esquire.com/ESQ0201-FEB_Greg_Dark_rev?click=main_sr) (accessed Aug 1 2008).

<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

of human belonging. Positioned as a cipher of racial-sexual alterity, the black female body in the work of the Dark Brothers, serves to demarcate the limits of humanity by illustrating what is out of bounds, but what is still desired.

*Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks* was the first video featuring black women that the Dark Brothers produced. Yet it follows a video made earlier the same year titled *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout White Chicks*.<sup>364</sup> *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout White Chicks* (1984) is an interracial hard core directed by the Dark Brothers in which white female sexuality is experienced and narrated via the gaze of black via the ultimate gaze of white men—a sort of white male's fantasy of a black male fantasy. While the former is a tale of black female sexuality and the latter a recounting of the sexual escapades of white women, both use race as a lens into female (and male) sexuality. In this sense, the Dark Brothers were pioneers in their recognition of the commercial success and selling power of racialized sexualities, not just interracial sex. With this series, particularly *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks*, Greg Dark is credited as bringing “inter-racial material above ground.”

Yet the most fascinating aspect of the video is its multi-faceted possibility for reversal. That is, as much as *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks* is white men's narrations on black female sexuality, it can also be viewed as the reverse: black female perspectives of white male sexuality. Indeed, the most interesting aspects of this video are the slipping, undulating and usurping of the layers of narratives of racialized subjectivity. Dark's own commentary, in interviews during the era becomes another, if obfuscating and infuriating, of these layers of narratives. The “seeing oneself through the eyes of another,” self-representations and double consciousness of the black female characters who narrate their own experiences with white men that are, in themselves, white men's sexualized narratives of black women. There is thus a refracted and schizophrenic gaze at work in the video—black women are seen through the eyes of white male pornographers and through themselves (“the audience” of black female performers within the film who serve as storytellers and listeners), while white men are seen through the eyes of black women and the gaze of the white male pornographers who invented them. So again we see the salience of the white male gaze as constitutive of black female sexuality.

This multi-layered gaze and narrative effect complicates the video's reading as traditional ethnographic film that invents, from the gaze of the hegemonic self, the primitive other. The slippages in narration and the possibility for reversal of the gazes inflect a shift in the power dynamics in the video, actually challenging its' belonging within the cinematic practice of ethnographic moving images. That is, *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks* separates with the realm of ethnographic cinema, as a practice of moving images that represents its subjects, often colonized subjects, as racialized others, primitives and savages fixed in a “displaced temporal realm” behind the civilized European culture.<sup>365</sup> By flipping the perspective and the voice(s) of narration, the video reverses the power dynamics of the colonizer/colonized that ethnographic cinema evinces and becomes the subject's gaze at both her own and other's sexual reality. Read from the perspective of the black women in the video, *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks* becomes an empirical exploration of not just black female sexuality, but white male sexuality—the title of the video virtually morphing into *Let Me Tell Ya' Bout White Dick*.

*Let Me Tell Ya' Bout Black Chicks* begins with the words “Dark Bros. Presents” in purple bubble lettering in quasi graffiti style, against a black screen. Against the opening credits, the

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<sup>364</sup> For a discussion of the film see Linda Williams, *Porn Studies*, 284.

<sup>365</sup> For a wonderful discussion of the practice of ethnographic cinema see Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 8.

video's title song plays. In its use of music the video is reminiscent of film *Lialeh*. Both productions feature an original musical score that functions concomitantly with the moving image as another type of representation to code the black female as a hypersexualized, perennially sexually ready and insatiable body.<sup>366</sup> Like *Lialeh*, *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* illuminates how multiple modes of representation are used together, rather creatively perhaps, to carry a central theme of the video: the synchronous hypersexuality and hyperraciality of the black female. The title song is an original and fetching score that serves to both introduce and set the tone for the film—a semi-comedic satirical pornographic tale about the over abundant black sexuality (as consumed by white male sexuality). The song is definitively in a rap style (fast paced and rhyming words spoken more than sung, over a heavy bass beat), with a young female (the main voice) and a black male (who raps the chorus).

I cite the complete song lyrics because, in addition to being astonishing in and of itself as a ripe commentary on black female sexuality, the song lays the foundation for the images to follow and works with the visual images to construct the black female body as alien (“from outer space”) in her sexuality. Furthermore, it is multiple and cooperative modes of representation working together in the video to make black female sexuality. The opening song paves the way for the video's treatment of the black female as an object utmost racial, sexual alterity.

Black chicks know that they're so fine  
we love to do it any old time  
Start in the kitchen, givin' you head  
Fuck in the shower, come under the bed,  
It really don't matter what's your style  
We take more inches to the mouth

Black chicks are from outer space  
One cannot sit on your face  
Oreo cookies are my favorite kind  
Two black chicks and one white guy

Stuck in the middle  
Or on your bed  
You better get ready for a black attack  
Rappin', scratchin, drinkin' wine  
You know we feel good all the time  
If double penetration is what you need  
Black chicks come satisfaction guaranteed.

Chorus

Black chicks know they can't be beat

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<sup>366</sup> Both sound and music are used rather creatively throughout the whole video and are often coordinated to the events (however random) of a scene. For example, in one scene that takes place in a men's washroom and uses a surfboard as the surface on which the sex acts take place bathroom, crashing waves introduce a version of a Beach Boys song.

You'll find them cruising in your street  
Soul girls really pass the test  
Visa, Mastercharge, American Express  
We don't have to take no shit  
But when it come to getting' it  
Black chicks are really like no other  
They spread their legs like peanut butter

Mornin' evenin' afternoon  
East Coast West Coast  
Black Chicks rule

Brown dark honeys grow on trees  
Pass the lubrication please  
All day long into the night  
If you want a good fuck take my advice  
Cause you know what the white boys think  
Give me black chicks everyday

Chorus

(singing) let me tell you bout the black chicks that I know  
They love to party and they'll do it more and more  
Let me tell you about the bitches havin' fun  
Won't you understand black chicks are number one [fade out].<sup>367</sup>

The song plays as the video's opening credits roll against a montage of hard core sex acts from the video—close ups of various performers giving fellatio, receiving cunnilingus and multiple penetration shots—a sort of treat at what's to come. The first scene of the video immediately follows, in which four black women dressed in black satin French-maid costumes with white lace trimmed white aprons are gathered together in a small ramshackle hotel bedroom. Two twin beds line the center the room and serve as the focal point for the scene and provide the actual surface upon which the majority of the women sit, reclined in a seductive position as they recount their individual stories of sex. The video is a composite of flashbacks of black woman's sexual experiences with a one (and often more than one) white male. Each woman holds a brightly colored –almost neon (this is the 1980s) feather duster in her hand that is color coordinated to a large hair clip pinned in her hair. The feather dusters become props used to punctuate the already overdramatized African American vernacular English that the woman speak, their excessive gesticulation, and overactive countenance (particularly a grandiose expression via the motion of the eyes and head). The sexy costumes and the space of the hotel bedroom serve to immediately sexualize the women.

The hotel bedroom becomes an intimate insider space of black female socialization where the women interface naturally with their “kind.” Again, the ethnographic, almost zoological,

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<sup>367</sup> In the opening credits of the video, the Music is credited to Johnny Powers.

lens of the video sharpens as it the audience is transported to a sort of wild-life reserve, voyeuristically watching untamed animals interact in their natural habitat. The room also serves as the spatial anchor for the entire video. Each woman recounts her story of sexual escapades, in the form of a flashback, from this room. So the viewers are returned to the room after each and every sexual escapade. It is the initial conversation between the black women in this room that also provides the premise for the film as well as introduces the main characters: Sapphire, Sahara, Jeannie Pepper, and Cheri Lei-Me.<sup>368</sup> While each woman plays a slightly different function and boasts her own unique tale sexual debauchery with white men, all are primitive, exceptionally libidinous and relegated to the domain of modernized oppressive



images of jezebel and mammy—the “ho” and the “maid.” As the women sit in the messy hotel room chatting of what sexual escapades must have occurred there the previous night and dusting phantom objects, a discussion ensues about the inevitability and naturalness of the subservience of black women.

Cheri Lei-Me, who embodies the quintessential minstrel combination of simplemindedness and slight self-loathing, states, “You don’t have to be no maid, don’t you know you can always be a ho, cause whitey love us for that dick, fool.” Sapphire, whose character stands out due to her militant nature and her openly anti-white remarks (she is the only woman who has never had sexual experience with white men and is repulsed by the very idea) responds, “Fuck all that, I’d rather be collecting whitey’s welfare.”<sup>369</sup> It is Cheri Lei-Me’s

<sup>368</sup> The white male performers, who are largely unrecognizable throughout the video due to their wearing of bizarre costumes, sunglasses and hats that obscure their identity are Marc Wallace, Steve Powers, Tony Martino, Tony Mangro, D.T. Mann, Ray Hardin. The last three names are most likely pseudonyms or stage names.

<sup>369</sup> When interrogated about her past experience with white men, if she has “ever let one eat [her]cunt or stick his alabaster pole in [her] hole?” Sapphire adamantly replies “Hell no, white ass ghosts, and like I said, they got little dicks!” Again this comment attests to the barrage of stereotypes at work in the video predicated on the biological, fixed, and homogeneous nature of race— i.e. all black men have larger genitals than all white men. Another stereotype being directly referenced in this line is black female as “welfare queen”, or as Patricia Hill Collins identifies, “the welfare mother.” For more on Collin’s theory of the ideological oppression of black women via “controlling images” of the mammy, matriarch, jezebel and welfare mother see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. London: Routledge, 1990.

response that illuminates the dichotomy of mammy and jezebel or maid and ho that the video erects for black women; she questions, “What’s wrong with you Sapphire, don’t you know that the good lord gave us the ability to be maids or hos so it’s a sin you just sittin’ on your ass all day collectin’ welfare.” Maids and hos, two positions of servitude, thus become the biological or god-given roles for black women.

Sahara ultimately affirms the base lascivious nature of the black nature of the black female interjecting, “Well I’d rather be sitting on whitey’s dick all day. No what I mean? Those white boys, they are clean. Now a brother, I can take his suit and put it in the corner it’ll stand up by itself it is so funky.” Though the video does not include any black men—black male sexuality is alluded to and black men become the foil against which white men are contrasted to, specifically via the genitalization of the black male. In addition to relying on this primal sexual stereotype, black men are also unclean in comparison to white men. The video has four main sex scenes featuring one black female performer, then concludes with group scene back in the bedroom.

There are two scenes in particular which encapsulate the video’s characteristic visual treatment – a concurrent hyperracialization with hypersexualization—of the black female body. First the Klu Klux Klan scene, starring Sahara, and second the voodoo scene, starring Jeanie Pepper. The video truly reverberates this love/hate relationship with the black female body that is so common in contemporary American pornography—her simultaneously vilification and animalization (her representation as not only other, but despicable other) and her sexual allure. *Let Me Tell Ya ‘Bout Black Chicks* reveals how the black female is both hated and desired within porn. The scene commences with Sahara commanding the attention of her fellow companions saying, “Listen I got to tell you about the time that I let these two whiteys do me at the same time. Mmmnnn uh it was too good!” Sitting on the bed, she laughs and fans herself with her bright yellow feather duster, presumably warmed from the heat generated from the sultry memories of her time with the “two whiteys.” The rest of the women “ooh” and “ahh” in expectation of a juicy story.



Next the camera cuts to a scene of her in a small bed wearing a blue chiffon night gown trimmed with white feathers that match her white feathered high heel slippers and sheer white



thigh highs. She sits masturbating, spread eagle with eyes closed. Again the music is coordinated to the scene—it is a gospel sounding tune dominated by an electronic organ and a man's soulful voice singing “I feel good,” as if to suggest Sahara's own self pleasure and the gratification proverbial male audience that pornography engendered at the time. Immediately, two men enter dressed in Klu Klux Klan costumes fashioned out of a shiny white satin material. Both men wear hoods that obscure their faces. Man One states, “Looky here grand dragon, a hot dark kitty cat just waiting to get filled with some milk.” Man Two, who speaks in an equally absurd tone, presumably affecting an American southern accent, states “Well shit listen let's fuck the shit out of her out of this darky. You know my great, great grand pappy used to say that in the old days, that this shit was fine.” Neither the comic tone of their over-exaggerated and poorly affected accents nor the presumed satire of their blunt, crude language mitigate the fact that, in their enactment of Klansmen, these two figures (albeit dawning tawdry satin robes), loaded with the weight of actual and symbolic historical violence against black people, men and women, are entering the private space of this black woman's bedroom at a most intimate moment.

Sahara seems nonplussed and undaunted by these two klansmen intruders entering her bedroom and continues to masturbate. She states, “I don't believe that. You guys go ahead and try if you want to but I don't think anything is gonna happen down there.” Her words serve as a challenge, a call to action for the two men, who seem excited by her doubt of their sexual abilities. Her words also incite violence from the men; Man Two threatens, “Why don't you shut her fucking mouth with your dick.” Again, Sahara's response is ambiguous in its simultaneous inviting of their sexual advances and disbelief in their sexual powers, “You'll have to prove it to me cause I ain't afraid of no ghosts.” Sahara's reference to the men as ghosts implies not a naivety but ignorance. The black women throughout the video are as portrayed slacking intelligence. Man One replies, “We ain't what you call 'ghosts'” as the music picks up again as the hard core sex acts ensue. Sahara gives one head while the receiving cunnilingus from the other man. The music crescendos overpowering the moans, the carnal utterances and racist epithets that the men blurt out—they repeatedly call her “darky.”

Both her act of masturbation and her provocation, “You guys go ahead and try,” can be read via what Saidiya Hartman call the “intervention of seduction—the assertion of the slave woman's complicity and willful submission.”<sup>370</sup> That is, Sahara's seduction is invented through her masturbation, an act which attests to her libidinal nature as a black woman, and her verbal instigation. This “discourse of seduction,” according to Hartman, is not just a result of the powerlessness of the black female slaves “no,” what she calls the ““no means yes' philosophy,” but her always already sexually willing nature.<sup>371</sup> So again, pornography alerts us to the fusing of violence and sexuality for the black female—violence as a mechanism of sexual domination, and an element of sexual pleasure. Indeed what becomes most disturbing in this scene, beyond the KKK imagery and the eroticization of not only the racial, sexual alterity of the black female body, but of racism itself, is that we do not and can not imagine Sahara as victim. The film engenders the impossibility of black female rape. Sahara this reflects impossibility of sexual violence enacted against the captive enslaved female as “both will-less and always already willing.”<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Saidiya Hartman, “Seduction and the Ruses of Power” *Callaloo* 19 no. 2 (Spring 1996): 545.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

In its employment of the Klu Klux Klan figure as a sexual partner for the black female, this scene is highly reminiscent of the stag film *KKK Night Riders* (1939). And similarly, in this scene the klansmen keep their hoods on throughout the sex acts to both protect their identity and ensure their characterization as klansmen is known to the audience throughout the video. The presence of two klansmen in *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks* versus one solo rider in *KKK Night Riders*, intensifies the sense of violence evoked by the sexual coupling of the white supremacist character of the Klansman in sexual with a black woman. Indeed, this is the only scene in the entire video that features a double penetration shot. Double penetration, though highly common in moving image porn, is still regarded in the adult entertainment industry as somewhat of a limit, as illustrated by the higher pay rate that it receives.<sup>373</sup> The camera dwells on an extended close up of the double penetration from behind the bodies of Sahara and one of her partners. Both films also rely on and attempt to comb humor and titillation from the racialized violence they enact. So that it is not just the difference of the black female body as racial sexual other that becomes amplified and eroticized, but violence (historical, symbolic, and enacted in the moment of the present sex scene) which becomes a central source of erotic capital.

This powerful scene concludes with double, though not coincidental, money shots. Man One ejaculates first onto the backside of Sahara while she continues to have sex with Man Two, who quickly follows, ejaculating in between her legs. The viewers are then transported back the hotel room where all four women repose on the beds, two upon each, thoroughly engrossed in their sharing of sexual hijinks. Sapphire remains unconvinced of not just the advantages of sex with white men, but the ethicality of two white Klu Klux Klansmen having sex with a black woman, she states “It’s bad enough to let two whiteys do your pussy, but two klansmen, they’re really evil.” The audience is only allowed a very brief period of impropriety in the sex scene that has just transpired before Sahara expels any doubt with her response, “Now If you knew how good it was you be out there trying to get you a couple a honkey’s too.” Her final comment, essentially an “if the sex was good why not?” serves to buff out the deep, trenchant marks of racism etched into this scene.

Finally it is Sapphire’s turn to speak, but since she has never experienced sex with a white man she recounts the story of another black female who has. Sapphire proclaims, “Well I know this girl named Lida, who is into this here voodoo. And she was doing this voodoo ritual on Papa Loki, you know to do this whole evil. And two demons appeared from a cloud a smoke.” Here, Gregory Dark’s interest the practice in voodoo resurfaces along with the ethnographic gaze of *Let me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks*—its keen interest in black female sexuality intertwined with an fascination with the exoticized cultural and social habits of the black women. Sapphire continues “Child they fucked her in her ass and pussy. You see she was doin’ this whole evil ritual. This here voodoo. And honey they must have sent her two of the evilest. Well honey I ain’t fucking with them whiteboys.”

Though pornography is not recognized for its narrative legibility, flow or cohesiveness, (and this video, though impressive in the layers of storytelling present, is no exception), it is

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<sup>373</sup> In a recent model call put out by Kink, a pornographic production house located in San Francisco, CA, on a B/G (Boy/Girl) pay scale, double penetration receives the highest pay rate, thirteen hundred dollars, for sex acts ranging from “vaginal dildo play and finger penetration”, seven hundred dollars, to “vaginal and or oral sex,” which secures nine hundred dollars. This is a pretty standard practice. Double penetration pays more money because it inflicts more pain, and puts the female performer at the risk of receiving sexually transmitted infections from not one, but two men; hence, less models are usually willing to do it. The model call is accessible by visiting <http://www.kink.com>

unclear from Sapphire's remark if the two "whiteboys" were intentionally summoned thought the voodoo ritual, or if they were some sort of demons being exorcized in and through the ceremony of Lida, the black woman played by performer Jeanie Pepper. Immediately the scene switches from the hotel room to a small, dark room which backlight with reddish light. The walls of the room are draped with ethnic printed tapestries. There is a round leather chair in the center of the room and thick smoke from dry ice hovers over the floor, intensifying the mystical and vibe of the space. A black woman wearing nothing but a yellow printed sarong green and red glittering head scarf dances around the room in circles hollering to herself in a most ritualistic, primitive way. She wears heavily exaggerated eye makeup that extends in thick brightly colored stripes from her eyes back to the edge of her hairline.



The excessive amount of jewelry she wears –bangles up the sides of both arms, long necklaces and amulets draped in around her neck— adds to the construction of her as some kind of elusive tribal, native. The tintinnabulation from her jewelry intensifies the rhythm of her movement. In her martial makeup, jewelry and costume she is reminiscent of Johnny Keyes and his legendary performance of black male primitivity in *Behind the Green Door* (1972).<sup>374</sup> She shakes off her sarong as she cries out to reveal her naked body to the viewers. Then standing still and silent, she claps her hands four times summoning two white man who enter the room wearing full suits and ties. One carries a leather briefcase. In move characteristic of the oft choppy editing in moving image porn from the early video age, we cut to shot of the woman reclined in the center seat performing fellatio to one man while she receives cunnilingus from the other man.

