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RACISM'S TANGIBLE LIFELINE: 20TH CENTURY MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE CONTINUITY OF THE WHITE SUPREMACY MYTH

by

Deborah-Eve Lombard

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of
Arts degree in African American World Studies
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

July 1999

Thesis Supervisor: Visiting Assistant Professor Donnarae MacCann

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Deborah-Eve Lombard

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts
degree in African American World Studies at the July 1999 graduation.

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Peter Nazareth

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William Welburn

To Lynette Curry Lombard and Christine Beuoy for their love and support

He who conceals his disease cannot expect to be cured.

Attributed to Ethiopian Proverbial Wisdom

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INTRODUCTION

As the possibilities of the 21st century appear on the horizon, it seems an appropriate time to look back on and critically analyze the past century which also began with reflection and expectations. Although many people in the United States are sure that "as far as race relations go, things have gotten better," a closer look at examples of material and popular culture from either end of the 20th century illustrates that "things have stayed very much the same." Even though the original "scientific" ideas that constructed our understanding of race are now presented in more subtle forms, their legacy continues to perpetuate the divisions that preserve inequality in our society. In *Discourse and Discrimination,* Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson and Teun A. van Dijk discuss the shift from earlier blatant and overt forms of racism which might seem to imply that "things have gotten better." Their research identifies the "subtle, covert, and possibly more insidious brand of racism [that surfaced and created] what has been referred to as America's 'second reconstruction.' The 'new racism' began to emerge in the late 1970s [and] solidified in the Reagan era. It has taken the form of social and public policies, sanctioned by the courts and America's political elites."[1]The resulting budget cuts in public education, housing, medical care and other services that assist the poor ensure that black and Hispanic people remain the poorest Americans. Historically, African Americans consistently remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy, as some immigrants managed to rise to higher levels. Now, new immigration laws prevent "third world" minorities, and particularly "Hispanic" people from becoming a part of the "American Dream."

This more subtle and "new racism" is in reaction to and follows the "racial progress" of the heightened civil rights and black power movements during the 1960s and

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[1] Smitherman-Donaldson, Geneva and Teun A. van Dyk, eds. *Discourse and Discrimination.* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988),13.

1970s when black Americans organized nationally and took to the streets to protest racism and oppression. African American's demands for political and social change pushed politicians to begin dismantling the obvious signs of racism. Laws that legislated segregation on the basis of race in education, housing, employment and suffrage were slowly repealed. The blatant images that also worked to maintain the status quo--images that were designed to ridicule and construct stereotypes of African Americans also seemed to slowly disappear. However, a closer look at contemporary material culture shows that the old images live through their descendants and are still very much with us. Like their earlier counterparts, printed advertisements, television commercials, children's books, popular movies, "scientific" films and exhibitions, and pictorial natural history magazines produced for Americans during the past one hundred years have continued to provide tangible evidence of white supremacist assumptions. These tangible materials are "consumed" at all age levels, and they are connected to broad-based intellectual constructs.

At the beginning of this century, the discipline of anthropology, the "science" of eugenics, and the ideas of social Darwinism continued to build on earlier assumptions and capture the imagination of many people. The relationship between these abstract arguments and concrete culture has maintained a perpetual and vicious cycle, even with a few sporadic doses of antidote. It is important to point out that the negative effect of the white supremacy myth impacts African Americans and Africans in very real ways, and that without social action the mere discussion of racism is ineffective. This paper aims to provide history and context to convince readers to take action and become more vigilant in critiquing the barrage of images and words that influence us every day. The first section provides a broad history of the complex development of idea and belief systems that form the foundation of racist ideology. In the following two sections, I discuss the background of some stereotypes of Africans and African Americans. The stereotypes of African Americans that are used to symbolically reconstruct segregation and maintain

popular opinion have their origins in the images and ideas that first deemed Africans inferior. These ideas are disseminated through images and technologies that allow information to double backwards and forwards, and even form new versions of itself. As in earlier eras, stereotypes of Africans and African Americans are often not separated, and they actually target all "black people." They exist to confirm white people's sense of superiority. I will compare and analyze selected examples to illustrate how 20th century racist ideas have been recycled through popular culture. This thesis originally included files of actual television commercials taped during 1998 and 1999, but due to copyright considerations they have been omitted. The commercials are described in the following sections of this thesis. When viewed in their entirety with sound, image and text, the commercials present unsettling and vivid illustrations of how early theories of race are as prevalent in advertising as they were earlier.

Since the definition of "race" and the accepted meanings of racism have shifted through time along with the implications for Africans and African Americans, it is necessary to establish my own position. My definition of "racism" includes the attitudes and ideas of individuals; the systems of thought that sustain ideas; institutional practices, and all behavior that prescribes negative and fixed roles or opportunity to groups of people on the grounds of physical attributes. This predetermination of inferior and deficient cultures, morals, and intellectual aptitudes based on the color of skin perpetuates the oppression and exploitation of people excluded from the privileged group of Americans allowed to consider themselves "white."

My analysis is situated in the context of the late 20th century, and is a reaction to the popular contemporary position that Americans live in a color blind society. Sadly, even a simple investigation provides too many examples to address all of them in this paper. In *Black on White: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture,* Jan Nederveen Pieterse, discusses the complicated history of representing the "other" in the western world. This concept of "other" requires distancing the "self" from the targeted

person or persons who are excluded. Images that portray the "other" are a key element in the campaign to ensure a hierarchy of power. They work to create psychological distance as well as physical, economic, and cultural exclusion. Stereotypes are an integral part of the segregation process and end up controlling popular attitudes when people come to believe that they are based on reality. Pieterse writes, "Probably the most important feature of representations of otherness is the role they play in establishing and maintaining social inequality."[2] Pieterse identifies two main categories of stereotypes which present people as either outcasts or competitors. Outcasts are considered absolutely beyond posing any possible threat and are therefore often believed to be invisible and irrelevant. Competitors on the other hand are seen as threatening and dangerous to the established hierarchy. This is easily illustrated when material culture is examined from time periods when African Americans' status seemed to be changing. Many examples show that significantly more derogatory images were produced and circulated.

> [S]tereotyping *increased* in the wake of black emancipation. Prior to emancipation, slavery itself ensured that blacks were excluded from competition; after emancipation blacks were 'niggered' in order to 'ghettoize' them, to safeguard their being excluded from competition by cultural and discursive, or if necessary physical means (KKK intimidation, rioting, lynching).[3]

The relationship between power and image is also apparent when representations of Africans in United States material culture are examined. Africans are portrayed as passive and savage; unable to help themselves and too uncivilized to figure things out. Images of "starving masses" flood the media, but there is never any discussion or explanation about how colonization created these situations.

> Postcolonial imagery presents the Third World as spectacle. The exploitation of the non-western world for western sensory

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[2] Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture.* (London, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 234.

[3] Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture.* (London, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 235.

> gratification, a practice begun in nineteenth-century art, has been extended and refined in the media culture of the twentieth century...Next to Bacardi-rum beaches, images of suffering, starvation and bloodshed circulate through the media networks of the [world].[4]

In this paradigm, the western world is believed normal and advanced in contrast to the rest of the "abnormal" world. For most Americans, words and images of "tribes," "warriors," vast geographic spaces with wild animals, Tarzan, primates, and a few half clothed black people fill the "jungle" landscape of a distant, different, horrific and exotic "Africa." Undergraduate students in my *Literatures of the African Peoples* classes, repeatedly list "wild animals, hungry babies, jungle, monkeys, war and unclothed people" as the most common images of "Africa." Reading African literature challenges their assumptions when they discover that "they" are a lot like "us." Most students remark that they didn't know that many Africans wear "American clothes," live in actual houses, and "aren't that different to us."

The stalwart power of ideas that promote racial inferiority is apparent in the long-standing co-dependency between ideology, images and collective consciousness. In the United States the ceiling of racist ideology is supported by pillars of tangible and real objects that ensure that the distinct racism that emerged after Reconstruction holds fast. Although, from our vantage point, white supremacist ideas may seem more blatant at the beginning of the century, the interests of whites are still being served as the century concludes. The subtle display of white supremacist images and concepts is as ever present as earlier, and contrary to popular belief, white supremacist thought remains a serious issue as we approach the 21st century.

The white supremacy myth has an intellectual base that is difficult to dismantle because its very premise requires controlling the attitudes of all participants, and its history and construction is complicated. Because the myth consistently reappears in the

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[4] Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture.* (London, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 235.

shifting forms of popular education and entertainment, its specifics remain largely unrecognized and obscured. This flexible theory manages to quietly permeate the collective consciousness of Americans, simultaneously offer the collective racist psyche recycled forms of sustenance, and spawn mutations as all Americans are attacked by the virus. Not only are African Americans and Africans the real and symbolic victims in this cycle, but the very essence of what it means to be "American" is affected. The attitudes of generations of white Americans support nationalist preconceptions, interests, and accepted values that only exist because they are constructed in contrast to the stereotypes that are believed to represent black people. The white supremacy myth is an often unacknowledged element in the "American Creed"--an element that is camouflaged by the mutable transformation of its specifics--specifics which are not periodically identified, analyzed, and discussed in public forums. At the same time, little academic attention is given to "trivial" popular culture and so the intrinsic white supremacy myth is allowed to breed. Many academic disciplines continue to promote the "American Creed" and "American Dream" which at the same time feed the national preoccupation with white supremacy. This preoccupation attacks African Americans and Africans (read black people) daily, invades American public policy and diminishes our collective quality of life.

