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Deborah E. Whaley *University of Iowa*

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Sexing the Colorlines: Black Sexualities, Popular Culture, and Cultural Production

Spike Lee's Phantasmagoric Fantasy and the Black Female Sexual Imaginary in She Hate Me

Deborah Elizabeth Whaley
Department of American Studies & Program in African American Studies, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA USA

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> In what could be termed, The Apprentice meets The L Word meets The Sopranos, She Hate Me [is] a contorted racial allegory.
>
> -David Yaffe[1]

> Spike Lee and I have had a contentious relationship. We ran into each other at parties and on street corners, at which point I pretty consistently gave him a piece of my newly Ivy League-educated mind. I found School Daze sexist, Jungle Fever exploitive, Girl 6 a departure, and so on. Lee never asked for my opinion, mind you. Flashing the impish smile of a provocateur, he seemed to enjoy my unsolicited comments, the more critical the better.
>
> -Rebecca Walker[2]

> [She Hate Me] is basically a fantasy out of pornography. [It] has enough ... material for three movies, and that becomes a problem, since it cannot decide which of the three it wants to be.
>
> -Roger Ebert[3]

Disappointed by the lack of critical attention to Spike Lee's 2004 film She Hate Me, I decided to put pen to paper. Ordinarily, I would skip such a film, being skeptical that Lee, after She's Gotta Have It (1985) and Girl 6 (1996),

could do justice to a film about Black women and sexuality. However, a close friend of mine, who is an African American male filmmaker and a fan of Lee's canon of work, insisted I rent She Hate Me. He did so with the promise that it was Lee's best work to date, and that it would put to rest our many debates concerning Lee's filmic misogyny. Therefore, I watched the entire 138 minutes of this so-called feminist corrective. Not to my surprise, She Hate Me is similar to Lee's previous films, insofar as a main component of the film is to reveal the plight of a Black male protagonist and to present Black women as co-conspirators in Black male subjugation. In this film, he does not use "Black female humiliation as plot resolution," as cultural and feminist critic Michele Wallace writes about many of his previous films.[4] Instead, Lee has given us a new bag of misogynistic and phallocentric tricks: Black women in this film humiliate Black men sexually by using one particular Black man as a breeder for hordes of baby-obsessed Black lesbians, thereby ruining the infrastructure of the nuclear, Black family.

Image 1 - Spike Lee's Stepford lesbians
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

The late sociologist and senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan might have turned over in his grave in horror and salivated with excitement at the same time given this film's premise of conservative family values and heterosexism masking as a progressive, contemporary narrative of Black female sexuality.[5] Cultural critics have yet to seriously engage with the sexually paralyzing aspects of this film. A few periodicals, including an article in the Advocate, defend and praise Lee for She Hate Me.[6] According to Lee, film

director and feminist pornographer Tristan Taormino, who self-identifies as queer, was a consultant on the film; she put the heterosexual actresses through what Lee explains as "lesbian boot camp," in order to ensure representative authenticity.[7] Spike Lee seems to suggest that some sort of "boot camp" for the actors legitimizes the film. However, even in my own heterosexual identity and antimonosexual, Black feminist positionality, I see this film for what it is: a convoluted, male phantasmagoric fantasy, which reifies normative conceptions of sexuality, while purporting to represent the non-normative Black female sexual imaginary in a sympathetic way. The concept of phantasmagoria explains how Lee's film constitutes a bizarre assemblage of deceptive and shifting narratives, optic allusions of Lee's imaginary delusions of Black women and sexuality, alongside specters of history and corporate capitalism that by the film's end, are rendered negligible. Phantasmagoria, especially in reference to visual culture and film, is a sequence of fantastic or implausible, haphazard and associative imagery, which frequently changes scenes and consists of numerous elements.

In her analysis of the term as employed by theorist Karl Marx, which theorist Walter Benjamin later revisits, cultural critic Margaret Cohen describes the visual aesthetic in phantasmagoria when she writes that "the aesthetic effect of the phantasmagoria ... more closely resembles the subjective experience of ideological transposition. [...]Phantasmagoria [therefore] endows its creations with a spectral reality of their own."[8] I build upon the above theory by addressing the following questions: How does the dominant narrative of She Hate Me reify conservative notions of the conjugal family? In what ways does Lee's phantasmagorical construction of Black, female sexualities undermine the cultural politics of memory, the unmasking of corporate subterfuge, and the global circulation of capital under the auspices of neoliberalism? How does his compilation of sexual iconography seek to serve the purpose of sensory stimulation, rather than a serious contemplation, of the parameters of sexual identities?

Framing and Filming Phantasmagoria: From the Boardroom to the Bedroom

She Hate Me begins with a four minute sequence of close-up shots of legal tender that ripple like the waves in the ocean, which ends with a close-up shot of former president

George W. Bush in the center of a three-dollar bill with an "Enron" logo stamp in red, green, and blue to the right of the bill. The long introduction to the film presents the idea that money and greed lead to drowning, which the former president and corporations are in part responsible. Lee films scenes that take place inside of one of his primary settings, a corporation, in a blue-gray lens, which asserts the corporate sphere as a site of melancholy, and visually sets up one of the first dramatic occurrences in the film: the suicide of a corporate researcher. Lee also obliges the viewer with a shot similar to that of his infamous technique of a protagonist floating through a scene onward on a dolly outside of the camera frame's focus, yet here the technique is made fresh by an inclusion of scene transitions and repetitive shots that follow, which indicate the passing of time. Lee's execution of sexual scenes constitutes a series of camera shots where the main protagonist is engaging in sex with a woman in a bathroom from multiply located camera positions, or with a succession of women in short orgasmic sequences that occur in a dimly lit bedroom. Further, he includes several animation shots, where he insults the spectator with a cartoon sequence of animated sperm cells that swim through women's anatomies in order to assumedly attach to cartoon, reproductive eggs.

Image 2 - Jack's sperm swim towards conception
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

Jazz musician and composer Terence Blanchard provides the melancholy music for the film's non-diegetic music source, which helps the film oscillate between its

competing genres of comedy and dramatic tragedy. In this way, the music score anchors the film within the mixed – even if not always successful – dubious genre of "dramedy." The quality of Blanchard's solemn trumpet and instrumental compositions clash with their unfortunate song titles, however, which reflect the film's largely incoherent chapters. It seems belittling to employ song titles such as "Egg and Sperm" and the not-so-subtle title "Les Be Friends," (as in les-b-ians) to an artist and film composer such as Blanchard, who is known for his innovative classical and Afrofusion jazz.

An exception to mediocre acting in this film constitutes cameos by the late veteran actor Ossie Davis who plays a judge, and the Blaxploitation film hero Jim Brown (Geronimo) who plays the lead protagonist's father. The only woman not exploiting Black men in She Hate Me -- Joie Lee's short and insignificant role notwithstanding -- is the perpetuator of their humiliation: Geronimo's wife Lottie (Lonette McKee). In tandem with Spike Lee's typical portrayal of the suffering Black matriarch (see Jungle Fever [1991], Crooklyn [1994], and Do the Right Thing [1989]), Lottie is a cold-hearted bitch, who bemoans she must take care of Geronimo, who is differently-abled, one-legged, and has diabetes. In one heavy-handed dramatic scene, Dottie scolds:

> Dottie: Look at this mess; I'm stuck here with you.
>
> Geronimo: Jesus Christ, let it rest.
>
> Dottie: I wish I could rest, instead of laying here playing nursemaid to you.
>
> Geronimo: I never asked you to be nursemaid to me. You think I asked the good Lord to give me diabetes?
>
> Dottie: (In a sarcastic tone) Why do you always bring up the Lord?
>
> Geronimo: The only thing that would make you happy is if you cut off my other leg so both my legs would be gone.
>
> Dottie: Why don't you get me a knife and I fucking will!