Even the language the woman speaks communicates a carefully scripted and enacted performed primitivity, à la the Dark Brothers, she says, "Me like your dick." Her broken, incorrect English, her inability to form cohesive sentences reveals her primitivity and ultimate inhumanity. Through she cannot quite speak, she continues hollering while performing fellatio. The animalistic noises she makes, fast and high pitched, sound like those of a barking dog. The camera alternates somewhat schizophrenically between close ups of cunnilingus and fellatio, before focusing on a vaginal penetration shot. This is one scene in the video where the music does not necessarily correspond to the events of the scene. One would expect heavy drums and

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<sup>374</sup> *Behind The Green Door*, DVD. Directed by the Mitchell Brothers, 1972.

deep percussion to match the constructed Africanity or ethnic quality of the scene. Instead, a heavily synthesized electric guitar blares.

This deeply disturbing scene ends with simultaneous money shot in which one man ceases from doggie style vaginal sex to ejaculate on her butt and the other, almost immediately following pulls his penis out of her mouth to sprays her face with semen. Yet the voodoo thematic continues as the audience returns to the hotel room for the follow-up conversation of the four black the women. One expresses disbelief in the scene's occurrence "Well that's the craziest thing I ever heard. I don't believe in no spirits or demons." Another testifies to the "healing" power of sex with white men as evinced in the last scene, "We've healed people that have spells on them, like you Sapphire, you needs to be fucked by a honkey." Suddenly all women begin to scream and moan bizarrely and direct their attention to Sapphire who is instantaneously possessed, as Sahara firmly interjects "She is possessed, she is possessed!" and "need(s) someone to turn you out real good." The women become increasingly excited and being falling over themselves and on to the bed, while the camera enjoys a semi-long distance, almost wide screen view of the heightened activity in the room. Sahara summons the demons, white men, ordering "Demons appear!" Three white men enter the hotel bedroom all dressed up in different, yet equally nonsensical costumes. One dressed as G.I. wearing camouflage fatigues, one with a "Zorro" mask and another wearing shorts, button down with insignia on the left arm, and a scarf around his neck looking somewhat like an overgrown boy scout. Against a musical backdrop of an upbeat funk song that repeats only the words "let's party," over a chorus of assorted moans from the performers, the final group sex scene, a dizzying and disembodied and cacophonous montage of penetration shots, fellatio, cunnilingus and performers gyrating in the claustrophobic and even messier hotel room, ends the video. *Let Me tell Ya 'bout Black Chicks* eroticizes not just the abjectness of the black female body but the miscegenation taboo. It recites the white male colonial fantasy for and of the black female body, a script in which hypersexuality, hyperraciality, subordination, and violence are imbricated in the production of black female sexuality and white male pleasure. Masquerading as the black women's sexual fantasy, the secret sexual desires of "black chicks," it represents the white male colonial fantasy for the black female body.

### ***Hot Chocolate***

The second approach to video, what Bright terms the "'Dis Here is Black Folks' approach" is reminiscent of the stag film *Darkie Rhythm* in its eroticized, highly satirical, educational outlook on how black people have sex.<sup>375</sup> The *Dis Here is Black Folks* approach was pioneered by white female director producer Drea, in video named *Hot Chocolate* on which she collaborated with actor, director, and long time porn persona William Margold, who functioned as the writer for the video.<sup>376</sup> The commentary surrounding *Hot Chocolate's*

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<sup>375</sup> The stag film *Darkie Rhythm* (1928) is discussed in detail in chapter three.

<sup>376</sup> White female performer, director Drea was active through the mid- to-late 1980s directing and performing in almost forty films during that time. White male veteran pornographer –performer William Margold co founded XRCO in 1984 and is a member of the AVN Hall of Fame and has acted in over one hundred and fifty films. He remains today, an important persona within the adult entertainment industry and an avid advocate of pornography. VCA Pictures, is a pornography distribution and production company that specialized in big-budget pornography feature films and videos during the 1970s and 1980s. The company had an integral relationship with *Let Me tell Ya 'bout Black Chicks'* co-director, Walter

production is invaluable in our understanding of the development of black video. Bright posits that Drea and Margold seemed to be solely financially motivated by making “black tapes” and that their work was definitely not “a labor of love.” However, in an interview with Margold, he assured me that his motives were not financial in the making of *Hot Chocolate*, but rather he, as always when making pornography, seeks to entertain; he states, “We are not even really trying to sell things, we are trying first and foremost to entertain.”<sup>377</sup> Margold’s mission to divert is heavily dependent upon his exploitation of blackness as a discredited signifier. Blackness, specifically black sexuality, is constructed in the video and mined as a source of entertainment in and of itself, by virtue of the fact that it is viewed as something different and in opposition to whiteness and white sexuality. The fact that the video is all black and features no non-black performers gives it an edge of authenticity, despite its being written by a white male and directed by a white woman. So while the all black cast may give some viewers the sense of this is how black people do it, knowing that the video is not a venture in self-representation complicates the dynamics of racial sexual authenticity at work in *Hot Chocolate*.

Margold’s own approach to *Hot Chocolate*, black video, and blackness is highly ambivalent and at times very contradictory. What he seems to fail to recognize is how his drive or desire to entertain is deeply circumscribed by both race and an economic imperative, also racialized. Margold’s labor of love/desire to entertain drive is further discredited by his statement about the making of *Hot Chocolate*, “I don’t get turned on by it. If I want to watch blacks on screen, I’ll watch football. Nobody wants to do these black tapes. They’re hard to light, they don’t create enough heat.”<sup>378</sup> This remark reveals not only his anti-black racism but also his deeply disturbing, almost polygenetic belief in the sexual and somatic alterity of black people. So though entertainment does not seem to be something Margold himself personally derives from making hardcore black porn, it seems to be something he strives to elicit in his work. Margold’s disdain for the black body and black sexuality is squarely at odds with his role as pornographer making black video. Also resonating from Margold’s statement is the polygenetic vibe that marked early moving porn—the conceptualization of black sexuality as an alien sexuality and the black race as fixed, distinct and utterly different from whites.<sup>379</sup>

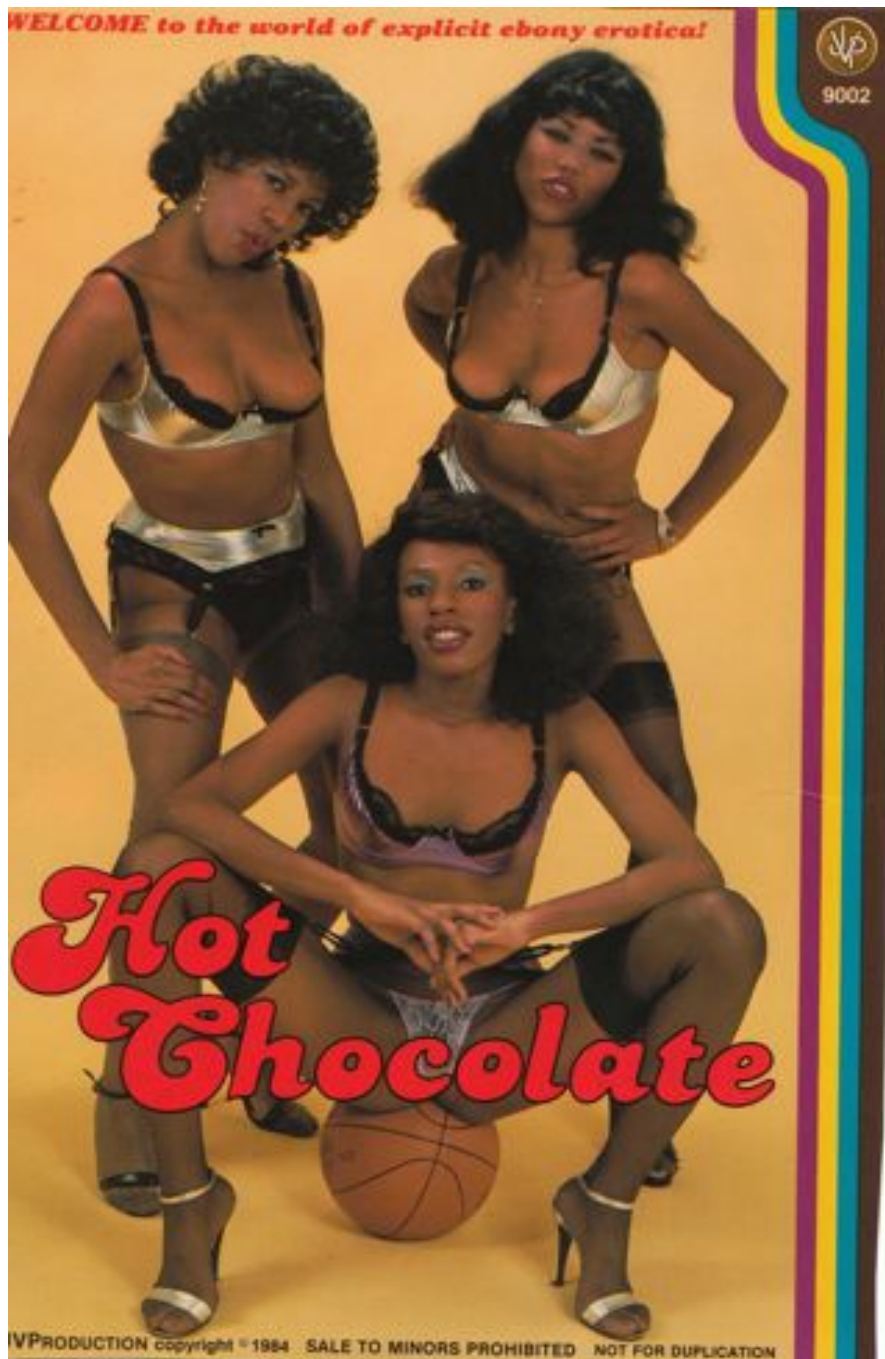
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Dark, who was an early VCA Partner. The company is also recognized as the force behind many Dark Brother’s classics as well as the video licensing and distribution of many golden age classic films like *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976) and *The Devil in Ms. Jones 2* (1982). In 2003 the company was bought by Hustler Video but maintained its brand name due to industry wide recognition of VCA’s status as a “high end adult entertainment company hosting a stable of legendary and award-winning directors.” Visit Tim Connelly “It’s now Official: Hustler Acquires VCA; Deal Comes a Year After Vivid Pact, Cementing Hustler As...” AVN Online May 22, 2003. <http://business.avn.com/articles/9322.html> Accessed May 19, 2009.

<sup>377</sup> Bill Margold, Interview by author, July 12, 2009.

<sup>378</sup> Susie Bright, “Inter-racial and Black Videos.” Scheduled to be printed in AVN December 1986, but never printed. Article given to author by Susie Bright.

<sup>379</sup> Bright, 4.



The text on the front cover of the video welcomes the consumer “to the world of explicit ebony erotica.” Indeed, this welcome is fitting as *Hot Chocolate* was one of the first black hardcore pornography videos. Writer, Bill Margold immodestly and definitively claims, “*Hot Chocolate* was the first all black video,” in addition to being “one of the more successful adult projects of all time.”<sup>380</sup> Either way, the entrée on the front cover serves to announce the budding genre of Black hardcore porn video, “explicit ebony erotica,” in the early 1980s—truly a new and different world of porn. That is, the birth of the market niche of black porn rests precisely

<sup>380</sup> Bill Margold, Interview by author, July 12, 2009.

on its manifestation as a different type of pornography, which in turn leans on a presumption that black sexuality is inherently different, may attract different consumers and thus needs to be labeled and marketed accordingly. The box cover itself illustrates just how important box covers were to the marketing and sales of video at the time. As previously mentioned, the box covers functioned as advertisements for the product within, allowing consumers to formulate a conception of what type of video was inside and what to expect. Yet these covers often eclipsed the video itself in terms of quality and content, painting a far better picture of what was inside for the consumer—improved lighting, more flattering poses of performers, more expression from performers, better makeup, different costumes and backdrops etc.



**WELCOME** to the double-dealing; soul-selling; body-bartering world of college athletic recruitment!

**WELCOME** to the Washington household, where brothers Calvin and Thomas are battling over the recruitment of "Sweet" George Brown...a hot-shooting and hot-loving basketball star. These brothers will stop at nothing to get their man. No price is too high and no trick is too low...and that includes dangling their exotic and erotic wives in front of the dazzling-dribbler.

**UNWELCOME** to the Washington home is the sleek ebony-eyeful who shows up carrying a double order of ribs for "Sweet" George's breakfast. She just happens to be a recruiter for State University and a three-way battle follows in an effort to seduce George and get him to sign on the dotted line.

**WELCOMING** all of this amorous attention, "Sweet" George gobbles up each new offer with the same stamina and enthusiasm that he is known for on the basketball court.

**CAST:**

**CINNAMON DREAM** .....as Emily  
**TINA DAVIS** .....as Bernardette  
**SILVER SATINÉ** .....as Cheronne  
**ALEXANDER JAMES** .....as Calvin  
**JACK BAKER** .....as Thomas

and Introducing:

**TONY EL - AY** as "Sweet" George Brown

Such is the case with the box cover for *Hot Chocolate*. The glossy, vibrant colors printed on the box belie the often muddled, dark colors in the video itself. And while this inconsistency

in color may be attributed to a faster depreciation of video quality versus the printed cardboard box itself, the photographs on the cover, back of the box and the text inflate the video. A full color full size photograph of the three black female performers, Cinnamon Dream (as Emily), Tina Davis (as Bernadette) and Silver Satiné (as Cheronne) wearing metallic bras matching garter belts, sheer black stockings, lace underwear and high heels, perched around a basketball graces the cover. Their gazes confront the camera, while they affect seductive faces with lips pursed and eyes focused. Two women have their hands on the hips and the other sits, legs spread wide open on the basketball. The three photographs that flank the top of the back cover are equally exciting, depicting an engagement and energy between performers that is not present in the video—performers grasp each other dramatically, maintain a provocative gaze with camera while playing seductively with fetish objects such as a basketball and a beverage cup, and look wantingly into each others eyes while locked in an intimate embrace. In addition to this cover photograph privileges black female sexuality over black male sexuality and frames the black female performers as the stars of the film. This move makes sense at the time when heterosexual men were, by and large, the leading consumers of pornography. But what the positioning of the black female also does is signal black women as the sort of stars of the incipient genre of *explicit ebony erotica* video. Black female sexuality and the black female body are of immediate salience in the video via this cover image. The text on the back box cover continues the theme of salutation inaugurated on the front cover, welcoming the viewer or potential consumer, “to the world of double dealing, soul-selling, body-bartering world of college athletic recruitment!” More than introducing this video, this text frames it, alerting the viewer to what would otherwise be a disjointed and obscure plot line and an overall confounding narrative. The cover informs the perspective buyer or viewer to the narrative that *Hot Chocolate* relates:

Welcome to the Washington Household, where brothers Calvin and Thomas are battling over the recruitment of Sweet Gorge Brown... a hot-shooting and hot-loving basketball star. These brothers will stop at nothing to get their man. No price is too high and no trick is too low...and that includes dangling their exotic and erotic wives in front of the dazzling-dribbler.<sup>381</sup>

Indeed, without the plot summary on the box cover the video itself is immensely hard to follow—the story line, character’s roles and sexual motivations muddy. But what this important text also does is to alert the viewer to the nature of representation black women in the video. The text compliments the photos in a multi-media construction or advertisement of black female sexuality as “exotic and erotic.” Thus the text and front the cover image work concomitantly to market the black female body as a central site of not just sexual capital but of otherness.

But above and beyond the highly subjective engaging potentiality of the narrative, the erotic charge and performance of the actors, the video is important for what it communicates about black female sexuality in particular and what it reveals about the black video during the video age. As an all black film, the video reinforces prevailing stereotypes about an insatiable over-abundant black female sexuality while simultaneously framing the black male as an overly carnal body, similarly unquenchable in sexual desire. But while both the black male and the black female are voracious in their lust and seemingly physically inexhaustible, there are subtle gender differences painted in *Hot Chocolate* between black male and black female. The gendered differences in sexuality are mostly underscored by power and performances of power

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<sup>381</sup> Ibid.



which inform the subjectivity and objectivity of the performers. That is, the black men in the video project exhibit a higher level of control, at times even ownership over the black women. The black women function as sexual objects, existing to not only pleasure “their” men, but to carry out various sexual favors for other men upon command (thus being doubly objectified and sexually exploited). The men thus are the barterers while the women function as the property to be bartered. The video resonates the sentiments of the anti-black female sexism of the black nationalist movement a decade before its production. It communicates the proper role of black women as property of their black husbands in positions of servitude, in this case sexual servitude. As such, it is obligatory that they do whatever necessary to help or placate them, not excluding the use of their own bodies. Furthermore, *Hot Chocolate* constructs black female sexuality as interchangeable and exchangeable; black female sexuality always up for grabs. Yet it paints an ambiguous picture in terms of the value of black female sexuality, as being simultaneously a valuable bartering chip or promising capital and something without value that one can merely “give” away.



*Hot Chocolate* begins with what may be the most exciting scene in the entire video, due to the use of cross cut editing. Emily, played by black female performer Cinnamon Dream, walks along the grass lined suburban sidewalks on a rainy afternoon. From behind, the camera focuses on her feet and bare legs as she slowly and determinedly steps on the leaf strewn wet pavement. Meanwhile we cut to a bedroom scene of Calvin (Alexander James) lying in bed on his back receiving fellatio from his wife, Bernadette (Tina Davis). Next we cut to a scene of Thomas (Jack Baker) and his wife, Cheronne (Silver Satine) having sex doggie style in their bedroom. The sex acts take second stage to the conversation in both bedrooms where both men

are trying to convince their wives of their god-given duties or responsibility to their husbands. Both wives express their desire not to have sex with anyone but their husbands. Next we cut back to Emily walking, this time the camera, from the front, capturing the top half of her body to reveal that she is carrying what looks to be a box of take-out food which she lovingly stares down at. In a quickening juxtaposition of scenes from Emily walking, to both bedroom scenes (where the sexual positions change yet the conversation of wife-swapping stays the same), the music becomes louder as the sexual pace peaks to mirror the pace of the editing. That is, the sex acts become faster and more expressive, the breathing heavier, the moaning louder as both wives finally agree and both husbands reach ejaculation at the point which Emily reaches the door of the house to ring the doorbell. This masterly edited (for a porn) crescendo of sex, music, movement, and dialogue that commences *Hot Chocolate*, only serves to set high expectations which make the video ultimately more disappointing.

*Hot Chocolate* relies on a number of tired racialized tropes and stereotypes of black culture and sexuality. First and foremost is the theme of basketball and the stereotype of the black male athlete which the video revolves around. Sweet George Brown (Tony El-Ay) plays an aspiring college basketball player around whom the narrative is constructed. Brown is so promising a player in fact, that the brothers, Calvin and Thomas, will give their wives to ensure he joins the desired team. His tall, athletic, lanky build strengthens his role as a basketball player. Yet while black masculinity is primarily stereotyped in a familiar body over mind, overtly carnal, specimen of athleticism, black femininity is translated slightly more complex in the video. The stereotypes of blackness seem to fall harder on the black women who embody more of the discredited signifiers of blackness than the men. Yet their positionality is still highly ambivalent hovering over a virgin-whore dichotomy that complicates the video's making of black female sexuality. For example, the wives, Cheronne and Bernadette, embody a perverse of manifestation of the virgin/whore dichotomy in their willingness to please their husbands, both through engaging in sex acts with them, their brother in laws, and Sweet George Brown thus making them "good" wives, while their sexual promiscuity and acts of adultery position them as whores. In other words, they both violate the sanctity of marriage but remain good wives because they do as their husbands ask and desire. Furthermore, the video reinforces pornography's narration of the hypersexuality of blackness, specifically a sexual willingness of black women in particular. It rests on a number of racist and sexist assumptions about black women as sexually insatiable, promiscuous and subservient to their black male partners.