In the United States, ideas of white supremacy have fueled a long history of violence against African Americans and Africans that continues as we approach the year 2000. The images on turn-of-the-last-century trade cards mirror the attitudes of white Americans as they trivialized very real violence. "Humorous" images allowed white people and their children, to vicariously enjoy violence and feel more powerful than grown black men who were consistently humiliated, chased, maimed, and depicted as targets. Many early trade cards also depict black men as "monkeys in suits." They ridicule the preposterous idea that a creature so low on the evolutionary scale could consider himself civilized. The following trade card tells the story of a "monkey in a suit"

who has fallen through the ice on Christmas Day. He has dared to "skate on thin ice," fallen through, and is about to become dinner for a shark and other large fish. As a final insult, a lobster in the bottom right corner is ready to pinch him. The message is that "creatures" who presume to be human, will not measure up and ultimately fall prey to the realities of life. This black man is a "fish out of water," and his attempt to act like white folks has sunk him into "deep" trouble. (Throughout this document click on the image caption to go to more information.)

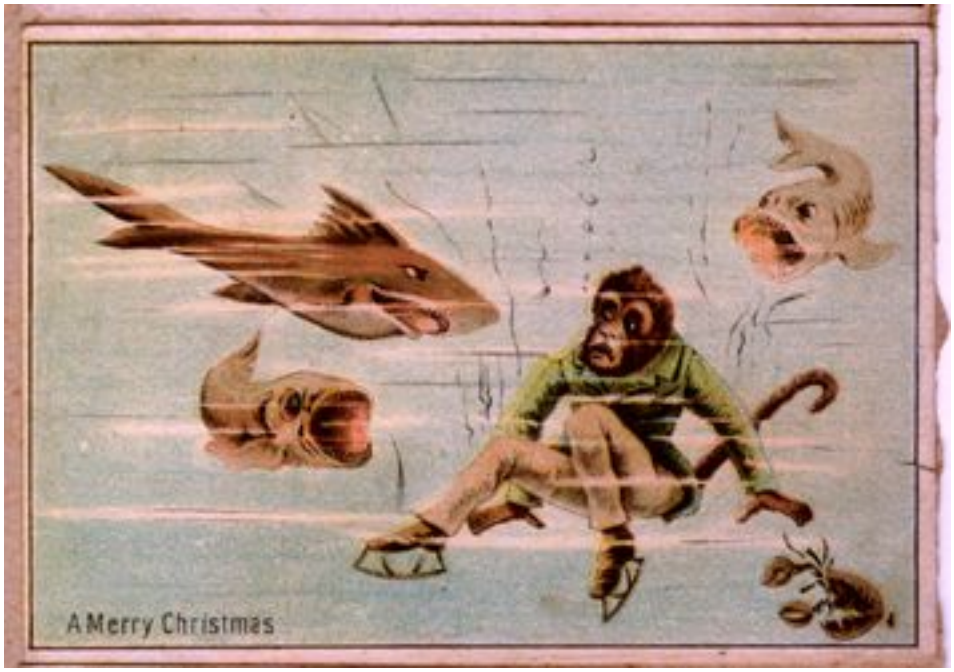

Figure 1 A Merry Christmas.

Between 1882 and 1968 there were more than 3,446 lynchings in the United States.[5] These violent acts were not limited to southern states and were carried out in the

[5] Low, W. Augustus & Virgil A. Clift, eds. *Encyclopedia of Black America*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 541-42. Although the Tuskegee Institute, Alabama, carefully recorded these statistics, the number should be raised. Many African Americans simply disappeared, and relatives or friends kept silent for fear of retaliation. Bodies turned up that could not be identified as other than black and showed signs of lynching and murder. All African Americans were

name of "justice" by local authorities who usually participated. The federal government repeatedly turned a blind eye to the situations. In the time period just before World War I erupted in order to "make the world safe for democracy," African Americans were robbed as tenant farmers and sharecroppers, denied their right to vote, and systematically attacked and insulted under the laws of Jim Crow. They were also barred from many jobs, crowded into filthy ghettos, and thrown into jails and onto chain gangs for minor offenses. The psychological torment of possible murder by mobs placed African Americans in a constant state of stress.[6] Today, even as we celebrate the people, events and triumphs of the civil rights struggle during the 1960s, black people still come under attack.

In February 1999, the United States Post Office issued the 22nd stamp in its *Black Heritage Series* which features Malcolm X, "one of the most influential leaders of the century."[7] On February 4, 1999 during the same "Black History Month," Amadou Diallo, an unarmed, 22-year-old immigrant from Guinea was killed by four New City police officers who fired a total of 41 rounds and hit him 19 times. Amadou Diallo's name was added to a very long national list of questionable police killings. On February 24, John King, a member of an organized white supremacist group was convicted of murder after he chained James Byrd Jr. (a black man) to a pickup truck and dragged him until his body was torn to pieces. While many white Americans deplored this violent physical attack, police brutality and symbolic lynching or attacks, are not considered serious. For

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victims as the threat of lynching was held over them, including the near victims who escaped death.

[6] African Americans' response to this violent environment includes forming neighborhood associations and settlement houses. The establishment of several organizations such as The Niagra Movement (1905), The NAACP (1909), The Urban League (1911), and branches of the YMCA and YWCA mark resistance to Jim Crow and terrorism.

[7] USA Philatelic, *The Official Source for Stamp Enthusiasts.* (Spring 1999, Vol 4, No 1), 5.

example, in Payson, Arizona, while conversing about the new Malcolm X stamp, Jill Fortuny reports that a postal employee retorted that they didn't have "them" in stock since nobody around there would want "them."[8] Jokes, innuendoes, images and coded information in examples of popular culture are still not considered dangerous because they are seen as abstract and inanimate. Just as at the beginning of this century, a small image of a black man can still provoke and arouse the need for symbolic and violent rejection. Like early 20th century children's books and counting rhymes, the line between systematically eliminating little "niggers" and "indians" one by one, is blurred between image and real people. The man convicted of murdering James Byrd Jr. has the image of a lynched black man tattooed into his arm. An image he ironically maintains protected him from black gangs in prison.

The collective "whitewashing" of American history allows generations of white Americans to invert historical events and label black men as the violent perpetrators. Through images, ideas, and public policy the victims of white supremacist violence are the very people who are stereotyped as the "enemy." In the 1990s politicians continue to stir up the fear of crime, "gangs," and violent black men in their bids to secure votes. They dredge up old associations of violent black men who were often depicted with knives and razors. Early images like the following trade card advertising "The Celebrated Queen Razor" played on this stereotype. On the card, graphic violence is couched as "humor" since the black man is dumb enough to chop his own head off. His bloody, severed head shown lying on the ground does not pose a threat so that the white viewer feels safe and can concentrate on the gleaming knife. Even violence that results in death is sanctioned when the victim is black.

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[8] Jill Fortuny, telephone interview with Deborah-Eve Lombard, March 24, 1999.

Figure 2 The Knife shut up...front.

Figure 3 The Knife shut up...back.

Numerous images like the one on the front of the card exist alongside images that work to show that white people are treated differently. Although the back of the previous trade card also shows a strap and razor, the tools do not maim the "queen" figure who sniffs a flower. The image on the front of the card relies on collective myths to create its "humor." Myths that support the idea that black men are not human and stupid, and likely to fall victim to their own violence.

Now, at a time when the violent crime rate is dropping and less than one third of the people in prison have been convicted of violent crimes, popular opinion supports the lucrative $35-billion-a-year prison industry which removes "bad people" from the rest of

society.[9] Since roughly half of the people in prison are African American and the general public does not see this as a crisis, it is evident that stereotypes have dire consequences for real people. Decades of violence against African Americans continue as most Americans believe that "bad people" cannot be rehabilitated.