Thus, the Black female characters are either exploitive or cruel beyond belief, and the rest of the characters in She Hate Me are flat caricatures with little emotional maturity or dimension. Yet, it is the discombobulated narrative that informs the film's diegesis of corporate corruption and Black sexuality, not the mise en scène and largely forgettable performances among the actors.[9]

Image 3 - Reporters question Frank Wills in 1972
(Used under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 2.0 license)

In She Hate Me, Spike Lee resurrects the story of the Black male security guard, Frank Wills, who helped to blow the whistle on "Watergate," as a parallel metaphor for a contemporary, Black corporate hero story. Watergate refers to a series of events connected to the break in at the Watergate building in Washington, DC, in the Democratic National Party Committee office. On 17 June 1972, Wills made a discovery of compromised, taped latches on the locks of the doors in the building, thereby allowing for unsanctioned entrance. After removing the tape on the latch of the locks, he later returned to the same area in the building and found that someone had again put tape on the latch of the doors. As the retaped locks suggested a purposeful break in, Wills reported the incident to the police. As a result, five men were arrested inside the DNC Watergate office and the then Republican president Richard Nixon was linked to the break in, unlawful acts, and audio taped recordings associated with it, which later led to Nixon's resignation. Despite Wills's role in

uncovering the crime, the pseudonym name Deep Throat (FBI Associate Director Mark Felt) is the whistle blower attributed to the Watergate scandal, because Felt helped a Washington Post reporter uncover the involvement of the Nixon administration in the crime. Frank Wills did not receive notoriety or any reward for his ethical intervention and died destitute while the criminals of Watergate – most infamously former president Nixon via former president Ford's pardon – went on to live a prosperous life.[10]

Lee's filmic take on Watergate occurs forty minutes in to the film, where he integrates the story of Wills via a five-minute flashback comedy sequence. In a dim lit and grainy film texture, Lee shows Wills discovering taped locks at the Watergate Tower B Garage. Wills calls authorities because he is suspicious that there has been a break-in. Soon after, Wills finds himself surrounded by clownish

Image 4 - Jack's boss "schools" him on the rules of corporate America
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

representations of the white men involved in Watergate, who offer one-liners to entertain (?) and inform (?) the audience. As the men circle around Wills and point firearms at him, a man wearing a Richard Nixon mask shouts: "Alright Wills, reach for the sky!" The others then shout: "Never should have found that duct tape on the door boy!" "Never should have made that call!" "Now your life is ruined." "You'll never work again." After the men speak to the fate of Wills, they boast of their own life prospects:

> I, John Dean, will make millions on the lecture circuit.

> I, G. Gordon Liddy, will have my own nationally syndicated radio show.
>
> I, John Erlichman, will retire from politics and become a best selling novelist.
>
> I, H. R. Haldemen, will just stay beautiful and live in Santa Barbara.[11]

Although this sequence was likely intended to place the main protagonist's predicament in a historical context of Black male corporate and political subjugation, the scene's awkward move from a tone of extreme drama to a tone of slapstick comedy makes Wills's life changing event appear more funny than serious, and therefore, cinematically superfluous.

Like Watergate's whistle-blower and Wills's intervention, She Hate Me's main protagonist, Jack Armstrong (Anthony Mackie) blows the whistle on the company Progeia, where he is a divisional vice president, because of their unethical dealings and intent to deceive the public about their soon-to-be-introduced and worthless HIV vaccine. His immediate boss, a white woman named Margo (Ellen Barkin), and the president of the company, a white male named Leland (Woody Harrelson), quickly conspire to fire him from his job, freeze his assets, and frame him for the company's misdealing. Jack retaliates by retaining a lawyer (played by Lee's sister and actor Joie Lee) and filing a counter lawsuit. The specter of Wills is played by an older-looking Jack look-alike (Chiwetel Ejiofor), who seems to haunt Jack throughout his financial and personal troubles in the latter part of the film, thereby creating an intertextual narrative by aiming to link Wills's previous lived history with a contemporary make-believe corporate protagonist.[12] After Jack's two bosses fire him and he faces a life of being penniless, his ex-fiancé Fatima (Kerry Washington) re-emerges in his life with a plan to get him out of his financial predicament.

Nearly half way into the film, the viewer learns via a flashback filmed in a sepia tone with yellow lighting, that Fatima left Jack after having an affair with a woman. At this point, She Hate Me illustrates an atypical, sob story: Jack comes home with red roses for Fatima only to find her humping like mad with another woman in their bed. Jack goes ballistic at the sight of the two women, and he throws the assumed "other woman," her clothes, and her sexual paraphernalia out of the bedroom. As Jack leaves, the

camera focuses on the bouquet of roses that he throws to the ground in disgust. The focus on the red roses works as a double-layered metaphor that signifies the breaking apart of Jack's unrequited love and Fatima's scarlet letter of sexual shame. Here, Lee flips the typical filmic scenario where the girlfriend finds the cheating boyfriend in bed with another woman, and he exchanges it with a phantasmagorical plot that turns a film with real political potential into poorly executed, soft-core pornography. In other words, Lee's stale illusion of sexual representation (i.e., Fatima's indiscretion) and underdeveloped political

Image 5 - Jack meets Fatima's lover when they ask him to serve as their donor
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

narrative (i.e., the resurrection of Frank Wills) creates a nebulous sexual and political phantasma of representation.

In present times, Fatima shows up at Jack's door, asks him to forgive her indiscretion, and with unabashed gall asks him to impregnate her and her female partner Alex, and later, 19 additional, beautiful, thin, multi-cultural-looking lesbian women as well as a few masculine-inscribed lesbian women. His compensation for doing the sexual deed is ten-to-twenty thousand dollars per successful conception, and Fatima negotiates to take ten percent of his profit for setting him up with the women. Fatima insists Jack sign a contract stating that he will have no contact with the women and their children after the births. Jack, with a tone of sarcasm, tells Fatima to "try a sperm bank," to which she replies, "that's like shopping for

Gucci at Walmart." Her classist response is comedic and may soften the bite of what Fatima is asking of Jack, but the not-so-subtle subtext is that male/female procreation, not sperm banks, is the preferable and therefore right way to have a baby. Since Fatima expresses this sentiment throughout the film via her dialogue and actions, the film seems to not advocate for alternative modes of procreation, nor does it provide subjectivity or sexual agency for the identities Fatima inhabits.