Margold himself alludes to this racism in discussing his inspiration for *Hot Chocolate*. He states,

Mark and I wrote it with the full intent of basically colloquializing it to the black entity including the scene where, who is it, Sweet George Brown is having sex on the table and she's eating a rib and dipping white bread in sauce and all that stuff. It's a very, very funny movie in it's own way.<sup>382</sup>

It becomes clear from Margold's statement that racism is not just eroticized, not merely a source of physical pleasure; it is also a comedic device. Humor thus becomes eroticized as well in videos such as *Hot Chocolate* that rely on stereotypes of what is perceived as not just a colloquial or vernacular blackness, but an authentic blackness in the sense that *Hot Chocolate* seeks to show, albeit in a slightly satirical manner, that this is the way black people are and this is the way that black people have sex with each other. Yet Margold's statement speaks to the

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

making of *Hot Chocolate* for a black audience as well. He presumably sought to make something “they” could understand, relate to, and/or would want to purchase. One sex scene in particular, the scene that Margold mentions, reveals this reliance on a colloquialization of the black “entity,” black sexuality and black culture, via the language of the stereotype. The scene, which depicts intercourse between Emily





and Thomas, is particularly disturbing not because of the finger-licking-rib-eating-minstrel-like black people it constructs but because of the lack of rapture that Emily shows during intercourse. Emily, the mysterious woman from the beginning of the video turns out to be a soul food delivery woman who unexpectedly, delivers the a box full of rations to the Washington household where both brothers have just finished making love to their wives and in the process convinced them to swap partners. While it seems to be intentional that the character Emily exhibits more interest in the soul food than the man on top of her, her stillness, quietness, blank facial expression, and overall lack of reciprocity makes the sex scene not humorous nor lighthearted, but rather difficult to watch. This scene concludes with a proverbial money shot as Thomas ejaculates all over Emily's pubic hair, then she, still reclined on the kitchen table, looks up at the ceiling, still seemingly unphased by the events that have occurred.

The scene harvests a number of familiar stereotypes in the name of humor and sexual titillation. Yet in my interview with Margold, I sensed a contradiction in his approach to racism in his work—he was at times, unapologetically racist yet couched this racism with humor so as to soften it and/or deny its presence. I am quoting a large section of our interview because it reveals a great deal about the ambivalence toward blackness present in a lot of early black hardcore video, yet from the production side, not merely the consumption side. That is, I feel that Margold’s commentary is illuminative of the multivalent nature of such representations.

Bill Margold - But *Hot Chocolate* was a very simple beginning middle and end. Well beginning middle and sequel, because as soon as I did it. It took two days. We shot it on a Saturday and a Sunday. Took our time doing it with a decent script. I could probably find the script somewhere. It’s cute. I had learned something, and this may make you cringe a little bit. That blacks can call each other nigger and not have it an insult, when I was working in Juvenile Hall. In fact part of my background is living there when I was twelve and working there in 56 and then working there from 69 though 71. And blacks can call each other names that whites won’t call them and they don’t seem to care. *Hot Chocolate* is somewhat—it’s amusingly racist in its own way. And it was done to catch the tone of the personality of the project. It was not done with any kind of racial slur or anything like that. No one seemed uncomfortable calling each other names-whatever names they were calling. They did have trouble however getting it up and there was a point in the making of that movie where Drea said go put shoe polish on you dick, and I said no. Because she wanted me to get a blow job in the car where they wouldn’t notice that it really wasn’t a black dick being sucked.<sup>383</sup>

Ariane Cruz - Oh, so a dick in black face?

Bill Margold - Well there was nobody else left, these two were worthless, except for Tony El-Ay who basically did every sex scene in the movie. Um this man had like five cum shots in the film. There was another great moment.

This “great moment” that Margold nostalgically recounts is revealing for what it communicates about the linkages of white male virility to the myths of black women’s utter libinality, and black male sexual potency. By blackening his dick with shoe polish, Margold is capable, yet unwilling, to satisfy black women’s sexual desire. The representation of white males as able to satiate black female sexual desire eviscerates white envy of black male sexuality while signifying not only white male virility but also white male power and privilege. Furthermore it is possible that the racist plot and dialogue of *Hot Chocolate* hindered the ability of the performers to become sexually aroused. That is, the performers themselves may have been reacting consciously, unconsciously, or subconsciously to the racially charged script and its making of a debased blackness while simultaneously attempting to exploit this same blackness for an erotic charge as well as financial profit.

Margold’s concession that *Hot Chocolate* is “amusingly racist” is seriously at odds with his need for black performers to be the agents of the racism, hence adjudicating him as the writer of this racism. Margold’s need to assert his anti-racism is so strong, that at another point in the

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

interview he references his own biography suggesting that his father's participation in the NAACP somehow proves he is not a racist. He states,

Well if you know who my father was, well you really don't know who my father was which is rather amusing. My father was an NAACP award winner, he was in Indian rights activist, he worked for Brown vs. The board of education. So I am not a racist, but I will use whatever means necessary to entertain. And if you step on a few toes, then people should wear, you know more preventative shoes then. PC, political correctness is a noose around the neck of creativity.<sup>384</sup>

Margold's lynching symbolism and reference to a noose works to seriously discredit his anti-racist platform. Yet despite denying this racism he seems to champion it as part and parcel of pornography's ultimate mission to entertain. Racism is tolerated because it is a tool of entertainment in pornography—both a comedic device and an implement of sexual pleasure and eroticism. *Hot Chocolate* reveals how black women performers, in particular, become sites not only where this gendered racism is enacted, but sites that allow us to see the pivotal role that black female sexuality and the black female body play in the production and reproduction of blackness.

## Conclusion

In 1986, scaling the precipice of the explosion in black video, Susie Bright states that “for inter-racial tapes and for black videos, there is a grey area of creativity and self-expression, which could bring riches to those bold enough to explore it.”<sup>385</sup> This grey area which Bright may be reluctant to enter or define is one where the eroticized visual manifestations of racism and sexism, as illustrated by *Hot Chocolate*, become confounded with creativity and self-expression. As this project has revealed, from the very beginning of moving image pornography in the stag genre, such a representation of black women was common. Stag films such as *Darkie Rhythm*, for example, document the use of discredited signifiers of a feminine blackness to titillate, both sexually and humorously. Reiterating the same tropes, stereotypes and power dynamics of moving age pornography in the stag genre, the video age reveals a continuation of white male representation of black women as hyperracialized and hypersexualized bodies and their scripting of black female sexuality as exotic and excessive.

The video age however, allowed for the mass production of such images and their projection into the intimate spaces of American culture—within American homes across the nation. Video allowed debased stereotypes of black female sexuality to become that much more accessible to the American viewing public. What is new and different in the video age, as Bright also notes, was that this purportedly grey area, this nebulous terrain of anti-black racism enmeshed with artistic inventiveness and the possibility for self articulation could, “bring riches to those bold enough to explore it.” That is, the by now familiar pornographic representations of black female sexuality as excessive, inhuman and utterly insatiable, become not merely fodder for a small, private viewing audience, but offer immense financial profit for those who produce and distribute them to the expanded audience the video age of pornography engendered.

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Bright, 10.

Furthermore, video's catalyzing of the development the American adult entertainment industry, is one in which genres or specialized racial markets of pornography emerged, thus solidifying not only the desire for the black female body but an actual market for such images. Yet just as the technology of the videocassette would allow for the development of pornography into American industry, another technology would threaten pornography. Internet and the development of the world wide web would transform the face of pornography once again, and shift the black female's place within it.

## Chapter Six

### *Internet Pornography and The Black Female Body*

The Internet provides an important site from which to interrogate pornography's making of the black female body and of black female sexuality for a number of reasons. First, following in the line of video, the Internet further facilitates the consumption of pornographic images of the black female body offering a greater variety of faster, cheaper images to a larger audience. Second, Internet pornography challenges the preexisting scholarly dialogue about race and cyberspace and the Internet functioning as a disembodied realm, by projecting images of the black female as hyper-bodied. Third, with the inundation of reality or "gonzo" pornography, the Internet offers a unique space to explore the dynamics of reality representation in porn and how these dynamics make serious demands regarding the "realness," the racial, sexual authenticity, of the black female body. Finally, the trend of interracial pornography online becomes an illuminative space from which to probe the racial and gendered dynamics of interracial pornography and its disavowal of the black female. The question of pornography's racialization of the black female body thus takes on new resonance in the realm of Internet porn. An exploration of Internet interracial pornography (IR) reveals that IR porn is not just about the need to categorize or cater to specific fantasies of racial fetish that we saw in the video age of the 1980s; it is about establishing and maintaining racial difference and upholding whiteness as a normative category of invisibility, property and privilege.

After historicizing the development of the development of the Internet pornography industry, I move toward a discussion of race and cyberspace that both contextualizes my exploration of the black female body within Internet pornography and reveals how Internet porn pushes the current dialogue on race and cyberspace—specifically challenging preexisting cybercultural theories of disembodiment and racial invisibility. I then discuss a number of websites of interest which offer valuable commentary on how Internet porn works to construct the black female body and black female sexuality in unique ways. For example, [phatbootyhunter.com](http://phatbootyhunter.com), a gonzo website specializing in black women, reveals how the black female, as "phat booty ho," becomes fetishized via her buttocks. I argue that the discourse of pornographic reality that gonzo recites has critical resonances for the black female body, indexically illustrating the natural truth of her racial, sexual alterity through a concurrent process of hypersexuality and hyperracialization. While the figure of the "phat booty ho" shows porn's recognition, albeit ambivalent, of the black female as a site of pleasure and desire, [www.mydaughtersfuckinganigga.com](http://www.mydaughtersfuckinganigga.com), an interracial porn website, reveals interracial porn's repudiation of the black female—its designation as sex between white women and black men. Interracial porn in cyberspace thus becomes key a site to interrogate porn's simultaneous rejection of the black female and its contradictory making of her as always already pornographic.

### **The Growth of Internet Pornography**

After consecutive years of unwavering increase, the sales and distribution of video pornography have recently declined. In 2005 the sales and rentals of pornography video totaled



4.28 billion dollars, yet by 2006 they had dropped to 3.62 billion dollars.<sup>386</sup> The apogee of video seems to have been reached in the early to mid 2000s, replaced by another new visual technology driving contemporary American pornography and further facilitating its production and consumption: the world wide web. So just as video pornography and its role in catalyzing the development of an American adult entertainment industry was enabled by technology, video porn would also be endangered by a new development in technology—the Internet. The Internet, both the websites which charge membership fees for viewing and the proliferation of free porn websites has seriously threatened the video and DVD market. These free so-called tube sites or DIY (do it yourself) tube sites (redube.com, youtube.com, xtube.com for example) are comprised of user-generated content which is provided to viewers for free. In turn, tube sites are dependent upon revenue from advertisers from generating traffic on their websites. Yet while the pornography industry overall may be ultimately threatened by the technology of the Internet, the Internet has in turn, largely prospered from its relationship with pornography. The online pornography industry has revealed “the economic potential of the Internet” serving as a model for cyber commerce and advertising.<sup>387</sup> Thus pornography maintains itself as a foundational and gestational part of the World Wide Web.

Online pornography first began in the form of amateur material on Usenet via fantasy chat rooms in which erotic text exchanges occurred between anonymous members worldwide, usually under cyber pseudonyms.<sup>388</sup> With the evolvement of the net from these types of electronic bulletin boards to more sophisticated websites that hosted streaming live video, Internet pornography itself evolved into a more image-based medium, became more hard-core (in regard to the sexual explicitness of the images) and became more capable of being tailored to the specific and momentary desires of the audience or consumer. The invention of the world wide web in the mid 1990s catalyzed a development of commercial Internet porn largely lead by websites such as Internet Entertainment Group (IEG), a pioneer start-up that came to be recognized as one of the largest pornographic sites on the web. IEG operated clublove.com, a website offering peep shows of female performers stripping and masturbating in real time for a fee.<sup>389</sup> Though these early American commercial websites such as clublove.com did not show hardcore sex i.e. genital penetration, they revolutionized cyberporn adding the important aspect of interactivity via live time and streaming video to Internet pornography. Such innovations

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<sup>386</sup> Matt Richtel, “For Pornographers, Internet’s Virtues Turn to Vices,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2007.

<sup>387</sup> Frederick S. Lane III, *Obscene Profits: the Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age* (Routledge: New York, 2000), 70.

<sup>388</sup> Developed in the 1980s, Usenet (an abbreviation for “user” and “network”) was a peer-to peer technology Internet discussion forum in which messages could be written, posted and read. Usenet and another similar internet communication system, Bulletin Board System (BBC) were both precursors to the world wide web, invented in 1989, but would not gain a public face until the early 1990s. “Pornography” on both early Internet communication forums consisted of the exchange of erotic chat and sexual communication.

<sup>389</sup> In 1997 the IEG website clublove.com was charging \$49.95 for a thirty minute clip of sex or sexual acts. IEG and owner Seth Warshavsky were both sinking by 2000 amidst news of inflated income figures, wrongful customers billings and debt. In 2001, fleeing legal trouble due to debt from creditors and IEG employees, Seth Warshavsky fled to Thailand where he currently resides. For more information about IEG and Warshavsky see Frank Rose, “Sex Sells,” *Wired Magazine* (accessed July 16, 2009) and Rick Anderson, “Porn Prince of ...Bangkok? Seattle Weekly <http://www.seattleweekly.com/2002-06-26/news/snapshots/> (accessed July 16, 2009).

would have critical effects later in the evolution of Internet porn and the pornographic discourse of the real illustrated in the genre of gonzo porn. Indeed, Warshavsky credits his success with Internet porn to “ease of use and instant gratification.”<sup>390</sup> Warshavsky believes that sex and the Internet became such a profitable partnership due to three elements; he states “Number one: it’s anonymous. Number two everybody has a desire for it. Everybody. Number three: it’s a very impulsive purchase-and you provide them with immediate delivery so that they can gratify their desire.”<sup>391</sup> Indeed the anonymity and immediacy of Internet pornography fueled its development for those who were already porn consumers and those who may have not been deterred by the physical trip to porn video retailers.

By the mid 1990s cyberporn was becoming a household name, as indicated by a July 1995 cover story in *Time* magazine that prompted a national panic over the new media and its effects on not just the nation but specifically on children. The article, informed by a Carnegie Mellon study from the same year touted the immense popularity of Internet porn, grossly overinflating the number of American Internet porn consumers.<sup>392</sup> In addition to availability of images of “naked women,” the article alerts the American public to the presence of “images that can’t be found in the average magazine rack: pedophilia (nude photos of children), hebephilia (youths) and what researchers call paraphilia—a grab bag of deviant material that includes images of bondage, sadomasochism, urination, defecation, and sex acts with a barnyard full of animals,” further inciting the national moral panic surrounding pornography’s infiltration of this new cyber medium.<sup>393</sup>

Well-known pornographic production companies followed suit, launching subscription websites where customers paid a monthly fee to gaze at naked women and watch them engaging in various sex acts. *Penthouse* magazine, for example, started their online subscription site in 1995, receiving three million hits a day on their website during launch week, a number which prompted the server to crash.<sup>394</sup> By the end of the decade most major men’s magazines operated commercial websites selling product. Also by his time many well-known performers had their own websites. For example, in 1999 the website of Vanessa Del Rio, a renowned Latino actress reportedly grossed half a million dollars that year.<sup>395</sup>

In tandem with the growth of online pornography emerged national anxieties over the decency of materials streaming through the World Wide Web. In 1994, the Communications Decency Act (CDA) introduced a landmark censorship attempt in telecommunication, making

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<sup>390</sup> Frank Rose, “Sex Sells.”

<sup>391</sup> Washavsky believes that sex and the Internet became such a profitable partnership due to three things. He states “Number one: it’s anonymous. Number two everybody has a desire for it. Everybody. Number three: it’s a very impulsive purchase-and you provide them with immediate delivery so that they can gratify their desire.” See Rose, “Sex Sells.”

<sup>392</sup> The *Time* magazine article states that the five largest adult-oriented computer bulletin-board systems (BBS)Services had, in 1995, annual revenues in excess of one million dollars. The article cited these statistics from a yet to be published report out of Carnegie Mellon University, dubbed the Rimm report after author Martin Rimm. The report has since highly criticized for grossly over-inflating the profits of online pornography. For a detailed critique of the Rimm report and the *Time* article see Donna L. Hoffman & Thomas P. Novak “A Detailed Critique of the *Time* Article: ‘On a Screen Near You: Cyberporn (DeWitt, 7/3/95)” July 3 1995

[http://w2.eff.org/Censorship/Rimm\\_CMU\\_Time/time\\_hoffman\\_novak.critique](http://w2.eff.org/Censorship/Rimm_CMU_Time/time_hoffman_novak.critique) (accessed May 7, 2009)

<sup>393</sup> Philip Elmer-DeWitt, “On a Screen Near You: Cyberporn,” *Time*, July 3, 1995.

<sup>394</sup> O’Toole, 251.

<sup>395</sup> Slade, *Pornography in America*, 238.

the distribution of “indecent” materials via telecommunications punishable by a \$250,000 fine and/or two years in prison.<sup>396</sup> The CDA was passed in 1996 as part of the Telecommunications Reform Bill only to be struck down four months later because it was found to be detrimental to free speech, before finally, in 1997, being ruled as unconstitutional.

The decline in video earnings has not been made up by the industry’s online revenue. In 2005 Internet pornography grossed 2.5 billion dollars in the United States and in 2006 the amount rose to 2.84 billion dollars, with an estimated forty million adults in the US accessing 4.2 million (twelve percent of the total websites) pornographic websites regularly. There are approximately sixty eight million (twenty five percent of the total search engine requests) pornographic search engine requests per day.<sup>397</sup> To complicate this matter, the Internet’s offering of free and low cost pornography seriously threatens the adult entertainment industry. If cheap digital technologies have not paved the way for amateur and do-it-yourself (DIY) pornographers enabling anyone with a video recording device and willing or non-willing actors to have sex, the barrage of free porn on the World Wide Web seriously jeopardizes the revenues of not just the online industry but the entire industry. Many long time industry personas, including Adult Video News (AVN) Media president, Paul Fishbein, have expressed anxiety over the Internet and its role in the degeneration of the industry, forecasting that the industry will continue to “shrink.”<sup>398</sup> AVN is the industry’s foremost industry trade magazine, a harbinger of industry sales, trends, new releases, reviews and information about performers.