During the last decade of the 20th century the world wide web provides new life and instant access to ideas of white male supremacy. Slick images present ideas and recruit members with sophisticated technological gimmicks and images. Earlier in the century hate groups relied on pamphlets and meetings to spread their ideology--now their message is instantaneously available in the comfort and anonymity of American homes. A special report by Dennis McCafferty in *USA Weekend,* March 26-28, 1999, raises the incendiary potential of such sites in reference to the murders of James Byrd, Mathew Shepard and others. Mathew Shepard was allegedly beaten to death because he was homosexual. A world wide web site that depicts Shepard's head bouncing through flames, now keeps track of how many days he has spent in hell. The Southern Poverty Law Center has identified approximately 250 hate sites on the world wide web.[10] A leader associated with the World Church of the Creator, says that "his site lets him target a more educated crowd than ever: students from Harvard, the University of California, and other major universities.[11]

> *Click*-- and you're on the Aryan 3 site. You're playing *Sieg Heil!* As an Aryan hero with a magic sword and a mission to thwart scientists creating a 'cross-bred' race.*Click*-- and another Aryan site appears featuring racist cartoons, including one contending that black ministers are behind their own church burnings. That site endorses violence against "whiggers," white people who have embraced black culture...[T]he World Church of the Creator's Kid page, the Web equivalent of the gingerbread house in the story of

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[9] Available from http://www.egs@philly.infi.net; INTERNET.

[10] *SPLC Report.* (March 1999, Volume 29, Number 1),1-3.

[11] Dennis McCafferty, "www.hate.comes to your home: Is it free speech? Or does it incite violence?" (*USA Weekend*, March 26-28, 1999), 7.

> Hansel and Gretel: [is] sweetly inviting outside, ominous within. The site has posted an online crossword puzzle, coloring pages and other treats, all serving as a primer on the white-preservationist movement.[12]

Joe Roy, director of the Intelligence Project at the Southern Poverty Law Center, says that, "academia has played an important part in giving hate groups the legitimacy they seek."[13] In 1998, the thirty-three chapters of the Council of Conservative Citizens were added to the Centers' hate group list of over 500 neo-nazi and Ku Klux Klan organizations in the United States. "Race scientists, contending that blacks are inherently less intelligent than whites and more prone to crime, have fueled extremist groups that use the scientists' work to justify their hatred and demeaning of non-whites."[14] Over the fourth of July weekend, 1999, a member of the World Church of the Creator, Benjamin Nathaniel Smith, gunned down African American, Jewish, and Korean people in a shooting spree that covered three states. Smith then killed himself.

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[12] Dennis McCafferty, "www.hate.comes to your home: Is it free speech? Or does it incite violence?" (*USA Weekend*, March 26-28, 1999),6.

[13] *SPLC Report.*(March 1999, Volume 29, Number 1), 1-3.

[14] *SPLC Report.*(March 1999, Volume 29, Number 1), 1-3.

SECTION ONE

INSTIGATING IDEAS

Conceptions of black people (African Americans and Africans) have shifted and mutated, and at the same time have been influenced by the social, intellectual and political currents that affect all American's experiences. Although there was/is the tendency to equate racism with the South, there is more than enough evidence to show that Northerners share the same beliefs, even if they are imagined more passive in enforcing them. These conceptions of race are not monolithic, but are bound together by certain widely accepted assumptions and belief systems. Extant material and popular culture reflect public reactions to history and legislation, and illustrate that both the Northern and Southern states have foundations of white supremacy. George Fredrickson presents this history of white supremacy in *The Black Image in the White Mind*, and discusses the complex record of legislation, personalities, and theories in the 19th and early 20th centuries that form the foundations for our current constructions of race. To understand our contemporary notions it is necessary to examine the entangled history of ideas, images, and events and discuss how they influence attitudes.

Although examples of racism exist in earlier times, the way that we think about race and specifically how we assume that there are in fact "races" of humans, is peculiar to more recent times. Up until the eighteenth century, people rarely mentioned "race." However, the paradigm for modern racism was established and cemented sometime in the eighteenth century as ideas of Western rationalism, or scientific positivism, became more dominant. Supremacist ideologies worked hand in hand with violence to legitimize the colonial control and subjugation of people. The foundational assumptions of western rationality include the desire to reduce cultural difference to biological difference, and the belief that western thought reigns supreme over all others. These assumptions did not merely evolve over time but were calculated political decisions. For many centuries in the

western world, the idea that there could possibly be more than one race was considered heresy, and the Christian church ruled that all people were the descendants of Adam and Eve. This changed as modern scientific disciplines emerged in the eighteenth century, and men began to record, organize and rationalize information about the natural world--a world driven by industrialization and colonization.

Eighteenth century thinkers in France, Germany, and England worked to explain the physical and cultural differences between humans. Linnaeus, Blumenbach, Cuvier, Buffon, Montesquieu, Pinkerton, Gibbon, Hume and others devised a wide range of theories that laid the foundations for modern science. For example, Linnaeus devised a classification system that divided humans into four categories and aimed to distinguish true species from their variations. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, believed that a combination of climate and other factors had produced five varieties of humans. He used colors to define his categories--white, yellow, black, red, and brown. The categories are often still accepted today as Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, and Malay. Later, Blumenbach added even more subdivisions. It is important to note that Blumenbach coined the word "Caucasian" to describe the white race, and that he based his theory on only one skull in his collection--a skull from the Caucasian mountain region of Russia.[15] Blumenbach and Buffon are considered the founders of the science of anthropology. As an authority in natural history George Louis Leclerc Buffon declared that excessive heat had made Negroes black. He believed that the white race was the norm and that different races could be explained as exotic variants. Although each of these scholars disagreed on how many human races existed, they were united in their desire to develop methods to show race difference. Even when faced with evidence that overwhelmingly questioned their flawed models, they refused to consider the possibility

[15] Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 37-38.

that there is no hierarchy of race. Obviously, they did not feel that it was necessary to prove what they already knew to be true!

Baron Montesquieu, David Hume, John Pinkerton, and Edward Gibbon debated the differences and capacities among the "races" of white men. Earlier, men like the Count de Boulainvilliers had developed racist theories to explain the special privilege of nobles. De Boulainvilliers believed that the Franks or *Germani*, a group of blonde, brave, chaste, and self-governing people had triumphed over the Gallo-Romans in their conquest of Gaul. His theory purported that the nobility in France descended from the *Germani* and the commoners from the Gall-Romans. An even earlier thinker, Tacitus (ca. 55-120 AD) was often quoted to support these ideas of Teutonic racism--and their position that a class or nation could claim superiority.[16] British historians created their own versions of Teutonic racism which placed Anglo-Saxons at the top of the hierarchy. As the British elite enjoyed the benefits of colonization during the reign of Queen Victoria, they convinced themselves that their good fortune was the result of their genes. In *The Saxons in England*, John Mitchell Kemble wrote, "The Englishman has inherited the noblest portion of his being from the Anglo-Saxons. In spite of every influence, we bear a remarkable resemblance to our forefathers."[17]

These theories were not only debated in Europe. In the United States, the rationales allowed for Africans to be kidnapped, imported, purchased and owned as unpaid laborers. The fundamental irony of this history is that at exactly the same time Americans were constructing and fabricating the "American Dream" or "American Creed." In her collection of essays, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and The Literary*

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[16] Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 84.

[17] Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 88.

Imagination,(1992), Toni Morrison writes about how significant the idea of "Other" (and specifically Africans on American soil) is to the very essence of being American:

> As a metaphor for transacting the whole process of Americanization, while burying its particular racial ingredients, this Africanist presence may be something the United States cannot do without. Deep within the word "American" is its association with race. To identify someone as a South African is to say very little we need the adjective "white" or "black" or "coloured" to make our meaning clear. In this country it is quite the reverse. American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen. Americans did not have a profligate, predatory nobility from which to wrest an identity of national virtue while continuing to covet aristocratic license and luxury. The American nation negotiated both its disdain and its envy...through a self-reflexive contemplation of a fabricated, mythological Africanism."[18]

For white Americans these ideas were/are subconsciously ingrained as "Our way of life," "Our national heritage," and "Our free choice." Now, the people whose skins allow them to live as "Americans" are easily lulled into justifying inequality as a natural state of affairs. In 1998, a television commercial pushed the idea that some people have a right to more than others, implying that the American Dream is not for everyone. In the commercial, a white female teenager faces the camera and talks directly to her invisible audience. She states that she wants to have a lot of things, that she supports Capitalism--that because she understands that she has to work hard to get things, she deserves a nice house:

> I'm not going to front *(nervous giggle)*...
> you know...I'm not going to be like...
> everyone should make the same money...everyone should have the same house...
> 'cause it's not...I don't think that's true...
> I think if you work really hard to make your money,...
> then you should be entitled to certain...extras, you know, like a nice house...
> and like nice clothes, and nice jewelry and...

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[18] Morrison, Tony. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination.* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 47.

> You got to *work*...for what you want...
> @levi.com[19]

The teenagers' words and emphasis on the word "work," imply that people who do not have a lot of possessions and a nice house are lazy. The commercial is for Levi jeans which we barely see in the commercial, and we only realize what is being sold at the end because a logo appears on the screen--along with the words, "What's True." Although the commercial might seem insignificant at first, the message is familiar. The "American Dream" is for a select group of people--people who work hard and are privy to inside information. Even with a cursory knowledge of late 19th century and early 20th century popular advertising, movie and literary images--the stereotypes of African Americans and "others" as lazy and responsible for their own plight are easy to recall. Since white Americans and the "American Dream" do not acknowledge the fact that African American families have struggled to recover from generations of slavery, popular images perpetually ridicule the lower economic status of black Americans.