Spike Lee does little more in this film than to promote what is perhaps the ultimate fantasy of some men: to be able to have sex without a condom, impregnate countless of beautiful women and never have to pay child support, nor worry about calling the day after a good lay, and get paid at the same time. In an era of growing numbers of HIV-positive persons among people of African descent, the above subplot that emerges as central is more than contradictory or ironic. Black women account for 2 out of 3 new HIV/AIDS cases in the United States, and most of these women receive HIV from having unprotected sex with a heterosexual Black male.[13] Given the reason for Jack's initial firing, that is, his exposure of a worthless HIV vaccine (Prexelin), the film presents a ludicrous, pathological narrative. At one point in the film, Fatima makes an egregious comment that Jack is "clean" based on his appearance, intelligence, and occupation, though her partner Alex wisely insists he provide a recent medical report indicating that he has no sexually transmitted diseases. Still, She Hate Me never engages with the medical and social facts of their behavior beyond comedic one-liners, and perhaps it should not; it is, after all, a film of fantasy, and not a documentary. Lee's filmic fantasy over reaches its aims, however, by integrating specters of Watergate with spectacles of Black sexuality, thereby reducing the film to the erotic tales of a hapless Black male gigolo and his equally pathetic bisexy madam.

Jack agrees with Fatima's plan until his new career as a male gigolo begins to threaten his legal case against his former employer. At the close of the film, there is an exoneration of Jack for the allegations of criminal action in association with his former job's financial and ethical corruption. Fatima also realizes she still has emotional and sexual feelings for Jack, and they live happily-ever-after when Jack agrees to play dad to the two children he created with Fatima and Alex while also doubling as the two women's live-in boy toy lover. Lee provides an intense make-out session between the three, and follows it with a shot of Jack sitting on concrete stairs with Fatima, Alex,

and all the babies he has created with donees. On the surface, this film might seem like a progressive, sexual and familial alternative. Upon closer inspection, one might also conclude that Lee's corrective to autonomous child rearing among women entails the reinsertion of patriarchy and by extension, heterosexuality, into their lives. Given this narrative, She Hate Me seems neither sexually progressive nor feminist. The film's retrograde narrative is further illustrated when Fatima refers to the additional donees in the film as her "lesbi" friends, who are all "highly successful business women that have achieved the American Dream," except for one thing: motherhood. Lee's sexual surrogate narrative thus does little more than to take professional Black women from the boardroom, and re-places them in the bedroom.

Image 3 - Fatima and Alex assert they are "business-women"
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

Corporate Ghosts of Neoliberalism's Past and the Glass Ceiling

Given that the production of She Hate Me came after several public scandals concerning the mismanagement and unethical practices of major corporations in the US, the initial premise of corporate corruption in the film had promise. In 2001, Enron was charged with increasing profits and concealing over $1 billion dollars of debt by improperly employing off-the-books partnerships; manipulating the Texas power market; garnering contracts overseas through the bribing of foreign governments; and, manipulating the energy market in California. Michael Kopper, who is a former Enron executive, pled guilty to

two felony charges and the company eventually filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 2002. Jeffrey Skilling (former CEO and COO), and the late Ken Lay (former CEO), also faced charges, due in part to Enron executive Andy Fastow's testimony, resulting in Skilling being sentenced to a lengthy prison term. The same year as the Enron bail out, WorldCom made headline news for writing off capital expenses as operating expenses in order to inflate cash flow by $3.8 billion while extending to WorldCom founder, Bernard Ebbers, $400 million in off-the-books loans. There was an arrest and criminal charges brought forth of former WorldCom CFO Scott Sullivan and ex-controller David Myers. Five years after the release of She Hate Me, the stockbroker and financial advisor Bernard Madoff was tried and convicted for the mismanagement and unlawful acquirement of billions of dollars from unknowing investors; his deceit constitutes one of the biggest Ponzi schemes in US history.[14]

Regardless of the prosecution of a few executives in high positions or individual investment advisors such as Madoff, there remains long-term effects of corporate and Wall Street malfeasance on the displaced workers of companies who go under, cheated investors, and on the economy at large. Writer Alexander Cockburn notes that there is a correlation between the acts of Madoff and corporate executives to that of the banks involved in 2008's subprime mortgage debacle and elected politicians.[15] Lee's connection between Watergate and twenty-first century corporate corruption thus had the possibility to do emergent and historicized cultural work. Indeed, the film comes close to beginning such work and laying bare the issues that Cockburn raises, when Jack views a video tape of one of his colleagues, the deceased scientist Dr. Schiller, which reveals that Progeia's dealings were nearly identical to the financial misdealing of Enron. This scene is rendered negligible, however, by a comedic scene that follows, where disgruntled workers at Progeia joke with their supervisors by asking if Enron or WorldCom is hiring, given their dim prospects for a long-term future at the company. Since it appears that Lee could not decide if She Hate Me should be a melodrama, soft-core porn, or a slapstick comedy, the aforementioned scenes reflect little more than the outcome of poorly mixed film genres. In the end, She Hate Me's narrative does little to shed light on the seriousness of Enron, WorldCom, and other major corporations and investment advisors that -- through their financial deceit and chicanery -- harmed the financial security and livelihood of workers.

The competing narratives in She Hate Me reduce the larger context of neoliberalism's chokehold on the global economy to a domestic, sexual exchange between exploited Black men and successful Black women. As an economic force, neoliberalism describes the process of market expansion in the global economy with limited state intervention and regulation; entails the more free movement of capital and goods; and, requires the privatization of previous national industries. Jack's firm is a prime example of neoliberalism at work, given its plan to exploit the growing number of HIV-positive Americans for profit via the global circulation of their worthless AIDS vaccine.[16] Pharmaceutical companies' commodification of health disease and their exploitation of consumers would make a fine plot, but Lee misses an opportunity to discuss corporate corruption and neoliberalism at length. He instead highlights Jack's sexual surrogate narrative, which is only made more confusing by two appearances of the specter of Frank Wills.

Image 7 - Jack's supervisor Margo argues that he "fired himself" when he made the whistle blowing phone call. She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

The subplot of sexual surrogacy in the film trumps the corporate corruption plot of She Hate Me at every turn. Lee's film thereby provides scant material to evaluate the racialized aspects and class antagonisms of corporate America. In the film's fantasy scenario, the chief problem of Black professional women is childbearing. This shifts focus away from the well-documented reality of the sabotage of Black women's success in corporate America because of the hegemonic belief of Black inferiority, career jealousy, and irrational fears of the ascension of Black women (couched within reverse discrimination

discourses). Human Resource Management expert Margaret Yap, for example, notes that the dominant culture fairs better in promotion than their equivalent counterparts of color. In particular, white males more easily acquire promotion in the corporate sphere in comparison to nonwhites, white females or minorities of either gender.[17] Comparatively, white women remain the largest demographic to benefit from corporate affirmative action programs since its inception in the late 1960s.[18] Insofar as race and gender is concerned, Yap's study finds "that discrimination in the workplace [often] occurs from envy-malice."[19] Yet, She Hate Me's narrative sidesteps this reality in favor of presenting abstract caricatures of "business women" who spend their time trying to make a baby in the bedroom, as opposed to facing and counteracting racism and injustice in the boardroom.