Yet this shrinkage is highly ambiguous. The Internet has expanded pornography in multiple ways, both pronounced and more subtle, providing pornographic images, video, audio, text, and chat to an online community of “netizens” worldwide. First it has further globalized the “American” entertainment industry, creating a vast worldwide market for American porn and enabling millions of new consumers worldwide. Despite threatening the industry, the Internet has further strengthened the United States’ market hold on porn—nearly seventy percent of the content distributors for pornographic websites are located in the United States. Despite a growing number of consumers outside of the United States, Matthew Zook is quick to point out that the Internet pornography’s “cybergeography” largely echoes the extant placement of information technology, networks, wealth and power. That is, the cybergeography of the online porn industry is anchored in the real world histories and economies of the spaces and places it occupies. The United States is the largest producer and consumer of Internet porn, a position which mirrors the state of the Internet itself as being predominately produced and consumed in the most developed countries. Zook notes however, that an “alternative cybergeography” of Internet porn emerging in both Eastern Europe and the Caribbean may suggest that Internet pornography could challenge some preexisting patterns of Internet distribution systems, “[t]he Internet adult industry is yet another example of how a combination of regulatory issues, lower costs for content, and low barriers to entry results in a restructuring of production and consumption.”<sup>399</sup> For Zook the Internet adult industry does not represent a “simple annihilation

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<sup>396</sup> The CDA was not the first government attempt at regulating the flow of pornography on the Internet. In 1993, the Federal Government launched “The Operation Longarm” arresting forty people and making two indictments for trading child pornography on the web.

<sup>397</sup> “2006 and 2005 Pornography United States Industry Revenue Statistics,” <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html#anchor4> (accessed July 1, 2008).

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> For more see Matthew Zook, *The Art and Politics of Netporn*. <http://networkcultures.org> Accessed May 25 2009.

of space;” rather it is a reiteration and reconfiguration of the tangible, physical spaces in which its production and consumption is located so that there occurs “a restructuring of connections between places that reorients and compresses time space unto new configurations and hierarchies represented by the space of flows.”<sup>400</sup>

Second, it has garnered a whole new audience within the United States and changed the demographics of its audience. The digital age has thus prompted a “mainstreaming of pornography” due to its accessibility enabled by the Internet. This accessibility is due to a number of factors that fuel both consumption and production of online pornography, mainly the ease, speed and anonymity of accessing images and information on the Internet. Diverse images, moving and still, of hard core sex between people across genders, ages, races, styles, languages and nationalities are available via the simple click of a mouse. This anonymity and facility of the Internet has certainly broadened and diversified the spectatorship of pornography. Women, for example, comprise one of the most rapidly growing markets for Internet porn, a growth to which Daniel Bernardi attributes to the anonymity of Internet porn and the ability to access it in a private and clandestine manner.<sup>401</sup> Accessing porn in private via the Internet one potentially avoids the social stigma associated with a physical visit to a public adult video store. While there is scant scholarly documentation on the gender of the Internet pornography audience, there is even less about the racial dynamics of this audience. This dearth in information regarding the racial demographics of online pornography consumption is due to the fact that credit cards were the primary source of demographic information for such websites.<sup>402</sup>

Part of this new audience for porn engendered by the Internet is undoubtedly due to the promise of free porn that the Internet brings. Indeed, Zook identifies the main distinction between Internet porn websites to be between free or so-called “feeder sites” and paying membership sites—those that offer free porn and those that charge a fee for membership viewing privileges. Many consumers, who would not purchase pornography, whether because of not wanting to be seen in an adult store, not wanting to visit one, or simply not wanting to spend their money, continue to view and download free pornography via the Internet. But just as the promise of free porn has lured new and different groups of spectators to online porn, it has simultaneously decreased the amount of paying customers, further ravaging the video market and the industry overall. Free porn sites such as redtube.com, xtube.com, and pornhub.com are largely blamed for a drop in sales estimated at between twenty-five and thirty percent for some pornography producers.<sup>403</sup> Though these sites are often blamed for drop in video sales, they are

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid.

<sup>401</sup> Daniel Bernardi, “Cyborgs in Cyberspace: White Pride, Pedophilic Pornography, and Donna Haraway’s Manifesto,” in James Friedman ed., *Reality Squared: Television Discourse and the Real* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 169.

<sup>402</sup> In addition to supplying the demographic information for customers, credit cards were also employed as a sort of screening device, approved by the Communications Decency Act (CDA), to ensure that all visitors purchasing access to online pornographic images were not minors. Eighteen was minimum age to the age to hold a credit card so it was assumed that individuals purchasing access to such websites were at least eighteen years of age. This type of censorship is of course highly problematic as minors do have access to credit cards. IEG for example cites demographic data from credit card companies, finding that their consumer audience was in 1997, ninety percent male, seventy percent residing within the United States and seventy percent between the ages of eighteen and forty years old. Frank Rose, “Sex Sells.”

<sup>403</sup> Red Light District, considered one of the major US porn production companies, located in Los Angeles estimates their sales to have dropped more than thirty percent in the last two years alone while

also attributed to “web growth;” indeed, in December 2007 rebtube.com was one of the fastest growing websites, gaining more than four million visitors in the month of December alone.<sup>404</sup> While most online porn sites charge a membership fee of up to forty dollars for a monthly-unlimited viewing pass, many of these new tube sites are simply giving it away, inciting anger and blame from many within the industry who attribute free tube sites to the overall decline in sales.

Yet some within the industry view free online porn as a way to revive the slumping adult entertainment industry. Many production companies pay to send so-called “teaser videos” to free online porn sites in the hopes of recruiting new customers to their own sites to purchase either DVDs or online memberships. These teaser videos are short, roughly five minute clips of porn videos usually featuring well-known performers. Often such websites also heavily advertise for pay sites through banners and/or pop up windows. Matt Rossoff contends that these free sites, what he terms “bait sites” comprise between seventy and eighty percent of porn web sites.<sup>405</sup> Indeed, the porn industry is facing similar challenges that the music industry faced when sites like napster.com first appeared—both are scrambling to figure out how to use the Internet to their advantage without being “undercut by hydra-like free content.”<sup>406</sup>

Yet this expanded audience of Internet pornography is not always welcomed. One of the central anxieties surrounding the proliferation of online pornography is the difficulty we experience surveilling and policing it and availability of hard-core materials to minors. In addition to the concern over adolescents consuming porn, there exists the fear of pornographic images of minors being available to pedophiles and the circulation of child pornography. In the mid 1990s the onset of Internet pornography rekindled fears prevalent in the nineteenth century regarding the exploitation and contamination of the “young person.”<sup>407</sup> Yet just as the Internet makes the circulation of illegal images easier, it makes the prosecution of these images more difficult. Internet pornography complicates our understanding of community, specifically the already muddy concept of “community standards” as set out in the still reigning *Miller V. California* (1973) verdict. The nebulousness, borderlessness, and constant vacillation of the online “community” makes it difficult to set standards and define what is obscene, socially valuable and/or indecent.

During the Clinton administration the Department of Justice (DOJ) prioritized not just fighting adult content on the Internet, but child pornography, as did the Bush administration led by US Attorneys General John Ashcroft and Alberto Gonzales. From its creation in 1987 throughout the reign of the George W. Bush administration, the Child Exploitation and

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Nectar Entertainment has estimated a twenty five percent decrease in sales within the last year. For more see Matt Richtel “For Pornographers, Internet’s Virtues Turn to Vices,” *New York Times* Jun 2, 2007.

<sup>404</sup> Youporn.com was also among the top five fastest growing websites in December 2007. For more see Betsy Schiffman, “Porn Sites Lead Web Growth in December,” *Wired Magazine*, January 17, 2008, <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2008/01/fastest-growing/> (accessed July 16, 2009).

<sup>405</sup> Matt Rossoff, “An Inside Look at the Net Porn Industry” CNET <http://homecnet.com/internet/0-3805-7-280110.html> (Accessed April 12, 2002).

<sup>406</sup> Shelley Dubois, “Porn is to Music as Free is to...” *Wired Magazine*, July 15, 2009 <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2009/07/porn-is-to-music-as-free-is-to/> (accessed July 16, 2009).

<sup>407</sup> In chapter one, I discuss in detail the young person in the context of Anthony Comstock’s American purity crusade of the late nineteenth century. For more on the cyber panic and the global concern of the affects of online porn on children, see Laurence O’Toole, *Pornocopia: Porn Sex Technology and Desire* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1998), 246.

Obscenity Section (CEOS) of the DOJ's Criminal Division fiercely prosecuted obscenity after an epoch of the Clinton Administration's relatively lax stance on adult content. In 1998 the passage of the highly controversial Child Online Protection Act (COPA) further tightened the ropes for Internet obscenity.<sup>408</sup> Currently under the Obama Administration with David Ogden (a lawyer who actually represented Playboy Magazine in the late 1980s) serving as Deputy Attorney General in the DOJ, COPA's unconstitutionality is again being brought to light, and Internet pornography seems to be experiencing a respite from federal prosecution. This history serves to illustrate not just the national salience of porn, but its ties to politics.

With all the concern over censoring the net, there are those who, on the contrary, believe in the regenerative nature and good of Internet pornography. Internet porn advocates tout the safe side of Internet pornography and cyber porn as a way to practice safe sex and enact fantasies without the consequence of live sexual interaction. Figuratively, the Internet allows one to become someone else, temporarily assume another identity, and indulge in fantasies without the repercussions of consequences (physical and emotional) of actual physical sexual relations with another human being. As pornography historian Joseph Slade states, "Cybersex is representation as representation; it makes possible erotic shape shifting enshrined by folklore and dreams."<sup>409</sup> The Internet significantly transformed how people were able to consume porn.

But the technology of the Internet has made inside changes as well. That is, the Internet affects not only how we consume and produce pornography, but what this pornography looks like. Just as the technology of video allowed for the birth of a specialized genre of black porn, the Internet further facilitated specialized niches of pornography catering to fantasies and desires, specifically with regard to race. The manifestation of race in cyberspace has received recent attention from scholars reacting against the initial theorization of the Internet as a raceless realm divorced from the more grounded societal theorizations of race as a category of power and difference. These scholars have done significant work to broaden our premature understanding of the Internet as a free and independent space outside the realm white patriarchal supremacy and hegemony.

## **Race and Cyberspace**

Internet pornography pushes the prevailing discourse surrounding race and cyberspace. First, the black female's representation in Internet porn has not yet been comprehensively written about. This much needed discussion of the black female in Internet porn thus challenges prevailing narratives of cyberspace as a disembodied space a space where bodies don't matter or carry the same weight as their tangible, real life counterparts. On the contrary, bodies in Internet porn are hyper-bodied; the naked sexual performing body stands in high relief as the primary focus of pornography online. Indeed bodies themselves are hyper: highly excited and active. Somatic signs of pleasure and sexual activity—wet genitals, money shots, erect penises and

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<sup>408</sup> Before COPA was declared unfairly broad in spectrum and thus unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court in 2004, the act was already opposed and protested by private citizens and huge web search engines like Google, who was subpoenaed under the act and forced to release private data regarding their web searches to the Federal government.

<sup>409</sup> Joseph W. Slade, "Flesh Need Not be Mute: The Pornographic Videos of John Leslie," *Wide Angle* 19.3 (1997): 116.

nipples, hard muscles, and moist skin—are critical and of primary interest to the eye of the camera. As sites where a plethora of bodies engaging in sexual acts is the cynosure, Internet porn is anything but disembodied. The deeply somatic realm of Internet porn thus becomes a ripe space to explore how race and racialized, gendered subjectivities work in the realm of cyberspace. Many scholars have recently challenged the initial conception of cyberspace as a raceless place. That is, a space in which race does not matter, a colorblind or color-less space devoid of the racialized relationships of power, hierarchies and hegemony.<sup>410</sup> These scholars have argued that cyberspace and the “real world” have been falsely positioned in a binary against one another as two separate and different entities, therefore creating a false idea of cyberspace as place in which racial identities do not carry the same power or meaning. On the contrary, race in cyberspace is no less meaningful or powerful than it is in real life, or “IRL.” The Internet’s conceptualization as a space where race does not resonate has serious consequences for not just the exchange of knowledge and goods via the Internet, but for the actual racialized bodies represented and commodified in cyberspace. Imagining the Internet as a space where race does not figure, reverts to a norm of whiteness lens that loses sight of racialized bodies. Thus, Kali Tal’s incisive critique of what he terms the “whitening of cyberspace” broaches another problematization of cyber culture discourse born from its theorization as a raceless or colorblind sphere—the invisibility of race and racialized bodies on the Net.<sup>411</sup> For Tal, cyberspace is a place in which “it is finally possible to completely and utterly disappear people of color.”<sup>412</sup>

Internet pornography challenges this statement and the existing theoretical dialogue about race and cyberspace. In the online realm of pornography blackness and black bodies are not invisible but hypervisible and race is not something elided or disavowed but rather projected and most aggressively marketed. One could argue that this hypervisibility translates into a type of invisibility so that the objectified presence of the black female body in porn websites equates to a kind of human invisibility. However this notion is challenged by the diverse proliferation of pornographic images of black women on the web from hard-core to soft core, professional to amateur, profit to non-profit, that complicate notions of objectification, agency, power, and control. So despite the possibility of the hypervisibility of the black women’s body in Internet porn signaling a type of veiling of her humanity, Internet pornography does more than this. It shows how race is a salient force of categorization in cyberspace and how racialized bodies are not disembodied but rather maintain an uber-physical presence and are hyper-somaticized.

Linking theories of racial performativity to discourse of cyberculture, Brandi Catanese reminds us of the “racial assumptions that govern cyberspace” as a site where racial subjectivities are not just produced performatively, but questioned, enacted and reenacted.<sup>413</sup> In her discussion of the website [www.rentanegro.com](http://www.rentanegro.com), a digital performance piece by black female performance artist Damali Ayo, Catanese explores the “racializing structures that shape cyberspace” positing that “access” and “self-representation” are key to how race is given

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<sup>410</sup> For a wonderful discussion of the politics of race and cyberspace see Beth E. Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman ed. *Race and Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2000). This diverse collection of essays treats cyberspace as a distinctly racialized realm and analyzes the effects of cyberspace on race and racial identities.

<sup>411</sup> Kali Tal, *The Unbearable Whiteness of Being*, <http://www.kalital.com/Text/Articles/whiteness.html> (Accessed July 8, 2009).

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Brandi Catanese, “‘How do I Rent a Negro?’: Racialized Subjectivity and Digital Performance Art,” *Theatre Journal* 57 (2005), 700.

meaning in cyberspace.<sup>414</sup> Yet for Catanese, the concept of race, conceptualized as a deeply embodied term, is problematized by cyberspace, as “a place where we have no constant access to bodies.”<sup>415</sup> Internet pornography again intervenes here, by functioning as a space, albeit constantly changing, in which we have constant, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week “instant access” to black female bodies. Indeed, sites such as phatbootyhoes.com, roundandbrown.com and blackvaginafinder.com offer around the clock “instant access” to the black female body via monthly membership passes available for online purchase with a credit card for payments ranging from just under twenty dollars to over forty dollars. Internet pornography thus serves to push the discussion of race and cyberspace and offer new sites, literally, from which to explore the ways that in which cyberculture produces new representations of black female sexuality, imaginings of the black female body, and scripts of interracial desire. In the digitized realm of Internet pornography, blackness is thus made not invisible but hypervisible and highly embodied while black female sexuality is hyper commodified. So as Catanese illustrates, while Damali Ayo’s audacious site, rentanegro.com, satirically performs the sale of blackness and the black female body, Internet pornography reveals an actual thriving practice in the digital commerce of the black female body. Internet pornography thus becomes a most illuminative realm to explore how race and racialized, gendered subjectivities function in cyberspace.

The concept of racial anonymity and disembodiment in cyberspace that many scholars, including Catanese, posit is challenged in Internet pornography. Internet porn problematizes the conceptualization of cyberspace as space “where invisibility and disembodiment mediate person-to-person interaction.”<sup>416</sup> Indeed, with personal web cams and live streaming video and audio, person-to-person sexual interaction via the internet is anything but veiled and incorporeal, it is an intimate and reciprocal exchange between two or more individuals who may not share the same geographical locale but share a mutual gaze and a common carnal experience. While Internet porn’s users or consumers racial identity remains obscure in many popular porn websites which offer monthly memberships for viewing hard core sex, the racial identity of the bodies on screen are not just revealed, but hyper racialized—boldly marked and aggressively marketed by their exaggerated racial identities. Race is a critical label, a flashing highlighted epithet, working in Internet pornography.

Furthermore within the context of this project, my reading of Internet porn sites is one focused on black women in Internet porn websites, not their consumers. Hence, I am interested in not how the viewers are racialized but how the subjects in these websites are racialized—the ways in which blackness, black womanness and black sexuality are coded, projected by and communicated about on these sites. How do race gender and sexuality work concomitantly to market and sell the black female body, as a cybersubject? In addition to challenging the reigning scholarly discourse on race and cyberspace, the Internet introduces a host of, if not new, then newly meaningful questions to the table of pornography surrounding issues of the construction of race, sexuality, and gender in porn as well as notions of access, desire, privacy, anonymity etc. What the technology of the Internet also engendered in porn, was to heighten the medium’s sense

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid., 701.

<sup>415</sup> Catanese cites in full Omi and Winant’s embodied definition of race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of bodies”. See Catanese p. 702 and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.



of authenticity via its engendering of a genre of reality porn. This trend towards virtual reality in online porn would have serious consequences for the black female body who was already deeply configured in contemporary hardcore American porn by the dynamics of racial sexual authenticity.

### **Virtual Real-ity: Gonzo, Internet Porn, and the *Phat Booty Ho***

In the late 1980s, as a result of John Stagliano's introduction of his prolific alter ego, *Buttman* (1989), a new type of moving image pornography emerged: gonzo.<sup>417</sup> Gonzo is a pseudo documentary or mockumentary style in which improvised texts reign over scripts, settings are less composed and stagnant, and the audience (via the cameraman) is transformed into a central participant in the filmic events and narrative itself. Gonzo thus embraces realism as an aesthetic practice, as a set of techniques. Gonzo not only garnered fame and riches for Stagliano, who has since won multiple AVN awards and started his own multi-million dollar, multi-media pornography and distribution company, *Evil Angel*, but has revolutionized pornography's production and consumption.<sup>418</sup> Though gonzo originated during the video age, it had significant resonances for Internet pornography because of another coeval evolution in visual technology, the portable hand held video camera. Portable handheld video cameras became more available, less expensive, lighter weight, and easier to use in the mid-1990s, the World Wide Web was also refining itself as a visual technology. The collision of the two would revolutionize both how we look at and make porn. These two visual technologies, the hand held video camera and the Internet, worked congruently to transform pornography from both the production and the consumption sides. Camcorders allowed for non-professional and/or DIY pornographers, while the Internet allowed for speedy, anonymous consumption of pornography from a computer screen anywhere.

Yet gonzo effects not just how we make and look at porn, but how the bodies in pornography are made themselves, specifically informing pornography's constructions of race, sexuality and gender. Gonzo, as a type of reality porn had critical resonances for the black female within contemporary American pornography. Racial and sexual authenticity collide in gonzo pornography on the site of the black female body. Gonzo allows us to raise critical questions about the ways we see truth and the modes in which black bodies are imagined to hold racial, social, cultural and sexual truth(s). Gonzo thus reinvigorates, in new ways, notions of the

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<sup>417</sup> The *Buttman* series which spans from 1989 until today, boasts almost one hundred video videos, and includes such well-known titles as *Buttman Goes to Rio* (1-4), *Buttman's Bend Over Babes* (1-6) and *Buttman's Anal Show* (1-5).