The trade card below sums up this attitude. The black man is portrayed as lazy and only interested in drinking. He is depicted in the stereotypical ragged clothing, a worn straw hat (as opposed to a real gentleman's hat), and with bare feet. The "absorbing subject" that consumes his attention is the alcohol that he is "stealing" by drinking through a straw and a hole in the barrel. Or, is the black man the "subject" that actually "absorbs" what is not rightfully his? The image printed on the card illustrates the pun of the text, and is designed to reinforce white viewers' presumptions of superiority. Ideas of superiority combined with actual power allow white Americans to instantly read the image and pass judgement, as well as presume the collective right to "the goods." The black man represents "all black men" and the barrel represents "all barrels." For white people, the information on the card is coded to evoke the deep seated fear of African Americans taking what "belongs" to whites. It should be noted that if the situation

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[19] Levi Strauss television commercial taped during 1998.

portrayed on the card is interpreted with historical context, African American labor actually filled the barrel. (Throughout this document click on the image caption to go to more information.)

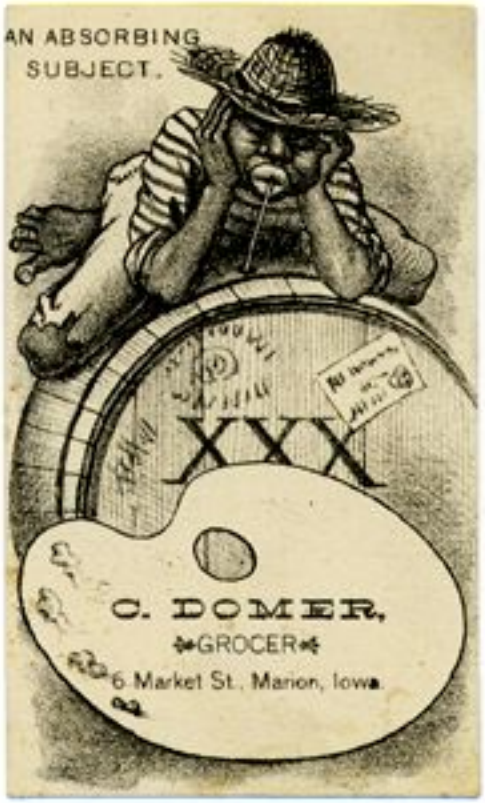

Figure 4 An Absorbing Subject.

Belief in the "racial inferiority" of African Americans supported the ridicule that made Euro Americans feel safe about their higher status. Later, these images incorporated the new language of the "urban crisis." In her article "Urban Others: The Black Underclass in American Film," Liam Kennedy writes:

> Public discourse on race and poverty in the United States has always constructed terms of description which work to attribute meanings and value to the living experiences of the urban poor.

> Few terms are more powerfully attributive than that of the 'underclass' it generates images of criminals, delinquents, crack addicts, and unwed mothers, and of an urban scene in which crime, drugs, unemployment, welfare dependency, indiscriminate violence, and educational failure are norms of existence. More insidiously it is a term of racial categorization signifying "blackness."[20]

Throughout the 20th century and especially since the mid-1860s, stereotypical images of black urban Americans have continued to circulate and construct white fear and fantasy. Current statistics show that non-white people in the United States are more likely to be poor and not own property.[21] In the Levi's commercial, the same belief system used to exclude Africans/black immigrant underclass and African Americans/black urban underclass is still at work, even though the target seems to have been broadened. If the context of economic statistics is added to the commercial, the target is redefined to specifically become African Americans and "others."

Like its ancestors--minstrel shows, *Amos 'n Andy*, *Sanford and Son*, and *Good Times* to name a few--a 1999 television program, *The PJs,* continues the tradition of finding humor in the situation of poor black Americans. ("PJs" is short for "the projects.") The show's episodes revolve around the character of Thurgood Stubbs, the unappreciated superintendent of the Hilton-Jacobs Projects. The animated cast of primarily black characters includes the usual list of stereotypes. Thurgood Stubbs has a tough exterior that masks how much he cares. "He may not be able to put his feelings into words, but he

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[20] Kennedy, Liam. "Urban Others: The Black Underclass in American Film." (*European Contributions to American Studies.* Vol.37, 1996), 289.

[21] *The U. S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1998* (118th edition.) Washington, DC, 1998 reports:

- in 1997 the number of black people who rented their homes was 52.9%
- in 1997 the number of white people owned their homes was 69.2%
- in 1997 the number of black people living below the poverty level was 28.3%
- in 1997 the number of white people living below the poverty level was 11.2%

sure can plunge a toilet."[22] Muriel, Thurgood's patient wife, is the calming voice of reason and since she doesn't have any children of her own, she acts as a surrogate mother to 10-year-old Calvin. The Thurgood character does nothing to dispel old beliefs about black men. He reinforces the idea that black men cannot express refined emotions and are only good for doing jobs that nobody else wants to do. The Muriel character reinforces images of longsuffering Mammies who put their needs before all others. A philosophical crackhead, and the complaining and combative Mrs. Avery who eats dog food are also part of *The PJs* cast. Other characters include "Haiti Lady" the resident voodoo expert who knows a curse for every occasion, and "Juicy" whose parents who are too obese to leave their apartment and presumably go to work. They make their son wear a sign asking people not to feed him as though he is an animal in the zoo. This subliminally reinforces the idea that Juicy (read all black children) is animal-like and well fed, an old stereotype of African American children. The image is even more disturbing when the history of how black people have been measured, labeled, and displayed is acknowledged. Real images of slaves at auction, photographs of lynchings with labeled bodies, and the accounts of black people who were paraded in zoos and at the circus cannot be forgotten.

The problem with *The PJs* is that none of the characters are balanced by characters that are not stereotypes. Like other ghettoes imagined by Hollywood, the characters clown around in their impoverished neighborhood. *The PJs'* website reinforces the show's commitment to the idea that poor, black Americans are content with their lot in life: "But for all the trials and tribulations the Hilton-Jacobs 'family' faces, they never lose their strong sense of community. They may not have a lot living in the projects, but they always have each other."[23] *The PJs* show allows more fortunate Americans to

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[22] Available at http://www.fox.com/pjs2/show.htm; INTERNET.

[23] Available at http://www.fox.com/pjs2/show.htm; INTERNET.

continue to imagine "happy, smiling darkeys" who laugh their way through their misery and who are only too happy to serve as the subjects for humor.

Figure 5 Compliments of the Domestic Sewing Machine Co.

Even when African Americans are portrayed at work, the implication is that they are not to be taken seriously. The fact that Thurgood Stubbs is a hard-working superintendent is conveniently down played so that stereotypes are not challenged. The salesman in the preceding trade card is met by smiling and happy customers, but the "humor" revolves around the image of the bumbling black man in a shoddy suit. Even though the man is obviously working, the goat pulling at his coat tails puts him in his place. A place that does not allow for the salesman to be taken seriously, or to look successful and independent in his cast-off clothing.

Racialist thinking in the United States crystallized in the 19th century because the institution of slavery was hotly debated and challenged by the Abolitionists. African

Americans ("blacks") were considered a central fact in the conflict that almost divided the Union.[24] After the Civil War, Euro Americans dug in their heels and fiercely tried to maintain the status quo. The justifications for slavery were reinvented to address the changing place of African Americans in United States society and ensure that black people remained disenfranchised. The imagined threat of recently freed slaves destroying the "American way of life" was symbolically controlled through images that ridiculed and belittled black people, as well as legislation and Jim Crow laws that restricted real African Americans' lives. People in the north lost interest in protecting African American rights and ignored the situation. By 1910 virtually every southern state had found ways to eliminate African Americans from voting. In order to maintain the existing social and economic structures, contemporary social and scientific thought breathed new life into and provided credibility to familiar explanations for inequality. By the beginning of the 20th century most Americans had come to accept "blacks" as a permanent but inferior segment of the population. As Progressivism and imperialism dominated the nation's thinking, attitudes of benevolent colonialism were applied to the "race question." This allowed liberals to express concern about the predicament of Southern "blacks" while at the same time ignoring the realities of the Southern policies of disenfranchisement and segregation.