In theory, Title VII would protect employees like Lee's protagonist, who experience retaliation for filing complaints of racial harassment, exposing dishonesty, and reporting unethical behavior. Further, the Lilly Ledbetter Act passed by the U.S. Department of Labor in 2009 loosens the statue of limitation for equal pay for equal work lawsuits that attends to gender equity in salaries. Nevertheless, the law and legal moves cannot mitigate or adjudicate discrimination at the unconscious or subconscious level. Dormant resentment toward racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities can covertly appear in seemingly small acts of microaggression in social relations. The freezing of Jack's assets and his corporation facilitating his decrease in income is a magnification of such small and larger acts. In sum, legality notwithstanding, the accumulation of microaggressive and more nefarious prejudicial acts such as corporate heads manufacturing Jack's guilt, freezing his assets, and firing him for being a whistle blower, adds to long-term, systemic forms of macro-discrimination. Although race and gender exacerbate Jack's predicament, Progeia's chess game of corporate sabotage is a part of a much larger power dynamic in corporate America, where capital and organizational toxicity often collide.[20]

She Hate Me's Hollywood ending purports that victory for Black male executives and workers will prevail in the righteousness of being right and that Jack's "truth" and being right in the end matters. Yet, as cultural critic Vershawn Ashanti Young notes of microaggressions in the wake of postracial rhetoric and neoliberal ideology in the public sphere, the dominant culture is "generally taught to ignore race, are not trained to perceive the new racism or

consequently how to avoid it. So when they get called out for some offense, they might get edgy, feel race guilt, cry 'reverse racism,' or cloak themselves in denial."[21] Similarly, Organizational Culture in Business (OCB) and globalization theorist Michàlle Mor Barak notes how corporations' nebulous rhetoric of "diversity makes business sense," "we are gender and colorblind," and "we do not discriminate we incorporate," become mantras of corporate managers, who equate claims to being blind to difference with being fair in their practices with historically marginalized groups.[22] Human Relations in Business theory additionally observes that managers may at times work within the binary of being dismissive or condescending regarding issues of difference.

Jack faces a form of the dismissive/condescending managerial paradigm, when the president of Progeia dismisses him after whistle-blowing, while his former supervisor Margo pretends to partially convert to his side of the issue, persuades him to confide in her about his donor activities, and then afterwards, she distorts that information for use against him at his legal hearing. As is the case with She Hate Me's fictional workspace Progeia, corporate sites may appear progressive or race neutral because of the few numbers of people of African descent in managerial positions. However, when moments of crisis emerge, as seen with Progeia's financial unfolding, the incipient ways racial discrimination against workers of color becomes an organizational safety-net is apparent.[23] Given this organizational culture and popular management style, what often prevails in the corporate sphere is not the ethical premise of being right, nor outing any form of discrimination that predicates wrongdoing. Rather, how one addresses microaggressions with skill, forethought, and maneuvers around their opponent leads to long-term victory in the corporate realm. It is this lesson of checkmate that She Hate Me forestalls with Lee's Hollywood resolution. Since She Hate Me's absurd corporate tragedy and seedy sexual comedy aims to invoke laughter, titillate first and inform second, the far more interesting game of corporate hegemony metamorphoses into a less interesting depiction of sexual exploits and sexual exploitation.

Doing Ole' Massa Proud: Cash Cows and the New Sexual Plantation

As Lee's film makes the turn from the corporate sphere to the sexual sphere, its potential comes undone. She Hate Me's immature position on sexuality is most apparent when its protagonist Jack tells Fatima that she has to define herself as either "bi, lesbian or straight; pick one," and then he launches into a diatribe about Black men on the "down low," who in his view are the most culpable perpetuators of the spread of HIV.[24] When Fatima remarks to Jack that, "There are a lot of men who would have walked in on me and a woman and be turned on," he replies in anger, "Well, there's also a lot of so-called straight men going around fucking other men in the cooler and coming home bringing AIDS to their wives and girlfriends." After his tirade, Fatima accuses Jack of homophobia. Fatima's accusation might hold political relevancy if it did not reveal her role in the most common way women of African descent contact the virus, that is, from "straight" Black males such as Jack, who have sex with countless numbers of women without a condom. Further, despite his acquiescence to the role of sexual surrogate for hire, Jack insists that while same-sex, child adoption is difficult, surrogates and sperm banks for women are ultimately immoral. She Hate Me's narrative further elides the history of Black, female sexual subjugation as slave breeders, prostitutes, and sexual commodities, and replaces it with a phantasmagorical, sexual imaginary, where Black women are exploiters of Black male sexuality. As Fatima tells Jack, he is nothing more than a "cash cow."

Jack's agreement as a donor serves the agenda of male fantasy, rather than presenting a consciousness-raising moment on the protagonist's part. Neither pan-sexuality or fertility technology, according to the plot of She Hate Me, should replace typical forms of sex and procreation.[25] The climax of the film also affirms this lack of consciousness, as at Jack's intense hearing for the false accusation of money laundering, one of his employer's lawyers attacks his character by asking, "Isn't it true that you accepted large cash payments from lesbians to impregnate them?" Jack emphatically replies in his defense, "I'm not proud of what I did." Filmic texts produce a multiplicity of narratives for which spectators will respond to with a multiplicity of decoded readings. However, as the threading of the above dialogue between Jack, Fatima, and his employer's lawyer

reveals, Spike Lee's central ideological thrust could not be clearer.

Cultural critic Amiri Baraka argues that Lee's first major film She's Gotta Have It (1986) recapitulates the basic "slave master propaganda" about lascivious Black women, and She Hate Me returns to that theme.[26] Yet, Lee goes farther to suggest that Black women literally are acting out the slave master's role of treating Black sexuality and bodies as commodities for reproduction. Crude remarks by the stereotyped, masculine-inscribed donees, who "ride" Jack during sex while promising to break him in half when they are through, seem not too different from white male slavers, who made the promise to emotionally and physically break slaves through the whip, rape, and to lynch for non-compliance, or for no provocation at all. One of the masculine donees conjures the ritual of lynching before having sex with Jack, with what sounds more like a sinister threat, rather than playful sexual banter, by retorting in a contralto growl, "I'm going to back you down, then post you up." In another scene, as Jack stands in embarrassment and humiliation, the more feminine donees demand he take off his pants for inspection, thereby visually mirroring the slave block scenario. The crudest of the women, who is a Black female rapper caricature that closely resembles the real life rapper Lil' Kim, shouts at Jack while he stands nude in humiliation, "Come on, Nigga! Show us your tube steak; your man stick!" Spike Lee's scenario presents the idiosyncratic notion that Black women hate Black men, especially successful, professional Black women, and that they are really all lesbians who -- given the chance -- will make Black men into breeders, just like ole' Massa on the slave plantation.

Image 8 - Fatima's friends ask Jack to show his "man meat"
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

Fatima and Alex express the conflation of occupation and sexuality when they first ask Jack if he will serve as their donor. In a voice inflection of sarcasm and disgust, Jack asks the two women, "Now, you two are lesbians, right?" In unison, Fatima and Alex reply, "We're business women." Film scholar Norma Manatu reveals the complicated ideological entanglement of assuming and representing unattached, professional Black women as lesbians, not only in film and the media, but more pointedly, in the public sphere. Drawing from feminist and cultural critics Audre Lorde and Ruby Rich, Manatu writes:

> How to live as sexually free women while still maintaining social respectability becomes a challenge [for Black women], since living such a life invites accusations of moral looseness. [Additionally], suspicion of lesbianism for the unattached female lurks just beneath the surface [in Black male films]. Black women's single status is generally viewed with deep suspicion. [27]

As the scholarship on Black sexuality reveals, many women in the Black Professional Managerial Class (BPMC) present an image of sexual propriety as a strategy of survival against sexual misconduct and assault.[28] The projection of a sexual identity of lesbianism onto them presents an explanation as to why women of the BPMC may not fit the hypersexual or at least the sexualized space reserved for Black women in the popular imagination. This illogical line of racially-inflected-sexual-thinking further explains in the subconscious of some, why Black women would aspire to or hold professional ambitions that are above average. Simply put, the film upholds an impoverished and myopic view of Black women's sexuality, which implies that if she succeeds in her career, is not hypersexual, is not married, is not saddled down with a litter of children, and has no "baby's daddy" in sight, she must be a lesbian. Whether affirming sexual misnomers of a particular class of Black women, presenting a stereotypical, binary view of masculine-inscribed lesbians and hyper-feminine, bisexy temptresses, Spike Lee's She Hate Me seems unable to escape what Manatu points out as a common filmic depiction of Black women's sexuality, where their "central values lie in raw, impersonal sex."[29]

There is a moment of sexual progressiveness in She Hate Me, as seen when Fatima refuses to narrowly define her sexuality and makes the decision to retain a sexual and emotional relationship with Jack and her female partner.