<sup>418</sup> Renowned originator of gonzo porn, John Allen Stagliano, *Godfather of Gonzo*, born November 29, 1953 in Chicago, remains an active figure in the American adult entertainment industry. Prior to making pornography video, Stagliano was a Chippendale's dancer. Stagliano's company, also called *The Evil Empire*, owned and operated by Stagliano, currently serves as an umbrella for a number of other renowned pornography video directors and producers including John Leslie Jules Jordan and Joey Silvera. Stagliano tested positive for HIV in 1997 but continues to produce an act (in non-sexual roles only). Stagliano who is currently facing federal obscenity charges for two DVDs he produced, *Milk Nymphs* and *Storm Squirters 2: Target Practice*, in the case, *the United States vs. John Stagliano*, is an active advocate and spokesperson for toleration, free speech and anti-censorship in pornography.

authenticity of the black female body and of black female sexuality and porn's ultimate narration of a truth of black female sexuality as naturally lascivious, physically dilated and utterly carnal. The Internet as a space in which information and images are uploaded by amateurs and quotidian individuals compounds gonzo's delivery of truth and reality—not just *real* sex between *real* people, but real racialized sexualized bodies.

Since Stagliano launched his famed *Buttman* video series in 1989, gonzo has become a dominant mode of expression in contemporary American moving image pornography. Stagliano is credited as having “singlehandedly revolutionized the \$5 billion-a-year pornographic movie market” and vastly increasing the industry sales, breathing new life into specifically the video market, but the adult entertainment industry as a whole.<sup>419</sup> With the 1989 debut of *Buttman*, adult video releases quintupled over a decade period to almost nine thousand new releases in 1999.<sup>420</sup> Gonzo pornography quickly extended to the racialized niches of first video, then Internet pornograph. By the early 2000s most top production companies had a line of what was called “ethnic gonzo,” featuring black women. For example, Video Team, a production company known for black/white interracial titles, already had a thriving gonzo line by 2000. In 2003, in response to rising competition in the market of ethnic gonzo, Video Team hired a new amateur producer Van Styles, whose mantra in regard to shooting ethnic gonzo was “Make sex as real as it can be.”<sup>421</sup> Styles’ remark shows salient the idea and perception of realness was to ethnic gonzo. It also reveals how realness is itself, something made. That is, *reality* is itself a construction or production in porn, not something preexistent.

From a production side, gonzo's popularity, much like reality television, is increased by its inexpensive production costs. A gonzo video costs only one tenth of the cost of a scripted feature pornography video, approximately twelve thousand dollars.<sup>422</sup> This trend in the cheapness of production mirrors that of reality television, a genre which largely appeals to television networks because of its inexpensive production costs in comparison to scripted television shows starring established actors. Indeed, gonzo's popularity as a form of reality pornography coincides with the surge in reality television on American networks. For example, *Survivor*, CBS's hit reality show that ostensibly established reality television as a dominant American mode of televisual expression, employs a twenty four hour production crew complete with two hundred people and twenty four cameras, costing an average of one million dollars per hour of television produced, while, *Friends*, the NBC hit sitcom that was in 2001, *Survivor*'s main network competitor on Thursday nights, costs upwards of six million dollars for each thirty minute episode.<sup>423</sup> *Survivor* brought in an average of twenty eight million, viewers while *Friends* twenty two million. The financial motivation behind reality television, the same impetus that fuels Gonzo pornography, is clear: production costs are simply less expensive for a product that draws a competitively large, or larger, viewing audience as its scripted and more expensive counterparts.

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<sup>419</sup> David Segal, “The Maharajah of Poontang,” Salon.com.

<http://www.salon.com/people/feature/1999/11/08/stagliano/index.html> (accessed July 17, 2009).

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> “Van Styles Gives Video Team New Edge In Ethnic Market.” *AVN Online* March 8, 2003. AVN.com <http://business.avn.com/articles/10055.html> (Accessed September 7, 2009).

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Kristen Michael Barton, “The Mean World Effects of Reality Television: Perceptions of Antisocial behaviors Resulting From Exposure to Competition Based Reality Programming,” PhD Dissertation, Florida State University, 2007, page 13.

But gonzo's crossover with reality television goes beyond financial motivations and production costs; it, like reality television, offers a mediated view of reality to its viewers—specifically in the form more raw, less stylized sex. The *realer* sex that gonzo pornography delivers is less reliant on scripts, costumes, elaborate settings, and props while featuring, instead of well-known performers, quotidian sexual encounters between everyday amateurs or amateurs coupled with recognized porn performers. The Internet catalyzed gonzo, further democratizing pornography and facilitating the online proliferation of DIY pornography. Free websites such as [redtube.com](http://redtube.com), [youporn.com](http://youporn.com) and [xtube.com](http://xtube.com) testify to the explosion of amateur reality porn on the net.

Gonzo pornography, as a type of reality porn, needs to be read against a history of visuality that is framed or governed by the discourse of the real. That is, the pornographic discourse of the real that gonzo initiated is situated within a larger cultural fascination with reality representation, first illustrated in the cinema, then, and perhaps more coeval with the genre of gonzo in Internet porn, in reality television. The concept of reality in moving images is of course, rooted in their purported evidential power emanating from the photograph as a documentary image.<sup>424</sup> The emergence of cinema in 1890 compounded this indexical quality of the photographic image, adding “new dimensions to the array of visual evidence: time and movement.”<sup>425</sup> More immediately perhaps, the antecedents of the discourse televisual reality and its coeval manifestations in pornography, can be traced to the cinema movements of Kino Pravda and Cinema-Vérité. Dziga Vertov's Kino Pravda (literally translated as *film truth*), a program for “true cinema” beginning in the 1920s in Russia signifies cinema's initial quest for the evidential, or a desire “to catch life unawares,” a sentiment later reincarnated in cinema-vérité movement of the 1960s in France. While even during its day, the term cinema-vérité was largely debated and loosely prescribed—its connection to reality, albeit contested, remained its definitive feature. In his article discussing the controversial and oft-debated umbrella term in its heyday in 1964, Peter Graham notes that what cinema-vérité films do have in common is that “they all use reality as a means to their various ends. That is to say that they are anti-fictional, they dispense with a scenario, actors, and studio and use film of real people, actual events.”<sup>426</sup> Evident in Graham's statement is a sharp distinction between reality and representation—his underlying belief that performance is not “real,” that actors are not real people and actual events are those that are not staged, scripted or engendered for the eye of the camera. Also discernable in his description of cinema-vérité films is a link to gonzo, specifically in its forgoing of scenarios, actors and studios in favor of amateurs (“real” people) and actual events.

Almost a half a century later, these fundamental chasms between reality and representation still imbue discussions of visuality, and become particularly resonant when we begin to look at how the discourse of the real plays itself out within porn in ways that speak specifically to the racial sexual authenticity of the black female body. That is, how the discourse of reality in pornography translates into a type of racial, sexual authenticity for the black female performer as a synecdoche for the black female body, and how her performances become coded by the discourse of the real, simultaneously evoking a history of visual representation configured

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<sup>424</sup> The indexicality of photographic image is discussed in detail in chapter two in the context of print pornography's racial and sexual authentication of the black female body.

<sup>425</sup> Arlid Fetveit, “Reality TV in the Digital Era: A Paradox in Visual Culture?” in *Reality Squared Televisual Discourse on the Real*. ed. James Friedman, (New Jersey: Rutgers State University Press, 2002), 122.

<sup>426</sup> Peter Graham, “Cinema-Vérité in France,” *Film Quarterly* 17 (Summer 1964), 30.

around the indexicality of the photographic image to reveal pornography as a media uniquely centered around a rubric of authenticity.

Despite the recent explosion of reality programming on major American television networks and cable television programming, which has seemingly proved itself to be no evanescent craze but an immortal flame in the ether of American entertainment, reality TV is nothing new. Instead, the relationship between television and reality is an inherent one, arising from the very nature of the visual medium of television itself and its capacity to deliver lifelike audio and visual images as these events are produced in “real time” (television’s capability to electronically broadcast *live* images). When in 1929, color television made its American debut, television’s ability to “reproduce scenes in their true color values,” greatly enhanced the linkage between television and reality.<sup>427</sup> “Reality” in representation, specifically within the visual technology of television maintains a long (and global) history that is deeply indebted to television’s ability to render live images and sound. James Friedman notes that in the 1950s, television’s golden age, a period in which American television networks became solidly established, live programming on TV is what further engendered the phenomenon of reality television— through athletic event, live dramas and morning shows, the link between television and the real was solidified.<sup>428</sup> Beginning in the 1980s, reality really became an established niche in television, growing ‘exponentially’ during this period. But during this period, the nature of the reality changed. That is, reality became not merely achieved through live programming, but via a broader more entrenched aesthetic of liveness, immediacy and documentation, so that “by the 1980s references to live performances, news, or special events had become a prominent source of subject material for a number of fiction programs.”<sup>429</sup> Again we see a chronological link to pornography that signifies the in tandem development of porn with other popular forms of American visual media signaling pornography’s salient place in the fabric of American visual culture. If the “evidential aspirations of photographic discourse is powerfully carried on—if not stretched to the limits—in reality TV,” then reality porn further distends these limits. As the money shot as a type of authentic rapture and tangible evidence of pleasure signifies, pornography was already invested in conveying a sense of realness and authenticity. Gonzo compounds this authenticity in complicated ways, offering a promise of racial, sexual authenticity of the black female body and of black female sexuality.

Renowned black male performer and producer, Lexington Steele, whose award winning ethnic gonzo line, starring black female performers *Black Reign*, on his website, blackreignx.com, critically reminds us of the performance element in gonzo and the fact that all sex, scripted or non scripted, professional or amateur, is itself some kind of performance.<sup>430</sup> For Steele, gonzo offers not real sex, but uber sex—sex that average, everyday people cannot experience or perform, yet fantasize about having. Steele and other well known professional performers deliver this type of better than average sex; he states,

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<sup>427</sup> Herbert E. Ives, “Color Television Makes American Debut,” *The Science News-Letter* 16, Jul 6, 1929, 3.

<sup>428</sup> James Friedman ed., *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>430</sup> Originally released in 2004, *Black Reign* Won the 2005 and 2006 AVN “Best Ethnic-themed series” and (*Black Reign 15*) was recently nominated for “best gonzo” at the Urban Spice Awards in July 2009. Blackreignx.com is a hardcore porn website promising to deliver “the most beautiful women of color”. For more see blackreignx.com.

What makes a great gonzo scene is its performers. The sort of sex they engage in is above and beyond what most of the population does in bed. People do not want to watch people like themselves in these movies—they want to see prime physical specimens at their peak doing things they can only imagine.<sup>431</sup>

For Steele, gonzo can be type of quality performance delivered by professionals. The reality edge of gonzo nature of his line *Black Reign* emanates from the close camera angles and the participant/producer role of Steel himself. Much like the godfather of gonzo, the *Buttman*, John Stagliano, Steele is interactive pornographer, at times embodying both the role of cameraman and performer, an act which presumably gives the viewer the sensation of actually being part of the action, as the viewer's gaze via the camera becomes a secondary instrument of penetration. The image below, taken from [www.blackreignx.com](http://www.blackreignx.com) for example, of famed black female porn performer Vanessa Blue giving Steele fellatio, illustrates typical gonzo camerawork. Such camerawork functions to make the viewer identify with the performers, specifically the male, by providing an intimate gaze at the action from his point of view. This type of framing supports the idea of the dominant heterosexual male audience for online gonzo in particular, and pornography in general.



Steele has long expressed a desire to bring “top notch pairings” in his productions and not the “average joe.”<sup>432</sup> Yet there is a distinct sense that these *top notch* performers are made available to the average viewer via the mediated sex that such websites offer.

Yet what Steele alerts us to is the tension in the genre of gonzo between the real, super-real, fantasy, and imagined. This tension is vividly illustrated in websites such as [phatbootyhunters.com](http://phatbootyhunters.com) which depict the more everyday or ordinary “specimens,” *phat booty hoers*, in extraordinary situations and positions. Sites like these, and there are many, illustrate how the ambivalence of the real is compounded by the ambivalence of black female sexuality—that is, how the real as something artificially constructed and projected is highlighted by the black female body as both desired and deplored, alluding to the multi-layered ambivalence in Internet pornography.

[Phatbootyhunter.com](http://phatbootyhunter.com) is racialized recital of gonzo's primordial series the *Buttman*. Indeed Staliagno's mantra/slogan, “bringing asses to the masses” is audible when watching the website, which fetishize the buttocks of black women. The hardcore porn website is characteristic of a whole movement of black female gonzo that stays true to its “Buttman's” ass fetish specialization—as evident from names such as [phatbootyhunter.com](http://phatbootyhunter.com), [40ozbounce.com](http://40ozbounce.com), [bubbledblackass.com](http://bubbledblackass.com), and [roundandbrown.com](http://roundandbrown.com), much gonzo featuring black women is centered upon the buttocks as a highly sexualized somatic marker. In its “hunt” for the black female

<sup>431</sup> “Mercenary Pictures Releases ‘Lexington Loves Vanessa Blue,’” AVN Online, March 3, 2009, <http://business.avn.com/company-news/31274.html> (accessed July 30, 2009).

<sup>432</sup> David Sullivan, Mercenary Streets ‘Nightstick: Black POV 5’,” AVN Online, Dec 22, 2008, <http://business.avn.com/articles/33902.html> (accessed July 8, 2009).

body, phatbootyhunter.com evokes disturbing colonial and antebellum resonances in an ethnographic fashion. The site vividly illustrates gonzo's stylistic and aesthetic pornographic realism at work as well as how when this realism becomes enacted on the site of the black female body, it not only recites a historical script of black female sexuality deeply somatic and linked with predatory violence, but also speaks to the authenticity of the black female as being predicated on a certain, familiar type of excessive sexuality and corporeality.

Since the early nineteenth century when the Sartje Bartmann was exhibited in Europe, the black female buttock has not only established itself to be principal prop in enacting the myth of black female hypersexuality, but proven itself to be an immensely profitable body part. Beyond, music, music video, fashion, advertisement and film, current American pornography maintains an absolute love affair, albeit prickly, with the black female butt. But as the early nineteenth century spectacle of Sarah Bartmann demonstrates, this fascination, or even obsession, is nothing new. Sander Gilman notes that association of black women to buttock, as a body part which signified their lascivious nature and sexual deviance, prevailed back in the Victorian era.<sup>433</sup> Contemporary pop culture's obsession with the large ass has led to everything from cushioned underwear sold in the back of high fashion magazines, to surgical butt implants, to Fergie's repeated reference to her "lady hump" in the Black-Eyed Peas 2007 Grammy Award winning, Platinum (U.S.) song, "My Humps" in which Fergie sings the praises of the power of her ass. Not surprisingly, black artists have, of course, done this before— LL Cool J extols multiple women's large backsides in *Big Ole Butt* (1989), Sir Mix-A-Lot, in his Grammy award winning *Baby Got Back* (1992), chants, "I like big butts and I cannot lie," and Beyonce more recently in 2001 swoons the benefits of being *Booty-licious*. What stands out about Fergie's "My Humps," is that it is a white woman, and a petite one at that, who sings about possessing a voluptuous ass, something all too often viewed as a biological racial marker of blackness and black femininity. Fergie's song as musical appropriation, performance and citation of the big ass, provides her with a sort of sexual capital that is unequivocally aligned with black women. But of course, this logic is entirely problematic in its re-assigning of a biologically inscribed and essential blackness.

If we accept, and I do, bell hooks' argument that within the traditional black pornographic imagination, the protruding butt is viewed as an indication of heightened sexuality, then there has been a pop culture seepage of the black pornographic imagination that allows for success (reception) of Fergie's "My Humps."<sup>434</sup> So if the pornographic imagination is not becoming deracialized, then its traditionally polarly positioned racial identities seem to be imagining the same things. Such a move suggests the possibility of a kind of blurring of the racialization of pornographic imagination. So despite on-camera interviews where the undeniably svelte Fergie admits struggling with her weight and often feeling overweight, it seems that from "My Humps" she likes big butts and cannot lie, or at the very least, recognizes their power as a type of sexual *asset*. Pornography shares this obsession with the butt, perhaps even more strongly than other cultural media, a fixation vividly reflected in the myriad of mere titles of hardcore gonzo websites previously mentioned that reference the black female butt. In such sites, butts become a site of fetishization where the body is reduced to, not just the sum of its parts, but the sum of one part, and where racial difference is eroticized over and over again.

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<sup>433</sup> Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985). See also Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>434</sup> See bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

Additionally, these sites become places where the legacies of black female sexual violence are rekindled.

Phatbootyhunter.com is such a pornographic website that capitalizes on the fetishization of the black female butt. *Phat Booty Hunter's* very title references the violent act of hunting, not only positioning black women as animals, but transforming this disturbing act of human hunting into sport and recreation. A bold purple and yellow slogan across the home page reads:

The hunt is on for fine, black booties, We catch only the hottest asses! Join our wild booty hunter in this wild and fun hunt! Our intrepid crew seeks out and tapes hot black sluts! ...We love our job! Where else could you get paid to bang phat booty?<sup>435</sup>



We, the audience, are invited along on this *Phat Booty* hunt, a kind of urban street, sex safari where black women are animals waiting to be caught and consumed. I can't help but to point out booty's double meaning –the commodification of the black female butt as a form of booty, as Webster's dictionary defines, "valuable stolen goods." But the notion of human game is complicated— the butt again functions as synecdochal body part for the black female. One can

<sup>435</sup> <http://www.phatbootyhunter.com>

imagine entering, after an exhaustive day plundering in the concrete jungle, the dark lodge of these proud male hunters and encountering black asses proudly hung from the wood-beamed walls. Such an image evokes a symbolic visual dismemberment that recalls the practice of lynching. Historian Steven Marcus alerts us that “pornography is not interested in persons but in organs” or that pornography is “confined strictly to the relation of organs.”<sup>436</sup> Porn is so often a visual cacophony of disarticulated body parts, micro zoom close ups of various organs, seemingly severed from their multiple owners, pleasuring one another. Yet the racialized history and context of this specific organ, the buttocks, and its continued titillation value in current porn is something to be examined. Strictly speaking the butt is of course a body part, not an organ, but it has become organ for the black female –in that it is what makes her body coherent and legible in this life-giving kind of way; that is, it performs a vital function.

These virtual urban sex safari’s phatbootyhunter.com offers are based on the best selling videos, again revealing the flow within pornography across different visual media—video and Internet in particular. When a production sells well in video or DVD it is quite simply often reproduced, not just again and again (hence *Ghetto Booty* 1-21), but in another, media, most commonly the Internet. Similar to phatbootyhunters in its fetishization of the black female butt, *Ghetto Booty*, a Hustler series is available for streaming download from Hustler.com. *Ghetto Booty* is sub-produced by Innercity Squad Productions, whose logo is a cartoonish urban cityscape with bold block letters appropriating a pseudo graffiti style. While this flashes on screen, the diegetic sound of a police siren is simultaneously heard. Sound is used in gonzo to enhance the character of reality serving to bolster the authenticity of the footage being shown. In many of these gonzo videos the diegetic sound is rough. The dialogue volume is low while both the outside sounds of the setting and the cameraman’s movement saturate the scenes. This type of unrefined sound combined with the jagged, uneven movement of the camera (clearly handheld) contributes to the sense of authenticity of the footage in gonzo productions such as *Ghetto Booty*. Indeed, the camera is itself a prime component in the aura of realism that gonzo projects; it is more than a vehicle of capturing and translating the sex images, rather it is a participatory instrument in the sex acts themselves. The camera becomes more than scientific instrument, but human appendage and sexual organ/genital.