The following trade card is inscribed with the words, "Election day (his first vote)," and ridicules the idea of African American men as voters. The image is designed to evoke laughter at the concept of people so low on the evolutionary scale--monkeys a.k.a the "missing link"--actually thinking that they have the right to be human. This message becomes the common denominator in trade card after trade card as well as in other depictions, and together they serve as a warning. Images like these were and are

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[24] Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 322.

created for white Americans. The "humor" only exists from their perspective and its presumed privilege. This paper does not attempt to fully discuss how Africans or African Americans interpret and are affected by the barrage of derogatory images that surround us. Rather, it is an attempt to address the people who knowingly and unknowingly sanction stereotypes and slurs. The very real and different experience of African Americans is usually negated by people who refuse to acknowledge that "things have stayed very much the same." Since the humiliation of decades of derogatory images has not been experienced by white Americans, it is often dismissed. Serious and valid objections are shrugged off as mere attempts to be "Politically Correct." It is worth noting that the definition of "Politically Correct, or PC," and how this term is popularly used has shifted from its original meaning. As recently as May 20, 1999, Microsoft Office "found" itself in a position where it was necessary to post a message on the world wide web to explain a search function in Microsoft Clip Gallery. When developing the software, nobody at Microsoft challenged the fact that when the words "monkey bars" are entered as key words, the results include the image of an African American couple posing on playground equipment?[25]

[25] Available at http://cgl.microsoft.com/clipgallerylive/pss/; INTERNET.

Figure 6 Election Day (His First Vote.)

Anthropology, Eugenics and Social Darwinism

Twentieth century material culture provides many examples of how the abstract arguments of anthropology, the "science" of eugenics, and the ideas of social Darwinism are ingrained in our popular imagination. These theories contributed to the complicated and entangled history of racism, and hold particularly steadfast positions in the popular ideas and attitudes that have been held onto throughout the nineteen hundreds. As with other theories that define western ideology, many scholars in Europe and the United States debated and argued over them. Even though distinct versions of these "sciences" were created in Europe and the United States, they were based on the same rhetoric. Scholars on both sides of the Atlantic had knowledge of the ideas from the other side.

In the 18th century, amateurs, including missionaries, travelers, and antiquarians considered themselves anthropologists. Many relied on their status of "Gentleman" as their only professional qualification as they measured and defined the people of the

world. As members of the ruling class, the gentlemen members of numerous anthropological societies debated whether "the races" descended from one or many species. The first anthropologists studied race in terms of the antiquity of man or class relations. They were not threatened by the "race" of non-Europeans because they were distant natives on the other side of the globe; their immediate subordinates were the poor "race" at home. As more and more Victorians traveled or conducted business abroad, they unsystematically reconstructed languages, collected artifacts and human skeletons, and recorded "native customs." They convinced themselves that these pursuits intrinsically proved the superiority of European people and civilization. Even the general public enthusiastically pondered the question of the "missing link," and many Africans and other colonized people were taken from their homes to be studied and put on display. The contrast between European and Non-European values and customs cemented the idea of an hierarchy of human races which became and remained the foundation for modern scientific anthropology in the 19th and 20th centuries.

These "scientists" generally fell into two categories, and the debate between the two stratified groups of polygenists and monogenists waged incessantly into the 19th century. Even though the two sides fervently argued their positions, they actually agreed that "the Negro" was innately inferior, and neither environment nor education would change "him." As communicated in the following trade card, even in a suit, a black man is a poor imitation of a white "gentleman." Like a wild animal, this "monkey in a suit" is unable to control his animal instincts. He drinks *too* much and ends up sleeping in a tree with his alcohol still in his pocket. He is at ease in nature, and spontaneously wraps his tail around a branch so that he doesn't fall out. This printed character is the "missing link," a "monkey in a suit" who just doesn't have what it takes to truly be human. This card is part of a series which includes "The Election" card and works to establish the monkey to be a black man. The image of the "wise old owl" adds legitimacy to the visual information and its claims. Obviously the monkey/black man is trying very hard to move

up in the hierarchy and become human. Even though he is fast asleep, he clings to the quintessential symbol of a turn-of-the-last-century gentleman--his hat--which he also seems about to lose.

Figure 7 Too Much "New Years."

Monogenists felt their argument was strengthened by the fact that it did not contradict Biblical explanations, but still relegated all non-white people to the bottom of the hierarchy. Their interpretations of the Bible named people of African descent as the cursed descendents of Noah's son Ham--their only concession was that these generations might be converted.[26] At first the monogenists held sway in the United States because of their religious arguments. Toward the end of the 19th century, polygenists dominated the discourse. In order to explain the apparently marked differences between groups of

[26] Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 5.

humans they developed theories that supported the idea of multiple groups of people, unrelated to each other and different both internally and externally. Anthropologists categorized people as groups who descended from pairs of people with distinct peculiarities and who had adapted to climatic conditions depending on their geographic location. Eugenicists arranged people in a hierarchy of species with Europeans at the top. Social Darwinism justified inequality since "less evolved" groups of people were considered inherently inferior and uncivilized. The monogenists supported theories that established that all people descended from one single pair, although they had difficulty explaining the increasingly evident reality of human diversity. Once Darwin called creation into question, and linked all people to a common ancestor, the polygenists' argument lost some substance, but both polygenists and monogenists speculated and explained the variety of human beings. Their debate wove its way into popular thinking and people marveled at the fundamental likeness or difference of each other. Like the "scientists," the public debated whether human differences were due to changing environment or to immutable heredity. People pondered whether difference was fixed or dynamic, relative or absolute, and inconsequential or hierarchical. Much like Americans now glean information from concise evening news broadcasts and magazines, many families at the turn of the last century gleaned their information from newspapers, family and natural history magazines, and advertising.

Darwin's *On the Origin of Species,* with its subtitle, "The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life," was published in 1859. Its implications were enticing for people who already believed that higher forms evolved due to the struggle between varieties and species and resulted in a challenge that would conveniently eliminate elements considered "unfit." In 1871 when Darwin wrote *The Descent of Man,* there was little established fossil evidence to support the hypothesis of man's evolution from anthropoid forms. George Stocking discusses how Darwin borrowed the idea of a hierarchy of human races from anthropology and social evolutionary theories to construct

his theory.[27] Many social scientists, including E. B. Taylor, Franklin Giddings, and Lester F. Ward, supported pseudoscientific theories that aimed to prove that man had risen to the height of present civilization from lowly beginnings--and by "man" they meant "whites." These theories placed wealthy white men at the pinnacle of all possible knowledge, morals and religion. By the end of the nineteenth century, numerous anthropological, ethnological and linguistic studies had been produced to confirm the ideas of white supremacy.

Since the publication of the *Origin of Species* did not eliminate polygenist theory, but actually provided ammunition for old beliefs, for a long time many anthropologists remained polygenists. Some social scientists tried to use Darwinian theory to solve the controversy between monogenists and polygenists. They argued that although "man" descended from the same root, it was so far back in time that natural selection had in fact produced completely different strains of people. The forces of imperialism fed the polygenist point of view and the gap between the supposed "civilized white man" and "savage black man" widened. Many social and biological scientists in the United States incorporated polygenist arguments into their positions, especially when it came to the racial issue of miscegenation. In their research, anthropologists and eugenicists interchanged examples of "traits" inherited both socially or physically to bolster their arguments.

Scholars who embraced the idea of natural selection continued to use it to interpret the conflict between individual members of society, between poor and rich people, between classes in society, between different nations, and ultimately between races. This conflict was seen as the natural process that produced superior men, nations, and "races." Herbert Spencer became the primary supporter of these ideas of social

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[27] Stocking, George W. *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology.* (New York: Free Press, 1968), 113.

Darwinism as he coined the language of "the struggle for existence" and "the survival of the fittest."

In the United States the discipline of anthropology looked to Germany for intellectual guidance, since the British disregarded anything American. New York City was the most important intellectual center. Columbia University, the American Museum of Natural History and the Eugenics Society were the three institutions recognized professionally. Even when the anthropologist, Franz Boaz, and his supporters contradicted the ideas of the eugenicists, many leaders embraced their theory, without actually calling themselves "eugenicists." Very few scholars tried to expose the dubious foundations of eugenics, and although a large number did not proclaim themselves to be eugenicists, many prominent physicians, educators, scientists and politicians were privately convinced by its rhetoric. For example, Theodore Roosevelt was a staunch supporter of eugenics, and from 1905 to 1910 eugenics was the second most common subject discussed in general circulation magazines in the United States.[28] The eugenicists were the most inflexible supporters of the hierarchical ladder of race and many of them were closely associated with the racist Galton Society.