However, Fatima's sexual disavowal also seems to serve the masculinist purpose of the film. In order for Fatima to remain as the sexually attractive femme fatale in She Hate Me, she cannot identify as solely lesbian (this identity is reserved for the few masculine-inscribed women in the film). To do so would make her appear off limits to an imagined heterosexual male spectator, as well as off limits to the male protagonist in the film (i.e., Jack). The brief sequence at the end of the film where Jack, Fatima, and Alex provide a visualization of how a two female and one male configuration can constitute a harmonious "family" is worthy, as this scene exposes the confinement of monosexuality, and it suggests alternative sexual and familial arrangements.[30] However, as stated in a prior reference to this final scene, the film's moralizing drone and narrative that the viewer sees for the first 135 minutes undercuts his slight cinematic intervention. Lee leaves the viewer with the following filmic conclusions: Child rearing without a live-in paternal figure is always-already dysfunctional; women are lesbians because they hate men; bisexuality, especially among men, is a deceptive lie that spreads HIV; bisexuality, especially among women, is only worthy so long as it can serve as an arousal mechanism for the scopophiliac gaze.

Image 9 - Fatima and Alex
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

She Hate Me is little more than Black homonationalism with a sexy twist, but it does present a twisted conception of female sexuality.[31] Homonationalism entails the seduction of sexual minorities into normative lifestyles by the dominant ruling force to gain acceptance as national

subjects of the nation, and the contorted sexual narrative in She Hate Me presents a cautionary, homonationalist tale that seeks to normalize its detractors on screen. Indeed, Jack's brother refers to Fatima's gigolo scheme as "freaky shit," and promotes the leading voice of a moral majority position when he says to Jack in response to Fatima's donor scheme, "God don't like ugly. You're ugly in your deeds. The bible does not say anything about Adam and Eve and Eve. Morally, this shit ain't cool." The jeremiad warning of Jack's brother underscores that in its essence, She Hate Me is homonationalism writ large.

Chronicle of Higher Education contributor, David Yaffe, reveals how She Hate Me may support homonationalist ideology and public policy when he writes

> There's a certain masochism that goes with the Spike Lee experience, and everyone, black or white, Jewish or gentile, male or female, has somehow borne the brunt of his personal filmic affronts. She's Gotta Have It, culminated in a rape scene, and his flights down misogyny lane have continued throughout his career. At the [She Hate Me] press screening I attended one woman stood up and loudly proclaimed, 'This is offensive!' and stormed out with a similarly miffed posse in tow. Sure it is. It's a Spike Lee Joint, not an Adrienne Rich reading. In a moment when President Bush [was] trying to shore up his political base by attacking gays and lesbians for wanting to make their commitments legal, the offended woman in the screening room did have a point... Spike Lee made a ... movie [that the former president] George W. Bush could love.[32]

To position Lee's work as in alignment with the policies of the former president George W. Bush may appear as a stretch given the vivid anti-Bush iconography in the beginning of the film. Spike Lee was also a vocal critic of the Bush administration, especially concerning its waylaid response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. He addresses his dissent in the documentary When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts (2006). In addition, in an interview in the Advocate, Lee claims he supports same-sex marriage and cautions that audiences should not confuse what his characters say in movies with his own feelings and position. However, in the very same article, he purports his disbelief of bisexuality among Black men and argues that he has Fatima and Alex take Jack on as a shared lover and husband at the end of the film in the interest of "the two

young kids they've got." Lee also admits, "I'm not gonna bullshit you--if my son, Jackson, was gay, would I hate him? No. Would I be a little disappointed? I would say yes."[33] Lee's own words, albeit admirable for their candor, speak louder than that of his characters.

Image 10 - Jack reads his surrogate contract before having sex with Fatima
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

Going Back to the Mattresses

Nowhere is the sexual absurdity of She Hate Me's plot more apparent than in the film's titillation and eye candy "baby making" scenes. In one scene, Fatima dresses in high heels, a garter belt, and black skin-tight teddy for she and Jack's "baby-making session." Moreover, as one might guess, all the lesbians who have sex with Jack—even the most timid—scream in euphoric orgasm once he begins to work and thrust his magic love wand. In a thick Italian accent, Simona (Monica Bellucci), who is a caramel- skinned, Ford-model-looking-lesbian, begs Jack to "take her," as she places her silk, black spaghetti strap dress just below her shoulders. The donee demands: "Go ahead, do it! Make me baby!" Her forced broken English and aggressive behavior is apparently Lee's idea of Mafioso-inspired, ethnic and sexual satire, though one might also view his erroneous depiction of the Italian donee as jingoist. The latter reading is made stronger when placed alongside an unnecessary scene in the film where the donee's father, Mafioso king-pen Diamond Don (John Turturro), recites a painfully long monologue from the film

The Godfather (1972), which he delivers in a cotton-mouth-sounding accent before extending his approval to Jack to impregnate his daughter. It should not require mentioning in the twenty-first century that Italians and Italian Americans have no innate connection to organized crime. Perhaps this intertextual, filmic moment that utilizes The Godfather via dialogue and exaggerated voice inflection aims to make the aforementioned point through satire. Nevertheless, like most of the far-reaching points in

Image 11 - An Italian donee begs Jack to help her "make baby"
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

this film, the scene reads and screens as absurd.

In an interview in Salon magazine, feminist critic and writer Rebecca Walker engages with Lee concerning the sexual issues he raises in the film, and she queries him about his creative influence:

> Rebecca Walker: Do you have ambivalence about men selling their sperm to women who want to have babies?
>
> Spike Lee: Nah, I mean if that's what you want to do. I wouldn't do it.
>
> Rebecca Walker: What I've heard a lot is that the film, or at least the intense sex scenes between Jack and the moms-to-be, was greatly inspired by

heterosexual porn. Was your sexuality, your views of sex and women, shaped by pornography?

Spike Lee: Not at all.

Rebecca Walker: So you haven't watched a lot of pornography in your life?

Spike Lee: I mean, I watched it later, but my sexuality was not formed by porn.

Rebecca Walker: So do you think that the porn you've watched influenced the choices you made in the film?