If the police siren aligns *Ghetto Booty* with the urban culture of *gangsta* violence that is so familiar in present pop culture, than the quivering butts that repeatedly introduce each of the five black female performer’s sex scenes (for which we can “select a booty”) need to be analyzed within this culture of violence. Despite advertising a *southern flava*, *Ghetto Booty* is situated in a stylized culture of anonymous anywhere black urban violence. The menu page shows a crude ghetto pastiche of brick background with a cerulean blue low-rider bouncing on hydraulics and shining rims, foregrounded by a black woman with her backside turned toward the camera wearing nothing but a red bikini top, red bandana and flashy jewelry. *Ghetto Booty* references the black female in a doubly symbolic manner, citing the practice of homicide and gang violence as well as the act of sexual intercourse (bang has long been a slang word for sex). The bang sound audibly recalls gunfire and refers to the noise made between two bodies during hard sex. The horrid phrase *black on black* crime, gains then, a new meaning in pornographic sites such as *Ghetto Booty*. As promised, *Ghetto Booty* is filled with close-ups, of moving, bouncing, jiggling asses. Each of the five black female performers, begins her scene by leading

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<sup>436</sup> Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Basic Book, Inc., 1964), 281,276.



the camera and the viewers into an inside space (bedroom or living room) where the sex acts will take place with her quivering naked or thong-flossed buttocks. These introductory shots of the backside, filling the entire frame and flapping deftly in front of the camera provide, as the cover page announces, “nothing but booty.” Film historian Ed Guerrero reminds us “opening scenes are often used to express an ideological frame or orientation through which the spectator consumes the narrative.”<sup>437</sup> As such, these initial butt shots work to cement the salience of the butt as instrument of arousal. They reinforce the centrality of the butt as primary sex organ of and for black female sexuality. We see their asses well before we see their faces.

Both phatbootyhunters.com and *Ghetto Booty* illustrate what James Friedman calls “the markings and conventions of liveness”—a gonzo porn reality aesthetic in which a sense of liveness, of the viewer’s sense of being temporally and physically situated *there*, in the moment, is achieved through various means such as, in addition to sound and camerawork, lighting, picture quality, script (or un script), and narrative flow or structure of events.<sup>438</sup> Unlike studio feature porn videos, the lighting in Internet gonzo tends to be more effuse, spread out over entire bodies, and less focused on genital penetration as in the traditional spotlight style of a lot of hardcore porn. One aspect of the handheld portable camera essential to gonzo, is that the picture quality may also be poor and the image, less stabilized. Subtle shaking or jerking of the camera adds to the sense of amateur realness of gonzo. Additionally, the extemporaneous dialogue communicates that there is no script, but that instead events happen on their own, unplanned. Often gonzo is characterized by a scarcity or lack of dialogue altogether. The dialogue which is very sparse on both phatbootyhunters.com and *Ghetto Booty*, seems non-scripted but reactionary, describing and reacting to the events unfolding. The commentary of the cameraman becomes a verbal, aural caption to the moving images. So if the dialogue intends to titillate in quintessential pornographic fashion (both woman and audience), then it also functions to verbally describe the actions unfolding, corroborating their credibility. In its over the top, slightly humorous, hyper-real reality, gonzo porn urges us to remember that the camera is never an objective instrument.

The racialized inscription of sexual difference that is somatically transmitted via the black female butt specifically in gonzo, but throughout pornographic media, petrifies the black female body in a seemingly anachronistic space in which the butt remains metonymic marker for the black female body and of black female sexuality, as the mythically large penis functions for black male performers. Blackness is a critical capital in Internet porn, which recites pre-existing racial sexual myths, of primitive, pathological black sexuality. One of the most salient myths being vividly replayed in Internet porn is the miscegenation taboo, and the allure of black/white interracial sex.

### **Reciting and Resuscitating the Miscegenation Taboo: Hyperracialized, Gendered Identities in Today’s Interracial Pornography**

Sex becomes in this popular theory the principle around which the whole structure of segregation of the negroes—down to the disfranchisement and denial of equal

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<sup>437</sup> Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image In Film* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press 1993), 32.

<sup>438</sup> For a wonderful discussion of the construction of reality in reality television see James Friedman ed., *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

opportunities on the labor market—is organized. The reasoning is this: “For, say what we will, may not all the equalities be based on potential social equality, and that in turn on intermarriage? Here we reach the real crux of the question.” In cruder language, but with the same logic, the Southern man on the street responds to any plea for social equality: “Would you like to have your daughter marry a Negro?”<sup>439</sup>

If contemporary American pornography was summoned to answer Gunnar Myrdal’s incisive question, the answer may initially appear to be an inordinate yes. The current popularity and tremendous financial success of pornography websites like [mydaughtersfuckinNigga.com](http://mydaughtersfuckinNigga.com), [www.daddysworstnightmare.net](http://www.daddysworstnightmare.net), and [niggercumsluts.com](http://niggercumsluts.com) testify to a large American audience’s desire to watch sex between not just black and white, but between black men and white women. And while sex, particularly sex within the temporally fixed and highly scripted space of pornography does not equate to interracial marriage, nor carry with it, the threat of mixed race offspring that plagues nineteenth century and beyond conversations surrounding the question of miscegenation, the prevalence and popularity of interracial pornography suggest that many *daughters* across the country want to do it with black men and that many more want to watch.

The gendered language of Myrdal’s query and the framing of the problem of miscegenation—as an issue between black men and white women—still reverberates in the realm of today’s commercial interracial pornography where black women are excluded from the niche of interracial porn. Their repudiation, discussed in the final section of this chapter, speaks to not only pornography’s resuscitation of the miscegenation taboo as a gendered phenomenon between black men and white women, but to black women’s disavowal from the categories of race and blackness in an economy of sexual desire and their discrimination from the more tangible economy of the pornography industry. That is, they are excluded from the economy of sexual desire engendered by interracial pornography as well as the market economy of IR porn as black performers. Myrdal’s gendering of the problem of miscegenation as an issue between daughters and Negroes, in addition to signaling a historical disavowal of black women as *daughters* of the nation, enounces the state of contemporary hardcore interracial pornography as being sex between white women and black men. This gendering is intricately linked to IR’s porn resuscitation of the miscegenation taboo.

In *An American Dilemma*, Myrdal’s quintessential text on black/white race relations and the quandary of an American democracy that founds itself on principles of racial exclusion and discrimination, he argues the “anti-amalgamation doctrine”, or the miscegenation taboo, provided the epistemological foundation for black white segregation, particularly in the American South. Myrdal’s illumination of the power of threat of black/white intimacy resounds in contemporary interracial pornography. The anti-amalgamation doctrine is summoned in modern interracial commercial porn, not as threat or fodder for keeping the races at definitive distance, but for precisely the opposite, as a technique of carnal intimacy. IR porn exploits the miscegenation taboo in its marketing and making of black and white sex. Myrdal’s affirmation of the salience of interracial sex as always already a political act in our nation echoes Kevin Mumford’s profound sentiment regarding the always extraordinary nature of black/white

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<sup>439</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy Volume II* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1944), 587.

interracial sex in America, that is always necessarily a political act.<sup>440</sup> The strategic and/or political undercurrents of acts of interracial sex in our nation have always been and continue to be more than just symbolic, but speak to present socio-cultural needs, desires, fears and fantasies.

So in what is a slight return, contemporary American pornography recites Myrdal's anti-amalgamation doctrine strategically marketing the taboo of black/white sexual intimacy. Yet in order for this taboo to function and maintain its power in an era where black/white sex no longer carries with it, the same of weight of transgression, shock value or interdiction, the identities of black and white must be hyper-racialized in their binary opposition from one another. To do this, modern Internet pornography travels back in time, if you will, fifty years or more, citing the anti-black lexicon and imagery of the Jim Crow era, the focus of Myrdal's landmark study, and making the black body a bestial, overgrown, uber-corporeal body. For example, the "black monster cock" heavily advertised on interracial porn websites attests to the perceived inhumanity and bestiality of the black male body and the eroticization of black male physical excess.<sup>441</sup>

In doing this, pornography rejects and inverts the cardinal rule system of character relations in traditional Hollywood cinema, a system grounded in the construction of race as a category of human difference perceptible via sexuality. Nick Browne, who rightly identifies the mantra of this white hetero-patriarchal system as the commandment that "no nonwhite man can have sanctioned sexual relationships with a white woman," finds that this system of social relations which governs the narrative of American cinema, acting as the "political unconscious" of American film, is sharply coded by the constructions and cinematic enactments race and sexuality,

The system of social relations that links race to gender in the heterosexual mode is mediated by a moral system that imposes value—positive, negative or transgressive—on each possible set of relations and constitutes the main terms of an *ideology of sexual relations*. From the white male point of view, there is general access to women; from the white female point of view, she is restricted in object choice and the prohibited relation with the nonwhite male (its violation is rape) is strictly enforce-able; the nonwhite female is subjected to all males. The nonwhite male is restricted in object choice to nonwhite females and is excluded from interracial relations by pain of death.<sup>442</sup>

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<sup>440</sup>Mumford's full statement is, "[i]n our culture, when a black person has sexual relations with a white person, the act is often controversial and always extraordinary. Because of History—slavery, racism, gender relations, sexual repression, power politics—sex across the color line always represents more than just sex." See Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), xi.

<sup>441</sup> See [www.mostersofcock.com](http://www.mostersofcock.com), [www.bigdiks.com](http://www.bigdiks.com), [www.mostercock.com](http://www.mostercock.com), [www.voodooostercock.com](http://www.voodooostercock.com), [www.bangbrosnetwork.com](http://www.bangbrosnetwork.com), and [www.blackchurch.com](http://www.blackchurch.com)

<sup>442</sup> Nick Browne's important article on race as a backbone of American film, allows us to make important connections between Hollywood cinema and its lesser-critiqued moving image cousin, pornography. For Browne, the premise of the non white male's prohibited sexual access to the white female body is what links the conditions of sexuality and race in film; he states "This constituting prohibition links and conditions the system of race (the relations between white and nonwhite) to the system of sexuality. This formula implies a complex set of social relations that constitute a kind of matrix of sexual and racial relations (and cross-cultural relations) that are replayed repeatedly in the narrative trajectories of American films from the beginning to the present." See Nick Browne, "Race: The Political Unconsciousness of American Film," *East-West Film Journal* 6, (1992): 5-16.

And while pornography has never directly followed Hollywood, despite periods of exiguous emulation and misguided mimicry during the Golden Age, it does more than not heed this system of social relations; it outright bucks it. The market or sexual economy of interracial pornography, though firmly situated within a heterosexual framework like Hollywood's "ideology of sexual relations," does not privilege the nonwhite male. On the contrary, black men enjoy complete access to white women in a total, glaring transgression (and transgression and transgression) of the anti-miscegenation taboo. However, as will be discussed in the final section of this chapter, just as within the ideology of sexual relations that Browne identifies, the black female, remains open to all males, yet is excluded from the market of online interracial pornography. Her exclusion speaks to her racial and sexual (gender) abandonment from "matrix of sexual racial relations" that functions as the coherence of American film.<sup>443</sup>

In 2005 Andrew S., a white male, started the website *mydaughtersfuckinganigga.com*, an interracial pornography website that offers hardcore sex between black men and white women, now since changed in name to *mydaughtersfuckingablackdude.com*. Despite coming from a theatre background in Chicago and admitting to having no experience, nor real interest in pornography at the time he got into the industry, Andrew S. now owns one of the most profitable IR pornographic production companies, recognized industry-wide as being a pioneer on the cutting edge of American hardcore IR porn. His move into the pornography industry was simply financially motivated, or as *Adult Video News* (AVN) states "Andrew S. knew how to con his way into the business."<sup>444</sup> Now, not yet three years later, Andrew S. owns a thriving pornography company that employs twenty-five people and maintains seventeen pornographic websites. His description of his own ingress into the industry is deceptively laconic, "I [directed] for a while, [and the] I had an idea to start the website *Mydaughtersfuckinganigga*. That took off, and I built my own company and stopped shooting for Top Bucks last year."<sup>445</sup> Andrew's story would suggest that websites like *Mydaughtersfuckinganigga.com* are lucrative enough for one pornographer with little experience in the business, to become financially successful in the adult entertainment industry.<sup>446</sup> His cavalier and vague description of the creative process of his arrival at *Mydaughtersfuckinganigga*, is frustrating yet suggests that he was, after being in the porn industry for just a short time, acutely aware of the commodity power of racial stereotypes in pornography, specifically the remunerativity of the taboo of black/white interracial sex.

Andrew S. seems less aware of the incisiveness of these same taboos, their socio-historical roots, their reciting of deeply anti-black modes of visualizing black sexuality as abject and other, and the cultural politics of the stereotype as technique of visibility; he states "[i]t just hit a nerve, because it was irreverent and it was about making fun of racism. It was a fine line, but somehow people got it. To this day, we haven't gotten one letter or email that was negative about our site. We were wondering if people got it and—obviously— they did."<sup>447</sup> The article,

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See Browne, "Race: The Political Unconsciousness of American Film," 9.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> SM Gelerman, "The Quiet Storm: Newly Renamed, HushMoney takes Interracial Porn to New Heights" *Adult Video News Online*, Online May 9, 2007 <http://business.avn.com/articles/4050.html> (accessed March 01, 2009).

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.

<sup>446</sup> Footnote to be inserted about the "recession proof" nature of IR porn from a trade magazine.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid.

which credits Andrew's company as one that "takes interracial porn to new heights" pronounces the website's overt racism as innocuous "satire" and Mydaughtersfuckinganigga somehow becomes a clever and noble endeavor that challenges racism.

Yet the nature of this challenge becomes even less clear after one visits the website which evokes debasing stereotypes of black sexuality for profit. The site, run by Andrew S's company Hush-Hush Entertainment, features scripted heterosexual hardcore sex encounters between various white female and black male performers. The site promises "Blackzilla pounding teen white girls with his monster cock!" and boasts,

Famous for inspiring nervous breakdowns around the globe, My Daughter's Fucking a Black Dude is like no other site on the Net! The dinner bell is ringing and inside this hardcore interracial site, teen white girls are the main course. The legendary Blackzilla brings his 1 foot of solid monster cock to the table, where the appetizer is black sausage and desert is cum pudding.<sup>448</sup>

The site polarly positions white women against black men in a Manichean relationship of pure, youthful white sexuality versus a monstrous, violent black male sexuality. This binary is further bolstered via the use of lexicon; the white women described as "little princesses" while black men as "monsters," "abominable" and "blackzillas." One can access the seventeen company sites from mydaughtersfuckingablackdude.com with a membership fee of \$24.95 for thirty days of unlimited access.<sup>449</sup> The site reveals the ambivalence of black sexual desire in porn, an ambivalence further underscored by its advertisement of things such as "jigaboo loving" and "big black jungle sticks." These words, are not written in quotation marks as if to suggest that the site is questioning them or "making fun of racism." Indeed, the website's evocation and replaying of the same fears fueling the anti-amalgamation doctrine that Myrdal explores is astounding. In its pitting of black sexuality against white sexuality, this site draws deeply from the historical anxiety of black men having sex with not just white women, but white women owned or protected by a white patriarchal figure. Daughters and wives thus become salient characters in the miscegenation taboo themed-script that these websites recite. Black male sexual predators violate the sanctity of white womanhood in its most vulnerable incantations of the figures of wife and daughter. Though the majority of the HushPass Network (nine out of the seventeen websites) depict IR porn, three sites in particular, capitalize on this particular fear of the white man's white woman being sexually violated by a black male: *daddy's worst nightmare*, *my wife's first monster cock*, and *my daughters fucking a black dude* which threatens, "Your worst nightmare - your teen daughter violated by 12 inches of black meat!"<sup>450</sup> While the site employs exaggerated representations and shallow characterizations of both black and white sexuality, it is still unclear how the material is "making fun of racism," or challenging any racial stereotypes. Instead, it reinforces, at its core, the primordial dialectic of black/white sexuality in which the black male performs his racial, sexual alterity in an alien manner, his genitals synecdochically functioning as the ultimate marker of his otherness. That is, the inhumanity of

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<sup>448</sup> [www.Mydaughtersfuckinganigga.com](http://www.Mydaughtersfuckinganigga.com)

<sup>449</sup> These seventeen websites, owned and maintained by Hush-Hush Entertainment are my daughters fucking a black dude, frat house fuckfest, my moms fucking blackzilla, 2 big to be true, abominable black man, bubble butt bonanza, butt naked in the streets, daddy's worst nightmare, freaky first timers, house wives need cash, milf invaders, monster cock fuck fest, muff bumper, teen cum dumpsters, and my wife's first monster cock.

the black male is coded in his gargantuan genitals. Such a recipe, inherited from the previous golden age generation of porn and its pioneer performance of Johnny Keyes in *Behind The Green Door* (1972), is currently extremely popular and profitable in contemporary Internet interracial pornography. Pornographers and distributors across the country are recognizing the market power of this type of sexual economy of hardcore black/white sex, a distinct formula of black male sexual predators paired with white quasi-quotidian women, who are “virgins” to IR sex, but become hooked once they experience the wonders of black male sexuality. Allison Miller, who owns a pornography retail store in Richmond, Virginia, aptly named Taboo, states, My customers seem to enjoy black men taking advantage of white women; seducing their white daughters and wives. The Blackzilla line is one of my best sells as soon as it hits the shelves. The more wrong a title is, the more appealing it is. My customers don’t want to see a loving interracial couple; they want to see massive black dick satisfying or defiling pretty white girls.<sup>451</sup>

While pornography is no stranger to controversy, political incorrectness and incisive subject matter, the racially inflammatory titles and deeply anti-black subject matter of the arena of current interracial pornography, as a most profitable domain of contemporary porn, is something to be examined.

It is not just white producers like Andrew S., working within this vein of IR porn. Black performers and producers are also exploiting the miscegenation taboo and age-old stereotypes of the white female virginity endangered by black male sexual excess, transgressing the “fine line” between virulent racism, fantasy enactment and the productive possibilities and/or reversal of stereotypicality. One of the lead male performers in Hush Hush’s IR porn, is black male performer, Shane Diesel who also stars in Hush Hush’s *Blackzilla* line featuring hardcore interracial pornography between Diesel, and various white female performers. Blackzilla marked both Diesel and Hush Hush as one of the most financially successful interracial brands. *Adult Video News* confirms the power of this specific formula of IR — an intensely genitalized, animalized black male coupled with a not necessarily vulnerable or sexually innocent white female, but one who is understood as already being the property of, or belonging to a white male — stating that the Blackzilla line “catapulted Hush Hush to the forefront of the market.”<sup>452</sup> However, the trade magazine tells a different story of the website’s inception, noting that the creative genius behind the “sensational new website: My Daughter is fucking a Nigga” was “Blackzilla” himself, black male performer Shane Diesel. The magazine cites Diesel as being the one to approach Andrew S., back in 2005 with the premise of the mydaughterisfuckinganigga site.<sup>453</sup> Whoever is the

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<sup>451</sup> Nelson X, “Black Humor: The Marketing of Stereotypes in Interracial Porn: An AVN Discussion,” *Adult Video News*, February, 2009, 76.

<sup>452</sup> Nelson X, Black Humor, The Marketing of Stereotypes in Interracial Porn: An AVN Discussion,” *Adult Video News*, February, 2009, 77.

<sup>453</sup> Another *AVN* article tells a different story of collaboration between Andrew S. and Diesel in the creation of site. The two met while working together with Pink Visual, an AVN award winning company that specializes in reality porn, available both online and via their DVD line. Andrew S. already had the idea to start my Daughters’ Fucking A Black Guy. Diesel, confirmed the potentiality of the concept yet wanted added controversy stating, “I wanted to call it *My Daughter is Fucking a Nigger* because I wanted to shock the fans out there”. For more see David Sullivan, “Shane Diesel Signs Exclusive With Vengeance XXX,” *Adult Video News Online*, Feb. 26, 2008 <http://business.avn.com/articles/1973.html> (accessed March 17, 2009).

actual mastermind behind the controversial hardcore interracial pornography site, Diesel's self-conscious and active role, as a black male performer in this type of production demands to be interrogated. The black male performer's complicity and self-perpetuation of these stereotypes is common within the IR realm of modern commercial porn where many performers are also producers.