Sir Francis Galton was Charles Darwin's cousin. He began to develop modern statistical methods in England in the 1880s, and ended up influencing psychology, biology and anthropology instead. As a prominent Victorian scientist, Galton devoted a lot of time to the study of heredity and based his conclusions on information collected by measuring people in his anthropometric laboratory. He was determined to prove that the plight of England's disenfranchised citizens was encoded in their biology. He accused social agencies of watering down the superior genius of the upper class by providing assistance to the poor and sick. Galton popularized the term "eugenics" which he

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[28] Philip R. Reilly, MD, JD, *The Gene Letter*, Vol.1, Issue 3, November 1996, available at http://www.geneletter.org/1196/eugenics.html; INTERNET.

borrowed from the Greek for "good birth."[29] In 1883 he presented a practical, "scientific" solution based on his ideas. A solution that promoted childbearing only in marriages between "talented" persons and opposed childbearing among the chronically ill, poor, and mentally ill:

> I have no patience with the hypothesis occasionally expressed, and often implied, especially in tales written to teach children to be good, that babies are born pretty much alike, and that the sole agencies in creating difference between boy and boy, and man and man are steady application and moral effort. It is in the most unqualified manner that I object to pretensions of natural equality. The experiences of the nursery, the school, the university, and of professional careers, are a chain of proof to the contrary.[30]

In the United States, late 19th century social scientists drew on Galton's theories as they studied any group of people with the assumption that they had an innate racial and hereditary character. They decided this was especially important in thinking about the "Negro problem" and later the rising numbers of new immigrants. Heredity was considered much more important than environment in creating society. It was widely accepted that groups of humans (races) represented a step on the evolutionary ladder and that the white race or a small portion of it would always be on top. As Americans looked to science to provide indisputable proof of their "rational and modern" society, more and more social reformers decried the cost of social programs and argued that large families were a danger to society. Studies were conducted to prove that large families produced more members who ended up in brothels, poor houses, prisons and institutions for the mentally retarded.[31] The studies cemented the idea in the folklore and collective

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[29] Philip R. Reilly, MD, JD, *The Gene Letter,* Vol.1, Issue 3, November 1996, available at http://www.geneletter.org/1196/eugenics.html; INTERNET.

[30] Philip R. Reilly, MD, JD, *The Gene Letter,* Vol.1, Issue 3, November 1996, available at http://www.geneletter.org/1196/eugenics.html; INTERNET

[31] Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 155.

consciousness of many Americans that large (extended) families were inherently responsible for their poverty and problems.

Dr. Samuel George Morton led the crusade for the polygenist point of view, and helped to make the theory of polygenisis and permanent inferiority respectable. Morton was a prominent physician and natural history researcher with a background in paleontology which probably fueled his early interest in collecting the skulls of animals and men. Later, Morton focused on collecting human crania, and since Morton knew so many scientists, he amassed the largest collection in the world at the time. These hundreds of skulls came to be known as the "American Golgotha" in reference to the biblical hill where Jesus Christ was crucified. Morton measured his skull collection and published his findings which ranked the races of the world in relation to their skull size and therefore "superiority." His research "proved" that whites had the biggest brains, "blacks" the smallest, and that American Indians were somewhere in the middle.[32] As more academics worked to arrange the races into a hierarchy, craniometry became more popular in the mid-nineteenth century. Earlier in the century, Franz Joseph Gall invented the popular science of phrenology. Phrenology determined the size of the brain, and character of a subject by the external shape of a person's head. It came to be widely accepted that brain size corresponded with intelligence. Morton used a variety of methods to "unscientifically" measure the brain cavities of the skulls in his collection. The materials he poured into the skulls included bird seed and lead shot which all can be manipulated to establish volume. From this "research" he characterized the innate differences between the races in terms of mental ability and temperament. Morton and

[32] Dubow, Saul. *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa.* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 59.

others "proved" that "Negroes were 'joyous, flexible, and indolent,' representing the 'lowest grade' of the races."[33]

Morton also believed that mulattos, or the children of "Negroes and whites," could not easily bear children. Linnaeus had established the test of a species as the ability to produce fertile offspring. Morton used his own research to argue that since "half-breeds" are the offspring of two different species, they therefore could not propagate indefinitely.

The polygenists were supported by the famous Swiss naturalist, Louis Agassiz, who immigrated to the United States. Agassiz supported the idea that there had been a series of creations that resulted in different species. Conveniently, his distribution of these species reinforced the boundaries of colonial expansion. Although Agassiz maintained that he had no political agenda and that all species were created by the grand plan of one deity, his personal views were less objective. In a letter to his mother, he described the repulsion he felt when he first interacted with "Negro waiters" in Pennsylvania. He describes how he wanted to leave the room in disgust when he saw the physical differences between "Negroes" and himself. Agassiz was convinced that "Negroes" were a different species because of the skin color, lips, dense hair and limb shape of the black people who served him in Philadelphia.[34]

At the end of this century, evolution is still very much a part of our daily discourse, and is definitely a part of American collective consciousness. References to Darwin, evolution, and the "missing link" turn up in examples of political commentary, advertising, and even animated children's cartoons. A popular television cartoon for children, "The Wild Thornberrys," presents the adventures of a family as they travel

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[33] Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 60.

[34] Gossett, Thomas F. *Race: The History of an Idea in America.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 60.

around the world filming a wilderness show. Members of the family include a talking monkey named Darwin, and a babbling child from Borneo who almost gets sent off to a university to be studied as "the missing link."

A 1999 advertisement for Nike running shoes combines text with the sepia colored image of a running, male human body with a goat's head. Secondary text advertises that the new shoe has "traction pads based on goat's hoof (really)." Other text is organized around the largest sentence, "A New Species." Now, running shoes, or the ability to purchase them, can make you super human. Evolution is as much a commodity for creating a hierarchy as it was at the beginning of the century. (Throughout this document click on the image caption to go to more information.)

> IT IS HIGH TIME FOR
>
> A New Species.
>
> No longer will we slip and trip and wallow in the mud like the lower animals.
>
> We will steal from Nature's best runners, and adapt--
>
> And go up to the mountains, up to the scary places, and run.
>
> *Evolution is a surprise a day.*
>
> www.nike-alphaproject.com

Figure 8 Nike advertisement.

During the early 20th century, white Americans used Darwin's explanations to justify their bid to maintain control of politics and the economy. The implications of race hierarchy affected non-white people at home and abroad. From 1899 to 1902 the United States violently annexed the Philippines and fought the war against "racially different" Filipinos. The domination of Native Americans had long been celebrated in many forms in the United States. Just as at earlier exhibitions, the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in

St. Louis, 1904, presented a visual and "real" way of illustrating a race hierarchy to the "masses." Filipino, African, Native American, and other dominated peoples were displayed and paraded daily in the Anthropology Village. The rhetoric of "Manifest Destiny" and the ideas of social Darwinism were preached throughout the United States by intellectuals, and reinforced in the myriad forms of popular culture. In the United States, the powerful shouldered "the White Man's Burden," and the implicit "responsibility" to civilize Native Americans, Cubans, Filipinos, Puerto Ricans and all "others." A long list of objects and products provided images and words to reinforce the superiority of white people--books for children, movies, household decorations, advertising, edible products, toys, museums, natural history magazines, public entertainment.

As white Americans struggled over which groups of people would be granted privilege in society, laws, scientific debates and popular culture defined the attitudes of most Americans. Segregation reinforced the social hierarchy and images and stereotypes were incorporated into the "normal" way of life for white Americans. In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, Fredrickson provides a synthesis of American racial opinions from after the 1830s until the early years of this century:

> To make certain that the debates and shifts of opinion are seen in proper perspective, we need only enumerate the basic white supremacist propositions in a form likely to have been acceptable to almost all shades of white opinion--Northern and Southern, Negrophobe and "paternalist"--after the 1830s. Widespread, almost universal, agreement existed on the following points:

Blacks are physically, intellectually, and temperamentally *different* from whites.

Blacks are also *inferior* to whites in at least some of the fundamental qualities wherein the races differ, especially intelligence and in the temperamental basis of enterprise or initiative.

Such differences and differentials are either permanent or subject to change only by a very slow process of development or evolution.

Because of these permanent or deep-seated differences, miscegenation, especially in the form of intermarriage, is to be discouraged (to put it as mildly as possible), because the crossing of such diverse types leads either to short-lived and unprolific breed or to a type that even if permanent is inferior to the whites in those innate qualities giving Caucasian civilization its progressive and creative characteristics.

Racial prejudice or antipathy is a natural and inevitable white response to blacks when the latter are free from legalized subordination and aspiring to equal status. Its power is such that it will not in the foreseeable future permit blacks to attain full equality, unless one believes, like some abolitionists, in the impending triumph of a millenarian Christianity capable of obliterating all sense of divisive human differences.

It follows from the above propositions that a biracial equalitarian (or "integrated") society is either completely impossible, now and forever, or can be achieved only in some remote and almost inconceivable future. For all practical purposes the destiny of the blacks in America is either continued subordination--slavery or some form of caste discrimination--or their elimination as an element of the population.[35]

The following sections of this paper provide specific examples of how ideas about race, Africans, and African Americans have been preserved throughout the 20th century. As at the beginning of the century, success in the United States is still overwhelmingly reserved for European immigrants and their descendants. At century's end it is only acceptable to consider the most extreme and overt actions and individuals as "racist." The study of history and the tangible material record of white supremacist ideas in the United States, provides proof that the blinders necessary to ensure racism, are still working very effectively and affect all Americans. If "things have really gotten better," Americans

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[35] Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 321.

should be eager to seriously evaluate the influence of ideas that construct our very understanding of what is believed to be reality.