Spike Lee: Not at all. I don't even see the connection between that and porn.[34]

Walker is kind to indulge and endure his answers, but Lee's denial above seems suspiciously naïve, given that a porn director (Tristan Taormino) was his chief consultant on the film. When writer David Yaffe asked Lee if he made

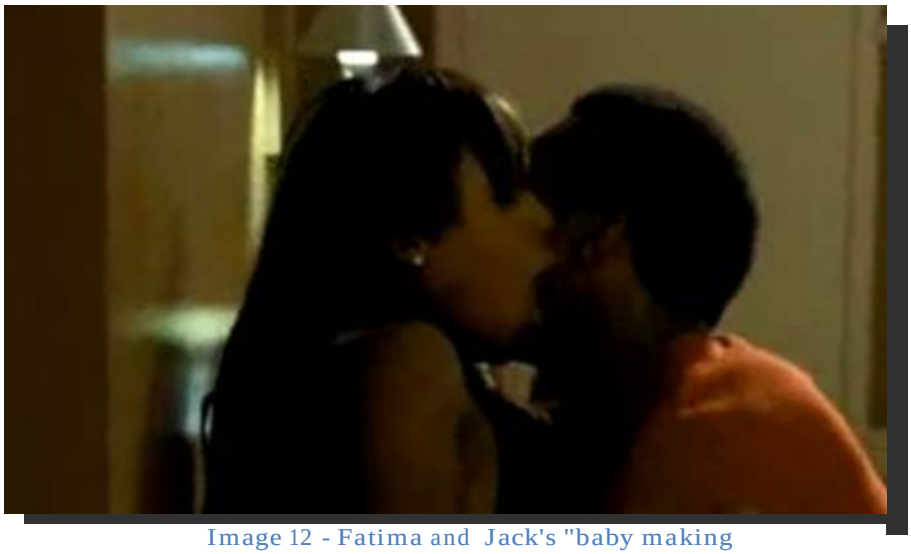

Image 12 - Fatima and Jack's "baby making session"
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

the film for "the entertainment of straight men or the empowerment of lesbian women," Yaffe reports, "Lee never really answered that question."[35] The porn issue notwithstanding, since that is not the loci of this film's or any film's failure -- like all film genres, porn has a rightful place in the cinematic milieu. The problem here is that even as soft-core porn the film fails, and Lee never

accomplishes what he generally works so hard to do in his filmmaking. That is to say, Lee fails to do justice to unearthing the forgotten story of a disenfranchised Black male, who in this case, is Frank Wills. If Moynihan might posthumously revel in Lee's representation of the dangers of Black female-headed households, the late Frank Wills, if alive today, might feel like a used sign of bankrupt corporeality. In other words, his body appears in flashbacks as a haunting sign of allegorical meaning, but in the end, Wills loses out to just enough "T & A" and bisexiness to secure an R-rating. There is thus a desecration of the memory of Frank Wills in this film; his story remains untold in the name of the cinematic trafficking of girl-on-girl action. By the time Lee returns to tell the story of Wills via an additional brief flashback at the end of the film, the viewer has already endured 2 hours and 4 minutes of a discombobulated, sexual narrative.

Cultural critics, including Rebecca Walker, have, to use popular vernacular, "called Spike Lee to the mattresses" concerning his misogynistic portrayals of Black women on the silver screen. In her discussion of Lee's entire body of films up until 1994, the late cultural critic Toni Cade Bambara argued against the idea that the polarization created for spectators in his films results in a transformative narrative. Bambara writes that Lee repeatedly "situates a range of spectators, often polarized spectators in his films, thereby [appearing to meet] the demand for social relevance." Nevertheless, she contends, "he does not let go of basically reactionary sensibility (homophobic/misogynistic/patriarchal) that audiences have been trained by the industry to...accept as norm, as pleasurable, inevitable."[36] With She Hate Me, his apparent answer to Black feminists are the following: "It is not me, it is you. You hate me (or on me)! I do not exploit you; Black women exploit Black men." Black men cannot make it in this world, so the storyline of She Hate Me goes, because the Black woman, white woman, and white man have their foot on either the Black man's neck or his genitals.

Those looking for a complex portrayal of Black female sexuality should look past this film, and instead look to the work of Julie Dash, Kasi Lemmons, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Euzhan Palcy, Sanaa Hamri, Alison Swan, Cheryl Dunye, Darnell Martin, and Yvonne Welbon.[37] I do not cite the aforementioned filmmakers because they are women of African descent or because their filmic portrayals are without representative problems. I cite them because they come closer to portraying a myriad of sexualities in popular and independent cinema. Unfortunately, as the

documentary Sisters in Cinema reveals, their works remain obscure due in part to the popularity of a handful of Black male filmmakers such as Spike Lee, John Singleton (Boyz n the Hood [1991], Poetic Justice [1993], Rosewood [1997], and Hustle and Flow [2005]), Lee Daniels (Monster's Ball [2001], and Precious [2009]), and the Hughes Brothers (Menace to Society [1993], Book of Eli [2010]), who many view as authentic purveyors of Black culture because of their gender.[38]

Conclusion

She Hate Me constitutes random, associative imagery of corporate subterfuge, and "pop" political history, and prepubescent sexual fantasy, making the whole of his phantasmagorical filmic world less than the dream work of its imaginary parts. The film is not successful as a transformative film just because of its silly lipstick lesbian sub-plot, its masking of the history of Black female sexual degradation and exploitation, and its melodramatic Black male victim-hood ad nauseam shown in most scenes and dialogue. As Yaffe suggested in relation to his viewing of the film amidst quick-exit protesters, most cultural critics would expect little more from Lee. However, even if one is able to dismiss or move beyond the moralizing, monosexual polemics, as well as his backward gender politics in this film, one still ends up with an underdeveloped narrative about racism, and corporate America, with scant mention of the glass ceiling. This film does little more than to contribute to the unrelenting representative pattern of Lee films where he insists upon dreaming up ethnocentric and clichéd stories about greedy Jews (Mo' Better Blues [1990] and Bamboozled [1999]), ruthless Italians (Do the Right Thing, Summer of Sam [1999], and Jungle Fever [1991]), crazy queers (She's Gotta Have It and Crooklyn) and Black bitches that stand in the Black man's way of obtaining his manhood.[39]

Given Lee's notoriety and staying power over the past few decades as a producer of quality and innovative cinema, the problematic portrayals he creates are clearly images that many audiences will pay to see and enjoy. The proceeds from such films allow him to gain the capital to write, direct, and produce some of the more socially relevant and cinematically breathtaking films and documentaries that he makes every few years or so, such as X (1992), Get on the Bus (1996), 4 Little Girls (1997), When the Levees Broke, Good Fences (2003), Sucker Free City (2004), Inside Man (2006), and Miracle at St. Anna

(2008). Put another way, Lee's ability to make socially relevant films is dependent upon giving audiences representations that are palatable to Manichean-thinking minds who find gratification with essentialist notions of Blackness and impoverished notions of Black sexuality. Indeed, in cultural critic Craig Watkins' analysis of Lee's film Get On the Bus, he includes a quote from Lee that may explain why Lee's filmic legacy includes such representative detours. According to Lee as quoted in Watkins, when he makes films like Get On the Bus that try to remark upon Black heterogeneity and social relevance, no one goes to see them; they are box office flops.[40] She Hate Me was also a box office flop; it cost eight million to make and grossed 1.5 million. The auteur may have thus exhausted his excuse to continue to create films about Black women's sexuality that read and view like the type of narrative dreamed up by a prepubescent, rather than a middle-aged, adult male.[41]

Image 13- Diamond Don, Lee's godfather of organized crime
She Hate Me, Sony Pictures (2004)

A film from Lee about the racism and corruption of corporate America with sound acting would have been a breath of fresh air. A docudrama about Frank Wills would have been a remarkable intervention into the nation's public memory. A cinematic analysis about the myriad of female sexual expression would be extraordinary. A film about the struggle of Black couples -- straight, lesbian, bi-sexual, pansexual, gay, intersex or transgender -- to adopt children would have explored untouched cinematic terrain.