Diesel left Hush Hush in 2008 to work with other production companies like Digital Sin and New Sensations Ethnic Label Vengeance XXX (as an exclusive director and performer), yet despite communicating a desire to move on, stating "I've been doing the Blackzilla series for almost four years, and I got to the point where it was repetitious and routine, and I wanted to do something more," haunted by the Blackzilla of his past, he continues to perform in a similar vein of IR porn premised on his "monster cock."<sup>454</sup> As evidenced by a more recent article announcing Diesel's partnership with Digital Sin, that "features six interracial scenes with the massively endowed performer breaking in new white girls," Diesel is still commercially marketed within this distinct IR framework governed by an over-endowed black sexuality paired with "fresh" white female sexuality.<sup>455</sup>

Yet for Diesel who recalls in an interview a group of young white male fans with swastika tattoos on their arms requesting the performer to sign DVD covers for them, this type of pornography is completely benign stating, "I love 'em—to me it's comedy. Most stereotypes are rooted in some truth. You can make fun of it and put on a good scene. Performers just need to set boundaries that they are comfortable with."<sup>456</sup> Pornography has always been about pushing boundaries, legal, social, moral, racial and gender, and sexual orientation. Diesel's mention of boundaries evokes the chasm between the production and consumption sides of pornography—between the performers and the audience. His comment, very importantly gestures to that fact that pornography is usually critiqued and approached from the point of view of its consumers, the audience, rather than its makers. Interviews with performers and producers like Diesel allow us to understand pornography from the production side, to learn the motivations, desires, and thoughts of those involved in the multi-billion dollar global industry and to better interrogate the dynamics of its making and marketing of racialized sexualities.

Other black male performers in the lucrative IR niche voice different boundaries when it comes to performances of black male sexuality and their negotiation of the miscegenation taboo. Jack Napier began performing in the industry in 1999 and made the transition to directing and producing with West Coast Productions in 2000 with *There's Something About Jack*.<sup>457</sup> Since then he has created, directed and performed in West Coast Productions *Chiquita You So Freaky* (2005), *Housewives Gone Black 1 & 2* (2005). Napier explains the rewards concomitant with the autonomy of producing, stating "[a]s a producer I am responsible for everything from hiring talent, developing scenarios, editing, box art, marketing and other post production aspects, basically I do it all. The reward comes in maintaining artistic control of the final product and

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<sup>454</sup>David Sullivan, "Shane Diesel Signs Exclusive With Vengeance XXX" *Adult Video News Online* Feb. 26, 2008 <http://business.avn.com/articles/1973.html> (accessed March 17, 2009).

<sup>455</sup>David Sullivan "Shane Diesel Rides Again For Digital Sin," *Adult Video News Online* June 30, 2008 <http://business.avn.com/articles/31011.html> (accessed March 17, 2009).

<sup>456</sup>Nelson X, Black Humor, The Marketing of Stereotypes in Interracial Porn: An AVN Discussion," *Adult Video News*, February, 2009, 78.

<sup>457</sup>*There's Something About Jack*, 1-37 range in production dates from 2000-2005.

feedback from the fans.”<sup>458</sup> Napier won Adult Video News (AVN) 2009 Best Interracial Series Award for the video *It’s Big, It’s Black, It’s Jack*.<sup>459</sup> He recognizes the prominence of interracial porn in the industry and the “power of taboo as a marketing tool.”<sup>460</sup> However, in his own work, he is not in favor of employing the racial stereotypes so integral to this taboo’s function. Acknowledging the interracial brand created by Hush Hush and Diesel as “the furthest plateau,” Napier states “I am not trying to knock another man’s hustle—I am not trying to knock a pork chop off his plate—but I just don’t see how perpetuating negative stereotypes turns into a positive thing.”<sup>461</sup> Napier’s questioning of the practice of stereotyping and the reciting of debased stereotypes of blackness as a method of somehow deconstructing them, gestures to the very heart of the problem of the stereotype as a form of representation, putting him in dialogue with modern African Diaspora scholars who theorize visibility and its making of blackness.

Lewis Gordon identifies stereotyping as a problem of typification resulting from our attempt to study and theorize social reality, in particular, social phenomena. Certainly, from a phenomenological standpoint, typification could become a question of essence—an appeal to the thing-itself (a type), but not the thing-in-itself (a type of being).<sup>462</sup> The omni-present black stereotype generates not just from our need to categorize social reality, but out of racist intentionality and a fascination with the black body of difference. As Celia Brickman notes, the stereotype is grounded in the categorization or establishment of not just racial, but sexual difference “ [i]n the same way as the stereotype of the primitive functions as a fetish for the recognition of sexual difference, the stereotype of the primitive provides a substitute for the recognition of cultural/racial difference.”<sup>463</sup> However, Gordon does reveal an important idea within the stereotype—that of phenomenological essence and essentialism. Yet the stereotype does not merely reduce the black body into essentials, tokens and/or over-simplified characteristics; it strips away the essential characteristics of the black reducing him or her into a non-human entity, a being without being. This process within (interracial) pornography is intricately tied to the genitalization of the black body, as a hyperracialized, “authentic” black body.

Theorizing the stereotype allows us revisit Michele Wallace’s conceptualization of negative/ positive that serves as a critical foundation for any discussion of blackness and visual representation. That is if we see an artist’s or producer’s engagement with a “negative” stereotype as only attempting to somehow make “positive” this stereotype, then we are not only restricting the goals of cultural production to the creation of “positive” works but limiting the possibilities of the stereotype, as a representational device. Furthermore, the process of reverse reversal, from negative to positive, is then never complete because it still, as Wallace states, “ties Afro-American cultural production to racist ideology in a way that makes the failure to alter it

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<sup>458</sup> “Napier Begins Producing For West Coast,” *Adult Video News Online* <http://business.avn.com/articles/23059.html> (accessed March 17, 2009).

<sup>459</sup> *It’s Big, It’s Black It’s Jack*, 1 -7 range in production dates from 2006-2008.

<sup>460</sup> Nelson X, Black Humor, The Marketing of Stereotypes in Interracial Porn: An AVN Discussion,” *Adult Video News*, February, 2009, 78.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> For more see Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 56.

<sup>463</sup> Celia Brickman, *Aboriginal Populations in the Mind: Race and Primitivity in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 130.



inevitable.”<sup>464</sup> As artist and art historian Olu Oguibe correctly warns, [w]ithout careful contextualization and extrapolation, a stereotype does not become a critique of stereotypy through mere repetition or quotation. Imagery so staunchly embedded in certain political or cultural agenda do not turn in on themselves by simply being reproduced and re-inserted in the popular imagination, especially because they do not create the critical context or platform of their own deconstruction. In other words, the act of deconstruction is an intellectual and critical exercise subsequent to the image, and an active rather than passive or incidental engagement, so that unless an offensive historical trope is consciously deconstructed or disemboweled, then carefully and analytically relocated so as to reveal its underlying political or cultural machination as well as implications, simply reproducing it only reinforces and perpetuates those machinations.<sup>465</sup>

There is then, a certain danger artists encounter when employing the stereotype. Yet, it is precisely this peril, a force deeper than mere controversy, that makes the stereotype so alluring, powerful and rich of a representational device. Theorizing the politics of self-stereotyping as a representational practice allow us to explore the black performer’s negotiation, construction, marketing and ultimately sale of his/her own sexuality.

As such Jack Napier occupies a contradictory position in the industry, one which rewards him for performing his hyperracialized blackness, yet simultaneously prompts him to feel that race becomes *the* factor through which black male performers are seen. To reconcile this quandary, Napier currently, despite having made and performed in pieces that highlight race and recite the miscegenation taboo in the past, attempts to downplay race in favor of the connections between individual performers. He states “I focus on the girl. The idea of interracial sex as being taboo is ridiculous to me. I suppose that it is, but I don’t try to perpetuate that in the movies that I make. When you watch a Jack movie. You’re looking for one thing; how she’s going to react to Jack. That’s all you need, it doesn’t have to be ‘you white bitch, come suck this black cock’.”<sup>466</sup>

Lexington Steele, one of the most recognizable black male performers in not only the current IR niche, but in contemporary American porn also diverges from Diesel in his outlook of the marketing of interracial taboos and ultimately the social responsibility or power of pornography to create and recreate racial sexual identities.<sup>467</sup> Steele expresses more concern

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<sup>464</sup> Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (London: Verso, 1990), 1.

<sup>465</sup> Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis: The University of Minneapolis Press, 2004), 136.

<sup>466</sup> Nelson X, Black Humor, The Marketing of Stereotypes in Interracial Porn: An AVN Discussion,” *Adult Video News*, February, 2009, 78.

<sup>467</sup> Lexington Steele grew up in New Jersey, and after graduating from Syracuse University in 1993, worked as a broker on Wall Street for four years. During this time he also modeled. This modeling experience, specifically his ability to “perform in front of the camera “is what the adult performer notes, is responsible for his transition into the adult entertainment industry. Becoming an adult performer was Steele’s dream, a dream that was pushed into actualization by others who encouraged Steele try performing because he “was blessed with a “huge cock.” After moving from New York to LA, Steele was able to establish himself slowly as a lead actor in the business. Steele has won prestigious industry awards such as the Adult Video News male performer of the year in 2000, 2002 and 2003. In 2001 he founded Mercenary pictures as a way “to express myself and my vision of porn.”

over pornography's marketing of racial stereotypes,

It's the white producer that tends to hold on to those elements of age-old taboo. I would never have put out something like *Blackzilla*. I believe it's disrespectful because you are saying the black male performer is a monster. Is he a monster because his dick is bigger than yours? Is a guy who is a 7-foot-6 guy a monster because he's a tall guy? I happen to have a large dick does that make me a monster?"<sup>468</sup>

The language of monstering and animalization to describe the black male body is quite common in interracial porn, what is also synonymous within the industry as the "big cock market" i.e. the black cock market. Renowned anti-pornography feminist scholar Andrea Dworkin notes, at the dawn of the golden age of pornography, this visual and verbal lexicon employed in pornography is a technique of its racialized or racist sexualization, "[t]his is the paradigm of racist sexual ideology—every racially despised group is invested with a bestial sexual nature."<sup>469</sup> Interracial pornography though, complicates this "racist sexual ideology" precisely because of the black male performer/producer's fluency in this lexicon of animal stereotyping. Yet it is not just the performers and producers themselves who employ this language, the critical realm of pornography aggressively markets the black male as animal in DVD release announcements, box covers and website and print advertisements. According to an AVN launch article, Doghouse Digital's recent interracial anal series, *How's that Big Cock Gonna Fit in My Ass?* "[f]eatures some of the prettiest- Euro girls currently working and pairs them up with some of the largest, scariest-looking black penises known to humankind."<sup>470</sup> Mireille Miller-Young confirms the salience of not just black men in today's industry, but black men with the quintessential somatic marker of authentic blackness—a large penis—stating, "[t]he biggest stars in the industry are black men, and they are not only black men, but they are black men with monster cocks."<sup>471</sup> Indeed, online interracial pornography is invested the genitalized marketing of the black male as not just other but beast. While pornography in general privileges the male and female genitals (so-called *meat* shots reign despite a trend toward narrative structure and the development and refinement of other filmic qualities that began in the golden age of pornography in the 1970s), the overwhelming focus on the black male penis, as both a signifier of primitive animality and synecdoche for subject, prime determinant of his entire being, signals the continuing salience of the genitalization of the black male. This comprehensiveness of black subjectivity as a function of the genital and/or libidinal, evokes Fanon's resounding statement in *Black Skin White Masks*, "everything takes place on the genital level."<sup>472</sup> Yet as critics, we must be careful not to replicate

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<sup>468</sup> Nelson X, Black Humor, The Marketing of Stereotypes in Interracial Porn: An AVN Discussion," *Adult Video News*, February, 2009, 78.

<sup>469</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: G Putman, 1979),

<sup>470</sup> Jonathan Blitt, at Doghouse digital, recognizes the market power of the "big cock market" of interracial anal pornography. The next volume in this interracial anal series is "How's that Big Cock Gonna Fit in My Mom's Ass?". For more see Mike Alba, "Doghouse Launches New Interracial Series," *Adult Video News Online* Jan 01, 2007, <http://business.avn.com/articles/7219.html>. Accessed March 1, 2009.

<sup>471</sup> Mireille Miller Young as quoted in *Black/White: Sex, Race, & Profit*, SexTV, Sep. 2006, Canada. [www.sextlevision.net](http://www.sextlevision.net).

<sup>472</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1952), 157.

this language of othering and alienation so fluent in the adult entertainment industry to describe the body of the black male, as well as the black female, performer. The rhetoric of bestialization of black performers is dehumanizing and only furthers their construction as bodies of racial, sexual alterity.

His series *Silverback Attack* in which Steele admits reveals he “choose[s] to play with stereotypes too” directly parallels the silverback gorilla to the black male, recalling the eighteenth century discourse of anti-black “scientific” and visual racism. Released January 1, 2006 and produced by Mercenary Pictures, *Silverback Attack* depicts hard core sex between Steele and various white female performers. As suggested in the title, the DVD markets a bestial and primitive black male sexuality. This series vividly flashes back to the historical visual technology of the othering of the African Diasporic body and the practice of establishing racial difference in and through the visual, discussed in chapter one. Pseudo-scientific research about the physical and physiological make-up of black people took the form of intricate diagrams of racial classification were merely revisions or updates to polygenic theory in that while blacks were finally believed to be of the same species as whites, they were still totally different creatures—so far behind the evolution of the white race that they were believed to be steps just away from the ape.<sup>473</sup> Visually, practices such as craniology, physiognomy and phrenology prevailed and scientific racism often manifested itself in carefully detailed drawings comparing the heads of blacks to the heads of apes. As such, Steele’s *Silverback Attack* is reminiscent Dutch anatomist, Petrus Camper’s (1722-1789), drawing of facial angles “The Evolution of Man” (published in 1821), an exemplary and notorious model mapping perceived cranial difference to an evolutionary scale, functioned to reaffirm racial hierarchies.<sup>474</sup> The diagram, ink on paper, illustrates a series of technical drawings of the head (skull and face), ranging from the monkey to the black man to the white man. The image, which appears to have lines marking cranial angle measurements, highlights a highly sloped angle of the black face—from the protruding full lips and swollen mouth area back to the slanted forehead. Such characteristics which art historian Michael Harris terms “visual signifiers of discredited blackness “ also included “the obvious physical traits defined as racial: dark skin, wooly hair texture, full lips and broad noses.”<sup>475</sup> Discredited signifiers functioned as the “truth” of race and were inscribed somatically. Interracial pornography illuminates the cultural politics of self-representation via black performer and producer’s use of discredited signifiers in the marketing of their own sexuality.

Steele, who in 2001 started Mercenary Films, one of the nation’s leading producers of interracial video porn, credits his success in the industry to not just his performing interracial

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<sup>473</sup> Such pseudo-scientific research, re-affirming white supremacy and black inhumanity, was racist propaganda disguised as science. It began in the early eighteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth century. Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau’s (1816-1882) “An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races” (1853-1855) is recognized as a pioneer text in this racist discourse. Visually, practices such as craniology, physiognomy and phrenology prevailed and scientific racism often manifested itself in carefully detailed drawings comparing the heads of blacks to the heads of apes. Dutch anatomist, Petrus Camper’s (1722-1789), drawing of facial angles “The Evolution of Man” (published in 1821), an exemplary and notorious model mapping perceived cranial difference to an evolutionary scale, functioned to reaffirm racial hierarchies.

<sup>474</sup> For a discussion of Camper’s “The Evolution of Man” see Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of Chapel Hill Press, 2003), 26.

<sup>475</sup> Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures*, 29.

porn, but his entrance into this niche early in his career. He states,

Part of the reason I have been successful is because I was thrown into that interracial section. You know, I've done very well with that. That's where we make the majority of our money. Primarily black male to white female. 70 percent of the market is, of the consumership, is dominated by white male, the other thirty percent is comprised of everything else. Say you are a white guy and you actually like seeing, the wonderful mix of a black buck and a hot white chick, you know, the fascination with the size of the dick, the fascination with the color contrast. These are things that people look for because they can't actually physically do it themselves.<sup>476</sup>

Steele's comment supports the significance of interracial pornography to the American pornography industry. His belief that interracial pornography functions as a safe space for the phantasmical and symbolic enactment of sex across the color line, an act people "can't actually physically do it themselves" is echoed by pornography scholar Mireille Miller Young. Miller-Young posits that interracial pornography is a medium that reconciles our shame over interracial desire and our simultaneous desire to practice black/white interracial sex; she states, "[p]eople are ashamed of interracial desire. White people do not want to admit having desire for black sexuality and what video does, is allow them to enjoy this in the privacy of their own homes with no one knowing."<sup>477</sup> In addition to interracial pornography reflecting no insignificant reciprocal velleity for the "other" race—not just white desire for the black body, but black desire for the white body, Steele and Miller-Young's idea of pornography as a safe space in which to consume interracial sex and satiate black/white interracial desire is problematic. Interracial pornography offers very particular, exceedingly stereotyped, hyperracialized identities of black and white. As such, it is not just a desire for black or white sexuality that IR porn provides, but a highly scripted version of a sexual fantasy deeply embedded in the historical taboo surrounding miscegenation. This kind of black/white sex, not readily offered on screen in traditional Hollywood cinema, is a most irreverent, politically incorrect, pathologizing visualization of white and black. And though pornography has never prided itself on being politically correct, this flagrant type of interracial fantasy lends itself well to the medium of internet as an anonymous private and way to consume this type of pornography. As Cram Johnson, co-director of Chatsworth Pictures promises of the recent interracial DVD release *Oh No! There's A Negro in My Daughter!*, quintessential of this niche in contemporary IR porn, "those in search of pitch-black, politically incorrect humor will not be disappointed."<sup>478</sup> As Cram and Grip recognize this very profitable niche of interracial pornography is a specialized one, catering to very specific fears about racialized sexualities—specifically black and white masculinity as well as white

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<sup>476</sup> Lexington Steele as quoted in *Black/White: Sex, Race, & Profit*, SexTV, Sep. 2006, Canada. <http://www.sextlevision.net>.

<sup>477</sup> Mireille Miller-Young as quoted in *Black/White: Sex, Race, & Profit*, SexTV, Sep. 2006, Canada. <http://www.sextlevision.net>.

<sup>478</sup> Following the success of *Oh No! There's a Negro in my Mom* DVD series (released in February 2008), grip and Cram Johnson, of Chatsworth Productions released *Oh No! There's a Negro in My Daughter* in June of 2008. David Sullivan, "Chatsworth Pictures Presents "Oh No! There's a Negro in My Daughter," June 24, 2008, *Adult Video News Online*, <http://business.avn.com/articles/30913.html> (Accessed March 30, 2009).

femininity.<sup>479</sup> What is left out of this formula, black female sexuality and the black female body, reveals a salient absence in not just the market of interracial porn, but the racialized economy of sexual desire that pornography reflects and engenders. The black female's absence from current IR porn, speaks loudly about pornography's engendering of racialized sexualities via its of performative enactment of fantasies and anxieties about black/white interracial intimacy.