While some of the most insidious racist rhetoric is now not acceptable in public, it is not unusual to see images, hear arguments, or read theories that expound on the differences between "blacks and whites." For example, the "superior athletic abilities of "blacks"," is often discussed, researched and assumed. This position is often viewed as a token of respect but is actually a way of maintaining the idea that black and white people are inherently different. Since black athletes are not regarded in the same light as corporate leaders, there is also the implication that they are fundamentally inferior to whites in at least some of the "qualities wherein the races differ, especially intelligence and in the temperamental basis of enterprise or initiative."[36] As white Americans insist that we live in a color blind society, many of the same Americans are convinced that an "equalitarian (or "integrated") society is either completely impossible, now and forever, or can be achieved only in some remote and almost inconceivable future."[37] Contemporary popular belief defends the status quo as the natural state of humans and the inevitable response to "difference." Honest and critical interpretation of late twentieth century material and popular culture in the United States illustrates that Americans have not genuinely altered the 'common sense' of the majority: whites still reject intermarriage, oppose affirmative action as 'reverse racism,' and distinguish between 'good' (middle-class) and 'bad' poor "blacks".[38] Most Americans may be physically moving into the next

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[36] Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 321.

[37] Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 321.

[38] Samuel Farber "Racism over Three Decades" (*Against the Current* 26, May-June, 1990), 31, quoted in San Juan, *Racial Formations Critical Transformations: Articulations of Power in Ethnic and Racial Studies in the United States.* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1992), 3.

century but they are firmly holding onto beliefs from the past, and material culture continues to feed the old belief systems. The deep roots of racism are often hidden and entwined in our consciousness and identifying them is the first step in eliminating them.

To organize this paper, I have separated the next sections into *Imagining Africans,* and *Inventing African Americans.* However, in our national consciousness I do not believe that these two groups of people remain distinct. The specific stereotypes for each group are fluid and allow for many new combinations when they are relegated to the common denominator of "black people." We use new words for the labels, but our ideas are still black and white. Many of my undergraduate students find it very difficult to use the terms African and African American correctly. For instance, they often write papers describing the experience of African Americans in South Africa when they are talking about black South Africans.

An image created for a contemporary American Heart Association brochure on "High Blood Pressure in African Americans" illustrates this confusion. Photographs of a smiling older black man; young African Americans reading, skating, and playing with a baby; and a young child thinking have been collaged into the shape of the African continent.

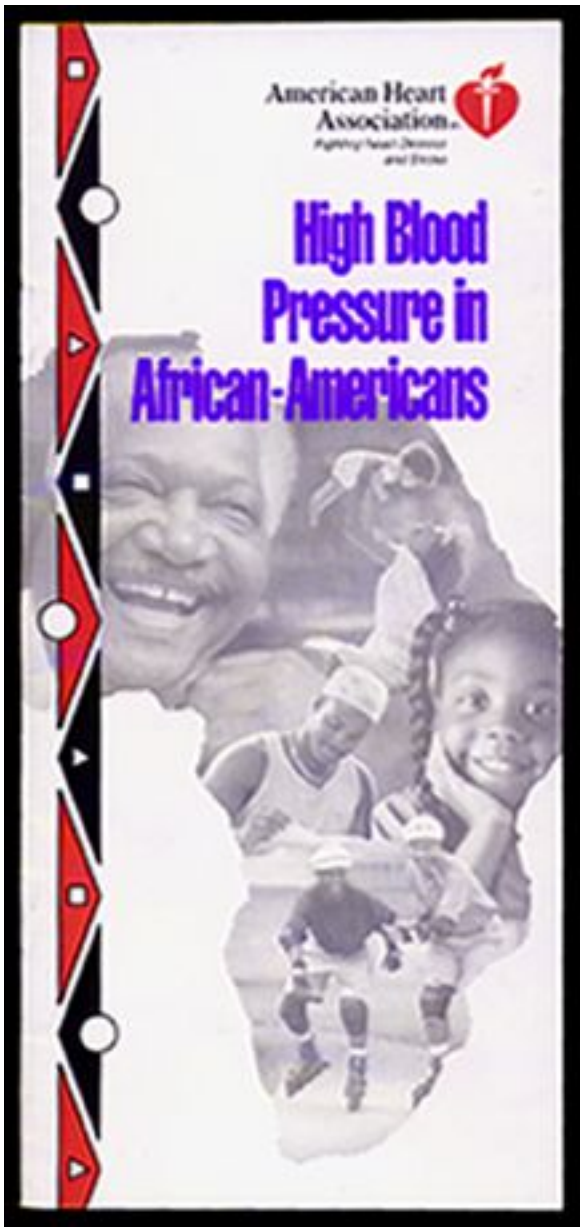

Figure 9 American Heart Association brochure.

While many African Americans do celebrate their African heritage, this image implies that a dark skin makes a person African which can be further understood to mean "not American." The brochure does not employ the image or shape of the continental United States often used in advertising, and a stylized border of geometric "African"

shapes completes the layout. This image is not only problematic since it expatriates African Americans to a geographic location other than the North American continent, but the context implies that a black skin biologically raises the risk for high blood pressure. No mention is made of the role that economic status plays in securing health care, or that existing in a racist society is extremely stressful when you are not white.

> Whether you are black or white, high blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart attack, stroke (brain attack) and kidney failure. But when compared to whites, blacks have a 1.8 greater rate of fatal stroke, 1.5 greater rate of heart disease deaths and 5 times greater rate of kidney failure.[39]

[39] American Heart Association brochure. Copyright 1995.

SECTION TWO

IMAGINING AFRICANS: INVISIBLE OR SAVAGE?

Since the seventeenth century, images of Africa have been distorted by Europeans. Although most Americans have never visited, nor will ever visit any place on the continent of Africa, an image of "Africa" exists in their minds. Americans' knowledge of this imagined place is not based on actual information but rather on images and information constructed by western news media and other popular sources. The media is not the only place that Americans learn about Africa, but it is a place where information is supposed to be factual and correct. School textbooks, picture books for young readers, movies, television programs and commercials, missionaries and relief organizations, scientific magazines and the news media provide the lore that perpetuates the myths. Vicarious travel allows Americans to visit and construct "Africa" as long as they have the proper accoutrements and protection from the "wilds."

The upscale, Spring 1997 catalog or *Owner's Manual No. 47b* for The J. Peterman Company prominently features a pith helmet and binoculars on the cover. Inside, page 75 offers clothing, accessories and a book under the title "On Safari." Like the other objects offered for sale in the rest of the catalog, this page creates "context" for the merchandise and aims to sell through its elite and fantasy literary style. Africa is referred to as "our most spectacular land mass" and images of Victorian colonialists are recreated:

> A martini sipped under the upside-down stars remains the most satisfying artifact on the planet.
>
> Wildebeests still outnumber tourists.
>
> Those are cicadas and coughing lions just beyond the campfire.
>
> Your Hat. A sola topee, a.k.a pith helmet. Worn by chaps who perfer[sic] not to experience dizziness, nausea, 110 degree(F) fever brain damage...*(English Raj tip: Soak topee in water and hope for evaporative updraft.)
>
> Your binoculars. See those elephants wading into the Kilombero? Now they're walking along the bottom of the river, their trunks

> snorkeling about the water: No? Well, you need good compact binoculars. Try these. High-tech infrared and UV filtration for bright, crisp, indelible memories...
>
> Your shirt. How Bror Blisen might have fiddled with his safari jacket, if he'd thought of it. Remove belt, make it fit like a shirt, make it light, but keep the big pockets.
>
> The Safari Travel Shirt...for ease of movement...
>
> Your Compact Camera. Snafuproof auto operation lets you capture that 70-mph cheetah without checking light meters and adjusting lenses...
>
> Your Chair...
>
> The Gadabout...used by HRH, the Prince of Wales, and the British Army on maneuvers...
>
> Your Required Reading. Brilliantly written sourcebook of adventure. Historic photographs, maps, drawings. Things you never saw or knew about Isak, Ernest, Beryl, Denys, Dr. Livingstone, Ava, TR, Gable, Zanjueela, and our most spectacular land mass.
>
> Bartle Bull's *Safari*...[40]

The "Africa" created in the media and popular culture presents two scenarios. The first simultaneously offers images of unstable tribes ready to fight at any moment and passive, silent masses slowly starving in their uncivilized state. The other scenario presents the beauty of a large land mass teeming with fauna and covered with exotic flora. A paradise for the pleasure and entertainment of westerners, minus actual black people. A Tarzan or tarzan-like character, the white man whose superior civilization overcame his rearing by apes, often exists in the uninhabited space. A contemporary television commercial for a margarine spread, reinvents the original Tarzan and his love interest, Jane. Even though the commercial seems to be actually set in South America since there is a toucan in the middle of the foliage, the character who evolves from wild man to human, evokes the idea of Tarzan and therefore "Africa." The image and language

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[40] "I Can't Believe It's Not Butter" television commercial taped in 1999.

of the woman coming "home to the jungle," revives the images and attitudes of Victorian explorers or missionaries who claimed areas of Africa as their own.