A film that deconstructs pharmaceutical companies' exploitation of the public and lack of resources put into HIV/AIDS research by the United States government would have been a brave response to the growing epidemic. A film that captures the alienation of Black men in/from big business conglomerates would be very timely in our current historical moment of a downward economy. Yet, put portions of all of the aforementioned topics together with a poorly written and executed script, acting that is either heavy-handed or fails to deliver, and a presentation of serious social and political issues as a phantasmagorical joke, and you get a forty acres and a mule mess.[42]

Notes

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[1] David Yaffe, "Spike Lee's Blind Spots on Lesbianism," Chronicle of Higher Education, 50.48, (August 2004): B12.

[2] Rebecca Walker, "The Female Trouble," Spike Lee Interview with Rebecca Walker for She Hate Me, Salon.com, (2004). http://www.salon.com/entertainment/movies/int/2004/08/19/lee (accessed 21 October 2010). Italics mine.

[3] Robert Ebert, Ebert and Roper, 31 July 2004; Episode 196. Disney/ABC Domestic Television.

[4] Michele Wallace, "Spike Lee and Black Women," Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory (New York: Verso 1990).

[5] I refer here to Patrick Moynihan's infamous study on the Black family wherein he made the argument that what he perceived as a Black matriarchal structure within African American culture was to blame for their socio-economic disenfranchisement. See Patrick Moynihan, The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, Office of Policy Planning and Research, United Sates, Department of Labor (March 1965), http://www.blackpast.org/?q=primary/moynihan-report-1965 (accessed 29 October 2010).

[6] See Liese Spencer, "She Hate Me," Sight and Sound 14.10 (Oct 2004): 66; Anne Stockwell, "He Don't Hate Me: Spike Lee gives his most revealing interview ever about homophobia, the down Low, queer bashing, gay parenting,

and She Hate Me, his winning new lesbian comedy," The Advocate (17 August 2004). An exception to an account of praise comes from Yaffe's "Spike Lee's Blind Spots on Lesbianism," Chronicle of Higher Education.

[7] Anne Stockwell, "He Don't Hate Me." In this article, Lee refers to Taormino as his "lesbian guru."

[8] Phantasmagoria constitutes a space where subjects, specters or optic productions (such as visual images and icons) disappear and reappear (Wills) thereby conjoining fantasy with reality (male sexual fantasy, e.g.), animate objects and inanimate objects (Wills and Jack), which in execution work against the said informative intents (the counterhistory of a Watergate hero and progressive images of women's sexuality). On the term see Margaret Cohen, "Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria," New German Critique 48.87 (September 1989): 93-94 and Caroline Evans, Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) p89. Although my use of the term admittedly situates the film in a problematic light, I acknowledge Andrew McCann's clarification and caution of the term when he writes that "though for some [phantasmagoria] refers to the marking of the pejorative space of mass culture and modern entertainment, it may also define as a shifting medley of real or imagined figures, as in a dream, or with the mental processes, with the workings of the imagination itself; the relationship between the exterior and interior, spectacle and imagination." See Andrew McCann, "Textual Phantasmagoria: Marcus Clarke, Light Literature and the Colonial Uncanny," Australian Literary Studies (University of Queensland, School of English, Media Studies & Art History) 21. 2 (October 2003): 137. The nuance between scholars is not in the definition, but rather, in its deployment and end-effect.

[9] I refer here to the narrative creation (or diegesis) of Lee's entire fantasy world of Black female sexuality. On the formation and theory of narrative (or narratology) and how it shapes a filmic or literary text and their reception see Mieke Bal, Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985). Mise en scène here refers to the film's visual coherence, or as Robert Kolker writes, "almost everything that goes into the composition of the shot, including the composition itself: framing, movement of the camera and characters, lighting, set design and general visual environment, even sound as it helps elaborate the composition." In other

words, it constitutes the aesthetics and production of a film. See Robert Kolker, Film Form and Culture (Blacklick: McGraw-Hill, 2001) and Jean-Anne Sutherland and Kathryn Feltey eds., Cinematic Sociology: Social Life in Film (Thousand Oaks: Sage) 73.

[10] Wills died destitute in 2000. For a interdisciplinary engagement with the political memory of Watergate, including what it meant for American culture during, after, and in contemporary times, see: Stephen Paul Miller, The Seventies Now: Cultural as Surveillance (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).

[11] On these figures see the retrospective piece by Karen De Witt, "Watergate, Then and Now: Revisiting the Major Players; Who Was Who in the Cover-Up and Uncovering of Watergate," New York Times (June 15, 1992): A15.

[12] As Julia Kristeva notes, intertextuality refers to the interdependent ways in which texts stand in relation to each other; intertextuality indicates that texts are not self contained or autonomous. Rather, their meaning is produced from or dependent upon additional texts. While Lee intends for the film to be read through or alongside the forgotten history of Watergate via Frank Wills, his use of Wills as a haunting allegory of symbolic meaning fails to make that story known, given the absurdity of what is essentially a subplot (i.e., sexual surrogacy) that emerges as the ultimate focal or dominant narrative. See Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel" in Toril Moi ed., The Kristeva Reader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) pp. 34-61. On the use of intertextuality in film, see Jefferson Kline, Screening the Text: Intertextuality in New Wave French Cinema (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

[13] US Department of Health and Human Services, The Federal Government Source for Women's Health Information website, http://www.womenshealth.gov/minority/africanamerican/hiv.cfm. (accessed 21 December 2010).

[14] See Steve Maich, "Prosecuting a Culture," Maclean's 118.12 (March 21, 2005): 44; Penelope Patsuris, "The Corporate Scandal Sheet," Forbes.com, http://www.forbes.com/2002/07/25/accountingtracker.html (accessed January 2, 2011).

[15] Alexander Cockburn, "'A Giant Ponzi Scheme,'" The Nation, (January 05, 2009) 8.

[16] Insofar as She Hate Me and neoliberalism as an economic force is concerned, I refer to the film's portrayal of a pharmaceutical company's place in a market driven economy, which has the power to shape and influence social and public policy with little-to-no intervention or regulation.

[17] Yap also makes connections between promotion and salary differentials:

> Gross promotion rates indicate . . . that minority females seem to suffer a double whammy in their prospect for career advancement. White [professional] males also earn more on average -- $68,000 -- compared with $64,000 for minority men and $54,300 for women.

See Margaret Yap, "Slicing and Dicing the Gender/Racial Earnings Differentials," International Journal of Manpower 31.4 (2010): 466-488. See also Annie S. Barnes, "Black Women in the Workplace," Anthropology of Work Review, 10.2 (1989): 4–10; Donna E. Thompson and Nancy DiTomaso eds., Ensuring Minority Success in Corporate Management (New York: Plenum, 1988).

[18] Miguel M. Unzueta, [et al] "How Believing in Affirmative Action Quotas Affects White Women's Self-image," Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 46.1 (2010): 121.