### ***Reverse IR, Interracial Porn and Its Denial of the Black Female***

When you even break down the genre of interracial. Interracial should mean this race and this race. It means Black men and non-black women. That's all it means. If you happen to have a title that's black women and white men it's called reverse interracial. If you happen to have a title with an Asian girl and a white guy, it's just a scene. Through interracial movies, porn have effectively taken an exacto knife and just cut black women out of that equation.<sup>480</sup>

Diana Devoe's terse remark about contemporary American interracial pornography's repudiation of the black female is accurate and easily verified by undertaking a simple internet search on the topic of "interracial pornography" to notice that the websites primarily offer images of sex between black men and white women, like the ones just discussed. Her statement also aptly characterizes the manner in which black women have been invisibilized—already intricately woven into the fabric of pornography, as phenomenon and industry, always already pornographic bodies, black women have been violently sliced out of the family portrait of commercial interracial hardcore pornography. Indeed, a recent landmark article in AVN confirms Devoe's take of interracial pornography as accurate. The article entitled "Black Humor: The Marketing of Racial Stereotypes in Interracial Porn," focuses on the industry's top black male performers such as Lexington Steele, Shane Diesel and Jack Napier, and the question of interracial pornography's marketing of stereotypes of black male sexuality. Not once in the three-page article, an industry inside "discussion" on commercial IR porn that occupies the very center of the magazine, are black women referenced.

Interracial pornography, from a market standpoint, translates to pornography depicting sex between a black man and a white woman. In this deeply heterosexist and anti-black female recognition of the term, black women are disavowed. The black female's exclusion from "interracial couplings" ultimately testifies to her inhumanity, as an unraced, ungendered body—an invisible body. The rejection of black women from the banner of interracial porn also means

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<sup>479</sup> In an interview regarding their release of *Oh No! There's a Negro in my Mom* DVD Cram recites an Oedipal-like reality underlining films stating, "As a child you were always scared that something would happen to your mother. And as an adult you realize that most of your early fears could be traced back to the black man." Partner Grip affirms Cram's disclosure of the anxiety that white men possess regarding not just the menace of black male sexuality, or the vulnerability of white female sexuality, but white female sexual desire for the black male body and vice versa, stating "This isn't racist. It's real. All too real." See David Sullivan, "Chatsworth Pictures Presents "Oh No, There's a Negro in My Mom!" Feb. 6, 2008, *Adult Video News Online*, <http://business.avn.com/articles/28758.html> (Accessed March 30, 2009).

<sup>480</sup> Diana Devoe as quoted in *Black/White: Sex, Race, & Profit*, SexTV, Sep. 2006, Canada. [www.sextelevision.net](http://www.sextelevision.net).

that black female performers are excluded from one of the most financially prosperous niches of modern American pornography. The creation of another category of pornography, *Reverse IR*, further solidifies the ontological alien nature of black female as being outside of the bounds of not just our national sexual desire, but humanity.

Devoe should know. She has been in the industry for ten years. Born and raised in rural Hawaii, Devoe holds a bachelor's degree in both advertising and communications. To supplement her income as an undergraduate, she danced at strip clubs, a job that served as her entryway into pornography. She states, "[i]t was shortly after graduation that I decided to become an adult video actress."<sup>481</sup> In 1999, she began performing in pornography videos and has since performed in over fifty films, with production companies such as Elegant Angel, Vivid, Video Team and Heatwave. In 2002, Devoe switched roles to move behind the camera with her March 2002 directorial debut for Video Team's<sup>482</sup> *Afro Centric* series called "Black Carnal Codes," one of Video Team's most popular lines at the time. Video Team is a production company specializing in ethnic and black/white interracial porn. Adult video review website, [xcritic.com](http://xcritic.com) lists Devoe as one of the top ten female pornography directors nationwide.<sup>483</sup> As the first black female pornography director, she is recognized as a "pioneer in the industry" and enjoys the autonomy of being a director, "[w]hen I do my features, I'm the boss; I don't have to answer to anybody."<sup>484</sup> Yet Devoe clearly acknowledges being wed to the financial demands of the industry. The director has a penchant for feature films, "I like to shoot feature films. The ones with a beginning, middle and end," but is often relegated to the more lucrative gonzo style of filmmaking, "I don't get a lot of [features] because gonzo—the kind where you just get straight to the sex—is cost effective for most people. I do a lot more of that than features."<sup>485</sup> One wonders if Devoe's cognizance of the salience of the economic potentiality of filmmaking translates to her slant towards employing black women and making black-themed productions. Yet she expresses that part of her move behind the camera was motivated by her dissatisfaction with the roles that she, as black female performer, was receiving. Consequently as a director, Devoe aims to create these roles for a new generation of black women in the industry, "[t]he reason I like doing features is because I like to especially give black girls the opportunities that I didn't have."<sup>486</sup>

Devoe's *Dymes* (Number 1-5, 2003 to 2006, part of Video Team's *Afro-Centric* line) is a series that highlights black female performers. The series is available for anytime instant viewing on Video Team's website which offers their entire of library over 1600 hardcore exclusive ethnic titles to their members for \$19.99 for thirty day unlimited online access pass.<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Diana Devoe's star Page Video Team Productions

[http://www.videoteam.com/starpages/Diana\\_Devoe.htm](http://www.videoteam.com/starpages/Diana_Devoe.htm) (Accessed April 1, 2009).

<sup>482</sup> Video Team is a production company specializing in ethnic pornography

<sup>483</sup> David Sullivan, Xcritic Ranks Top Ten Female Porn Directors *Adult Video News Online*, Oct 20, 2008, <http://business.avn.com/articles/32946.html> (Accessed April 3, 2009).

<sup>484</sup> Anthony Springer, "Porn Week: Diana Devoe-Ladies First," *Hip Hop DX*, Jan 4 2009, <http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/lifestyle-features/id.1299/title.porn-week-diana-devoe-ladies-first> (Accessed March 10, 2009).

<sup>485</sup> Anthony Springer, "Porn Week: Diana Devoe-Ladies First," *Hip Hop DX*, Jan 4 2009, <http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/lifestyle-features/id.1299/title.porn-week-diana-devoe-ladies-first> (Accessed March 10, 2009).

<sup>486</sup> Ibid.

<sup>487</sup> In addition to offering over sixteen hundred "exclusive ethnic titles, the Video Team website offers

It can be viewed as the director's attempt to incorporate and celebrate black women within the industry. In many interviews with the director, Devoe embodies an almost matriarchal attitude of leadership toward young black women in the industry. Her entire directorial repertoire tends toward a more black focus, as is evident from the titles alone of her series *Chocolate Ass Candy* (1-4, 2006-2007, distributed by Candy Shop), *Cream In Chocolate* (1-5, 2006, 2007, distributed by Candy Shop) and *Desperate Blackwives* (1-4, 2005-2007 distributed by Metro). This practice of clear and explicit usage of race within the titles of black and interracial porn is very common and has been noted in scholarly studies on pornography. Mayall and Russell for example, find that seventy seven percent of pornographic materials featuring people of color, identify race and/or ethnicity in the title of the film, thus indicating the salience of race in the marketing and sales processes.<sup>488</sup> Devoe's conscious decision to work within a black niche of porn seems to be based on her difficult experience in the industry as a black female and the obstacles she faced as a black woman in a white-dominated industry. When asked about the status of black female performers in a recent interview Devoe replies, "Black women, there is nothing for us. Most of the companies that shot black women consistently are not doing very well right now."<sup>489</sup>

Part of the exclusion of black women in the industry is tied to the profitable niche of Internet interracial pornography's disavowal of the black female. As a director, Devoe has recently worked within the domain of so-called *reverse IR*, possibly as a way to both include the black female and capitalize on the popularity of black/white hardcore simultaneously. Yet, while she clearly expresses a desire to give black female performers chances that she did not have working in the industry as well as evinces a history of inclusion of black women in her work, it is important to examine her replication of hegemonic constructions of race, sex, and gender in her work. While Devoe, as a black female porn performer and director, is personally invested in the cause of black female performers and their rejection from a most lucrative niche of modern American porn, she is not the only one in the industry who recognizes the power of reverse IR. Lexington Steele, however, views reverse IR not so much as a chance to combat the exclusion of black women from tradition IR porn, nor provide black female performers with more diversity of roles, but as a business opportunity. In an industry article on pornography retailers' need to diversify product for increased sales, Steele proposes reverse IR as a hot commodity of the future, "something new" to give retailers a "heads up on [their] competition."<sup>490</sup> In May 2006, Steele's production company Mercenary Films released the first volume of *White Man's Revenge*. In a sales release article, AVN confirms the film's violation of traditional IR porn proclaiming "it goes the opposite way of the standard interracial scenario of a black guy and a white girl. Instead, this one features white male performers getting busy with black females."<sup>491</sup> *White Man's Revenge*, as Steele notes, "is the first title from Mercenary to only feature scenes

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"live 24/hr webcams w/chat," over two hundred thousand "hi-res XXX photos." For more see <http://www.videoteam.com>.

<sup>488</sup> Alice Mayall and Diana E.H. Russell, "Racism in Pornography," *Feminism & Psychology* 3, (1993): 277.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Chloe Bannion, "Retailers: Diversify to Maximize," *Adult Video News Online*, Jan 1, 2006, <http://business.avn.com/articles/24691.html> (Accessed April 01, 2009).

<sup>491</sup> "Mercenary Unleashes White Man's Revenge," *Adult Video News Online*, May 5 2006, <http://business.avn.com/articles/26850.html> (Accessed April 01, 2009).

with black females and white males.”<sup>492</sup> Following their success, Mercenary Films released second edition of *White Man’s Revenge*, also with director Jimmy Scafnetti, known within the industry as an accomplished gonzo director. Steele hopes he and Scafnetti will be able to “develop this reverse interracial series as a big part of Mercenary.”<sup>493</sup>

As the title of the series, *White Man’s Revenge* (like Devoe’s *Bang That Black Bitch White Boy*), exposes, reverse IR porn performs a rather insecure reversal of traditional IR pornography, a mere superficial switching of characters in the same, tired, drama of the miscegenation taboo. Reverse IR fails to invert and disrupt the racialized and gendered dynamics of traditional IR Porn, and remains solidly anchored in the tenacious logic and rhetoric of American miscegenation that fuels traditional IR pornography. Indeed, reverse IR can be viewed as a sequel of sorts to the story of the miscegenation taboo, in which the violated white male seeks vengeance for the black male’s sexual conquest of the white female. As such, despite reverse IR’s inclusion of the black female, it is still highly ambivalent and firmly embedded in the white heteropatriarchal foundation of commercial pornography.

### **Conclusion: It’s (Not) All Pink on The Inside and Pornography’s Changing Same**

If as David Hollinger posits, the history of the United States is “a story of amalgamation,” then pornography becomes a critical text in this history—one that reveals how very present the legacy—the discourse, rhetoric and visual lexicon—of miscegenation is to our national imagination.<sup>494</sup> Contemporary Internet interracial porn is an overlooked national cultural representation that demagogically, humorously, offensively and creatively, yet poignantly, expounds the gendered dynamics of the enactment of black/white sexual intimacy and the always already political act of sexual crossings of the color line. In the process, it engenders categories of white and black that become meaningful in their relation to one another—their intimacy and distance, distinction and resemblance. That is, pornography is dependent upon race as a category of difference and favors, at times, an almost polygenetic view of race active in nineteenth century discourse on miscegenation. As such Internet IR porn elucidates the very American, exceedingly ambivalent, fear and fascination with the question of ethnoracial mixture and the question of black sexuality.

In an interview on the topic of interracial sex for a Canadian television network, Diana Devoe rhetorically questions the role of racial categorization within the adult entertainment moving image industry, “[w]hy is there an interracial designation in adult at all if we are all just having sex and we are all pink on the inside? Why is there interracial? Why is there Black? Why is there Asian? There’s these categories because it is about attraction. It is about selling a fantasy.”<sup>495</sup> Indeed, the specific designations within porn—racial, fetish, sexual preference—are all about as Devoe notes, “selling a fantasy,” and the need to categorize (in order to market and sell) these specific fantasies. However, interracial pornography is also about establishing and maintaining racial difference and upholding whiteness as a category of invisibility, property and

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<sup>492</sup> Steele’s series *Black Reign* which won the AVN Best Ethnic-Themed Series award twice (2005, 2006) does contain a scene of reverse IR.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

<sup>494</sup> David A. Hollinger, “Amalgamation and Hypodescent: The Question of Ethnoracial Mixture in the History of the United States,” *The American Historical Review* 108 no.5 (Dec 2003), 1374.

<sup>495</sup> Diana Devoe as quoted in *Black/White: Sex, Race, & Profit*, SexTV, Sep. 2006, Canada. [www.sextelevision.net](http://www.sextelelevision.net).



privilege. The colloquial phrase “it’s all pink in the inside,” simultaneously inclusive and discriminative, rooted in difference and sameness, thus encapsulates a number of contradictions at play within not just Internet IR porn, but pornography across media—print, moving image and Internet. It thus becomes a mantra that guides this project.

First, the phrase speaks to pornography’s anchoring in the ambivalence of racial, sexual difference. Pornography eroticizes not just the racial, sexual alterity of the black female body but also the ambivalence of this difference—its instability. This ambivalence of difference that pornography is so fascinated with is more than the sameness/otherness split (black or “pink”), but the lust/disgust dichotomy. As this project illustrates, black women in contemporary American porn across media and time are grounded in the shifting plates of desire and derision. Black women are simultaneously represented as repulsive and deplorable but sexually enticing and highly “fuckable.” They maintain a low human worth but a high titillation value.

Secondly pornography speaks the ambivalence of the categorization race itself. Beyond race as a category of sameness and otherness, pornography communicates the contradiction of race as a social, cultural, political, economic, an outwardly shaped construction, versus race as a given natural, biological, and fixed entity. Pornography seems to communicate that sex, the act of sex, makes us all the same. However, this chapter’s discussion of black/white interracial porn in particular reveals just how different the identities, bodies and mentalities of black and white are. Black/white interracial pornography is deeply invested in erecting the highest walls between black and white as to demarcate pure racial boundaries, only to violently, voraciously, and with much pleasure, tear these walls down. It repeatedly reminds us, while it may all be pink on the inside, it is very, very different on the outside. Thus in many ways pornography returns us to a conception that race is real, is fixed and mostly, inscribed on the body.

But as the idiom “it’s all pink on the inside” communicates, there is an urgent need for pornography to repeat and remind its audience and itself perhaps, of both the realness, legitimacy, and fixity of the racial categories of black and white, and the racial sexual, alterity and utter carnal primitivity of black womanhood. So it furiously works to deliver visual evidence of an authentic black female sexuality, one absolutely anchored in racial, sexual difference, only to negate this difference—to remind us that black, to return to Homi Bhabha’s brilliant theorization of the construction of otherness, is “almost but not quite” the same (or different) but that it indeed is “all pink on the inside.” For Bhabha “the recognizable Other”[is] a subject of difference that its almost the same but not quite.”<sup>496</sup> We must understand pornography to be a paramount visual force in the making of otherness and a most salient discursive strategy “that vacillates between what is already ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.”<sup>497</sup> So the repetition of excessive, primitive, and animalistic black female sexuality that is evident in pornography across time and media from her performances in early stag films, to drawings in Tijuana Bibles, through the golden and video ages, and into the era of the Internet, is itself performing a certain type of work. Pornography’s redundant and regurgitative enunciation of “the fact” of black womanhood, to borrow from Fanon, belies its very faith in the veracity of black womanhood as fact. That is, porn’s “anxious” repetition of the otherness of the black female body speaks to the very inventedness of her racial, sexual otherness as something that is not fixed, never “in place,” and not always “already known.” The carnal libidinality of the black female body is both something certain which requires no evidence and

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<sup>496</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid, 95.

that which can never be visually proved. So we can see that pornography disrupts the very fixity of race it works so hard to uphold. Blackness, as a category of otherness is naturalized and denaturalized, stabilized and mercurial in contemporary American pornography. This changing same is a salient feature of pornography and its representation of the black female body. Pornography's changing same is a repetitious slippage of difference, sameness, desire and derision.

Indeed, this project is pulled by two overarching tensions—pornography's changing same, its reiteration of common themes, narratives, tropes and stereotypes regarding the black female body and black female sexuality, versus the chronological evolution of pornography and its technological transformations (print, film, video, and finally Internet). So the narrative of the black female body becomes one of stasis and change. Despite the evolution of technology there remains a persistence of frames across media and space that impedes the black female body in contemporary American pornography. I have already argued for the consideration of porn's changing same in light, of what Bhabha terms productive ambivalence, a primary feature of colonial discourse and its representations of otherness within a framework of discriminatory power.

Yet apart from the changing same as a technique of power that speaks to pornography as a mode of racialization of and for the black female body, porn's changing same derives from its nature as visual representation. Thus, the other part of porn's repetition, reluctance, and even recalcitrance is linked to the very photograph itself, as the visual technology that each of the three pornographic media I examine, is grounded in.<sup>498</sup> The camera's still active myth as mechanical eye and the presumed indexicality of the photographic image fixes the black female body in a certain "truthful" way. Therefore pornography, as photographic representation, documents what is purportedly already in existence before us—the black female body in her "real" and "natural" state. This gives pornography and the representations of the black women within it a certain inviolable currency, across time, space, and media. In Bazin's "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," he identifies this very primary function of photography as a mechanical system of reproduction to duplicate "the world outside," objects, people, places as they exist in nature.<sup>499</sup> For Bazin this reproduction of reality is at the heart of photography, "[i]f the history of the plastic arts is less a matter of their aesthetic than of their psychology then it will be seen to be essentially the story of resemblance, or if you will realism."<sup>500</sup> Hence the photograph's act of reproducing what is *already* in existence is another root of pornography's changing same with regard to the black female body and black female sexuality.

Finally, the phrase "it's all pink on the inside" alerts us to the cross pollination of white male sexuality and black female sexuality that this project argues to be a central theme of pornography. Though it is a black woman, Diana Devoe, who here employs the phrase "we are all pink on the inside" to question the existence of racial categories in pornography, the saying historically speaks to the ambivalence of white male consumption of black female sexuality as desired and detested, same and other. Devoe is citing a derogatory colloquial phrase typically uttered by white men about black women. Beyond communicating white male sexual desire for the black female body and the anxiety of this desire, it thus signals the linkage of white masculinity and black female sexuality and their mutual constitutive nature. Black female

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<sup>498</sup> with the exception, of course, of Tijuana Bibles.

<sup>499</sup> André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," in *Classic Essays On Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 238.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

sexuality in pornography is more than just a product of the white male gaze, it is an important force in the construction of white male sexuality itself. So as we have seen throughout this project across media, the figure of the black female in pornography serves to signify white male sexuality. Pornography's racialization of black womanhood is often linked to its racialization of white manhood.

This multifaceted ambivalence and changing same is not just the impetus of pornography's representation of black female sexuality and the black female body, but its bittersweetness. While pornography reaffirms white male heteropatriarchy and upholds the racialized regime of representation deeply invested in revealing the otherness of the black female body as a site of racial, sexual alterity, it also offers the possibility for productive imaginings outside of fixed categories of race, transgressive crossings of the color line, and options for the "virtual" enactment and consumption of sexual fantasies. Pornography is thus a vital medium that allows us to raise critical questions about the categories of race, sexuality, gender, agency, pleasure, and subjectivity and their deployment for black womanhood.

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