[19] Margaret Yap, "Slicing and Dicing the Gender/Racial Earnings Differentials."

[20] I illuminate here a tripartite relationship and violent collide wherein nebulous, liberal ideology, the market forces of neo-liberalism, and the cut throat environment of the money-profit-money practices of corporate America are further diseased by the ongoing racism and discrimination that historically marginalized workers with less power experience.

[21] Vershawn Ashanti Young, "Momma's Memories and the New Equality," Present Tense, 1.1 (2010): 1-6. http://www.presenttensejournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/Young.pdf (accessed 3 January 2011).

[22] Michàlle E. Mor Barak, "Vive la Différence? Theoretical Perspectives on Diversity and Exclusion in the Workplace," Managing Diversity: Toward a Globally Inclusive

Workplace (Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 2005) 148.

[23] As cultural critic George Lipsitz informs, "seemingly race-neutral...sites contain deeply embedded racial assumptions and imperatives. [...] The white spatial imaginary ...explain[s] how and why the racially propelled logic of hostile privatism and defensive localism has come to dominate decisions [in job sites], private investment and public policy." See George Lipsitz, "Introduction: Race, Place, and Power," How Racism Takes Place (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011) 13.

[24] The "down low" is a vernacular reference that has gained significant traction in popular films, prime time television episodes, daytime talk shows, popular and advice literature. The term refers to men who secretly have sex with men, often maintain sexual relationships with women, but who do not define themselves as gay or bisexual, so that they may promote the public facade of heterosexuality.

[25] Rebecca Walker also refers to this general issue in "Lusting for Freedom" in Barbara Findlen ed., Listen Up! The Next Feminist Generation (Boston: Seal Press, 2001) 24:

> Sex could stand to be liberated ... from marriage and procreation. It can be more: more sensual, more spiritual, more about communication and healing. Women and men both must learn to explore sexuality by making love in ways that are different from what we see on television and in the movies. If sex is about communication, let us think about what we want to say and how we will say it. We need more words, images, and ideas.

[26] Amiri Baraka, "Spike Lee at the Movies," in Manthia Diawara ed., Black American Cinema (New York and London: Routledge Press, 1994) pp. 145-153.

[27] Norma Manatu, African American Women and Sexuality in the Cinema (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2003), 63.

[28] See Lisa B. Thompson, Beyond the Black Lady: Sexuality and the New African American Middle Class (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Patricia Hill Collins, Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism (New York and London: Routledge, 2005); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the

Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920 (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1993); Stephanie Shaw, What a Woman Ought to Do and to Be: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Angela Davis, Women, Race, and Class (New York: Vintage Books, 1981).

[29] Manatu, 85.

[30] Monosexuality refers to a monolithic and one-sided ideological construction of sexuality most commonly expressed through the insistence of seeing and viewing sexuality through a homosexual/heterosexual binary. I argue that given the totality of Lee's narrative, the film She Hate Me advocates a monolithic or unitary definition of sexuality, especially one that locates sexuality within the binary of heterosexual and homosexual. Fatima's bisexiness is less of a filmic intervention as it is a spectacle for the scopophiliac gaze. For a discussion of monosexuality and its deconstruction, see Donald Hall and Maria Pramaggiore ed., RePresenting Bisexualities: Subjects and Cultures of Fluid Desire (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

[31] Jasbir Puar, Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009). Puar argues that homonationalism consists of the national project of interpolating heterosexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities into a national citizenship via a "you are with us or against us post 9/11 discourse." A U.S. national project therefore dangles the carrot of cultural citizenship to queer communities that it never intends on providing for fear of alienating a portion of its heterosexual constituency.

[32] David Yaffe, "Spike Lee's Blind Spots on Lesbianism."

[33] Anne Stockwell, "He Don't Hate Me."

[34] Rebecca Walker, "The Female Trouble."

[35] David Yaffe, "Spike Lee's Blind Spots on Lesbianism."

[36]Toni Cade Bambara, "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: Daughters of the Dust and the Black Independent Cinema Movement," in Manthia Diawara ed., Black American Cinema (New York: Routledge, 1993) 137.

[37] See for example Julie Dash, Daughter's of the Dust (1991), Kasi Lemmons, Eve's Bayou (1997), Zeinabu Irene Davis, Compensation (1999), Euzhan Palcy, A Dry White

Season (1989), Sanaa Hamri, Something New (2006), Alison Swan, Mixing Nia (1998), Cheryl Dunye, Watermelon Woman (1996), Darnell Martin, I Like It Like That (1994). For a thorough discussion of Black women directors, see the documentary by director Yvonne Welbon, Sisters in Cinema (2003).

[38] For a discussion of the plight of African American female filmmakers in the age of Spike Lee see Michael T. Martin, "'I Do Exist': From 'Black Insurgent' to Negotiating the Hollywood Divide—A Conversation with Julie Dash," Cinema Journal 49.2 (2010): 1-16.

[39] I refer here to the egregious depiction of characters Mo and Josh Flatbush from Mo Better Blues, which Lee later apologized for in a New York Times op-ed piece on 22 August 1990. Lee maintains that the Flatbush brothers were to reveal the exploitation of Black musicians rather than to present an image of anti-Semitism. Many argue his film Inside Man is a visual apology for Mo Better Blues, see for example David D. Gerstner, "De Profundis: A Love Letter from the Inside Man," Paula Massood, ed., The Spike Lee Reader (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2008) and Lori Harrison-Kahan, "Inside Inside Man: Spike Lee and Post-9/11 Entertainment," Cinema Journal 50. 1 (2010): 39-58. Lee's most consistent ethnic satire has been of Italian Americans in urban settings, which have been brought to life by character-actors John and Nick Tururro, Danny Aiello, Anthony Quinn, and Frank Vincent. On the Italian American presence in Spike Lee films, see Theresa Carilli, "Italian/American Performance Style in My Cousin Vinny and Jungle Fever," Via: Voices in Italian Americana 8(1):33-44, 1997; Pasquale Verdicchio, "'If I Was Six Feet Tall, I Would Have Been Italian': Spike Lee's Guineas," Differentia: Review of Italian Thought, 6.7(1994): 177-91. Insofar as sexuality is concerned, I refer to David Patrick Kelly's queer minstrel performance as "Tony Eyes," and RuPaul's role as the transvestite and risqué temptress "Connie the Bodega Woman" in Crooklyn. Both men serve as the film's cartoonish queer spectacles, while Opal Gilstrap in She's Gotta Have It is the lesbian seductress, who, second to the lead protagonist's (Nola Darling) rape in the film, is Lee's cinematic warning about out of control, autonomous Black female sexuality.

[40] Craig S. Watkins, "Reel Men: Get on the Bus and the Shifting Terrain of Black Masculinities," Paula Massood, ed., The Spike Lee Reader (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2008) 157.

[41] Spike Lee and screenwriter Michael Genet wrote She Hate Me. It won four awards (best director, score, screenplay, and breakthrough performance by Anthony Mackie) from the Foundation for the Advancement of African Americans in Film's (FAAAF) Black Reel Award show, which recognizes African American achievement in film and television. This award underscores the argument by a host of Black cultural critics who assert that the pervasiveness of Lee's impoverished representations of Black female sexuality may result in an uncritical response to the female question among the Black masses and Black, mainstream press.

[42] Forty Acres and a Mule is the name of Lee's production company.

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