> She was coming home to the jungle, and to their wild, untamed love...for butter.
>
> Cut down by cholesterol until--
>
> *(Fabio swings in as Tarzan)*
>
> "Darling look what I've brought back!"
>
> "I can't believe it's not butter!"
>
> It's the premier spread flavored with real sweet cream buttermilk for a fresh butter taste but without the cholesterol
>
> *(Woman and Fabio appear in evening dress.)*
>
> "How civilized."
>
> I can't believe it's not butter!"
>
> The taste you love without cholesterol.[41]

The first sentence in the commercial sets the scene by contrasting the idea of "home" with the words, "jungle," wild," and "untamed." The language of "Africa" is as exotic and distant as the images. Cholesterol has interrupted this western fantasy within an exotic jungle place. When the tarzan-like character, played by the blonde French Fabio, swings in on a vine he is wearing an animal skin. The "premier" spread transforms the explorer and "ape man" into a "civilized" couple in evening dress. Like the Tarzans of the movies, Fabio is easily transformed and since he is white this does not seem absurd. There are no real Africans in the story or in this commercial, although monkeys do chatter in the background. The usual argument is that the story of Tarzan is pure fantasy, but this position purposely obscures the need to evaluate what we are trying to escape. Realistically, the tarzan-like character and Tarzan for that matter, should have trouble wearing western clothing after being raised by apes and usually wearing animal skins.

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[41] J. Peterman & Co. "On Safari," *Owners' Manual No. 47b* (Spring 1997), 75.

They should in fact look like "monkeys in suits." An early trade card makes full use of this white supremacist idea of the difference between black and white men. It depicts two black men in evening dress with the title, "The Shades of Night." Their transformation is presented as absurd. The unwritten punch line is in the previously conditioned knowledge that clothes do not make the status of a black man. The implication is that, "You can dress a black man in a suit...but he's still a black man." (Throughout this document click on the image caption to go to more information.)

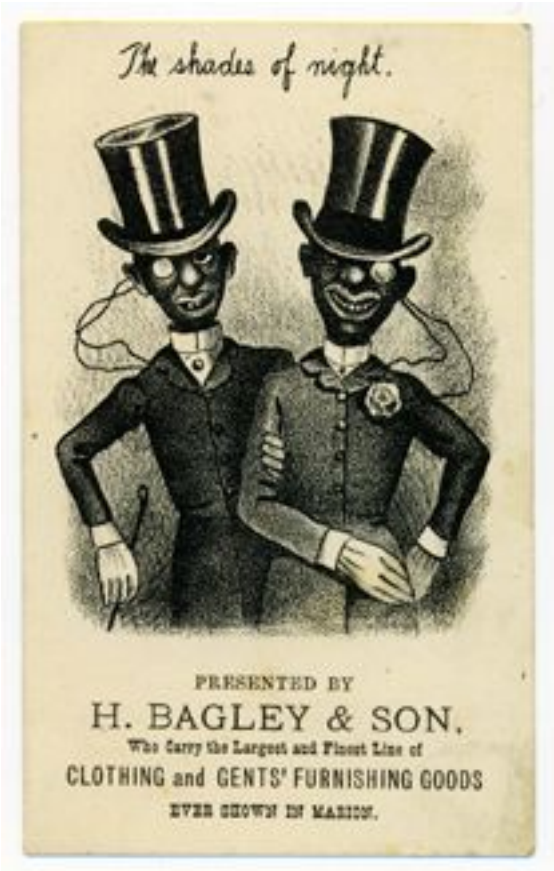

Figure 10 The Shades of Night.

Images that present Africans as barely distinguishable from animals abound both now and earlier. Surely Tarzan would have been saved and raised by Africans? Or, does the story illustrate that there is no difference between black humans and animals? As in the following commercial from 1999, the implication in both is that black people are less human than white people, and more like animals.

A television commercial shown during the 1999 Super Bowl presents a barefoot Kenyan (African) marathon runner who is tracked by four white men driving an all terrain vehicle or Humvee. When the men in the "search and rescue" team find and catch up to the runner, they tranquilizes him as though he is wild game. The runner collapses and the *Just For Feet* team tags him with shoes. As the runner regains consciousness, he looks down at his feet and screams when he sees that he is wearing shoes. He is "obviously" not smart enough to remove the athletic shoes and so tries to shake them off (like an animal) as he continues running. The commercial contains all the elements of a safari, beginning with the field guide with human track prints, the lions and elephants along the empty trail, and white men chasing the prey. The messages in the commercial are not easy to decipher. Since *Just for Feet,* aims to "serve and protect" it is not clear who is being served or protected. Are the Kenyan's feet being protected against his will? Surely he could get his own shoes? Are the race times of white runners protected when the fast Kenyan is slowed down by the shoes? Although most viewers would not process this information consciously, the fact that the runner is dumb enough to think that he can outrun white Americans is apparent. The "humor" relies on projecting the African as the "other." An other, who unlike "us" is a foreigner to shoes. Overtones of paternalism and ridicule ensure that the American viewer does not see the Kenyan as an equal or human.

The 30 second spot ran during the third quarter as an estimated 130 million viewers watched. Most advertisers paid an average of 1.6 million dollars for the 30 seconds. *Just for Feet,* a retailer of sneakers ran their commercial for the first time. In a January 28, 1999 article, *The New York Times* announced the line up of commercials. The

Just for Feet spot is described as a "humorous spot" designed to generate interest from captive viewers. "Super Bowl advertising takes on a life of its own," said Clinton Pollard, executive vice president for marketing at the association in Denver, primarily because, for a change, "people are paying close attention to the commercials...That way, your message can strike home in ways that it might not during regular programming."[42]

After the previous commercial aired, Harold Ruttenburg, chairman and chief executive of the Birmingham, Alabama, *Just for Feet*, said that the ad would not be shown again because of criticism over how the runner is treated. He denied that the ad was racist and said that the trackers included a Hispanic man and a black woman. After viewing this commercial repeatedly, I have yet to find the Hispanic man and black woman. Even if they were part of the ad it does not change the facts: an African is tracked down like an animal, drugged, and tricked into wearing shoes by four white men. The commercial makes full use of the popular consensus that biologically Kenyans (read black people or Africans) are more athletic, even without athletic shoes. It also condones drugging black men to make them comply.

In their article, "More Myth than History: American Culture and Representations of the Black Female's Athletic Ability," Patricia Vertinsky and Gwendolyn Captain discuss the 19th century ideas that continue to reinforce public opinion that black athletes excel due to their "jungle instincts" or "gifts of nature." They quote John Bale with Joe Sang's, *Kenyan Running,* which discusses the idea that "it is the penchant to generalize, based upon essences perceived as biological which defines "racism."'[43] Hard work and perseverance are seldom used to explain the athletic success of black people in

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[42] Stuart Elliott, "Trying to Score Big in SuperBowl." (*New York Times*, January 28, 1999) c1.

[43] Vertinsky, Patricia and Gwendolyn Captain. "More Myth than History: American Culture and Representation of the Black Female's Athletic Ability. *Journal of Sports History,* Fall 1998: (25:3) 538.

comparison to "Caucasians." Vertinsky and Captain cite John Hoberman who notes that he wrote *Darwin's Athletes,* in reaction to "the taboo that has wrapped the issue of racial athletic aptitude in a shroud of fear."[44] Hoberman argues that

> ...[T]he way we think about black athletic aptitude has been conditioned by a tradition of thinking about black human beings in a certain way, and that the mounting triumphs by black athletes serve up imagery and metaphors that reinforce racism.[45]

Images and information that "Africa" is a different, strange and scary place are also plentiful in children's books and cartoons. Disney's 1999 cartoon version of the Tarzan story depicts Africa as a place filled with animals. Tarzan is the only human (until others arrive from England) and their are no human Africans in the film. Like the early trade cards which were often collected and glued into scrapbooks by children, contemporary programs and images designed for children still allow young people to collect ideas about Africans. Africans are portrayed as helpless, animal-like and ignorant people who make silly decisions and don't know much. The contemporary cartoon, "The Wild Thornberrys," perpetuates stereotypes in an episode titled "Naimina Enkiyio." The character Eliza is persuaded to hunt lions with a group of young Masai. While she is learning to stalk and throw a spear, Eliza and the young male Juka become very competitive. Juka tells Eliza the story of the "naimina enkiyio"--the forbidden forest. The place where a little girl entered and never came out. (The action in this episode flips between what Eliza is doing and what her sister Debbie is up to. Debbie is trying to train Donnie, the creature from Borneo, to serve soda since the word for the day is "servant." She expects Donnie to hold a tray, hang a towel over his arm and speak with a British

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[44] Vertinsky, Patricia and Gwendolyn Captain. "More Myth than History: American Culture and Representation of the Black Female's Athletic Ability. *Journal of Sports History,* Fall 1998: (25:3) 538.

[45] Vertinsky, Patricia and Gwendolyn Captain. "More Myth than History: American Culture and Representation of the Black Female's Athletic Ability. *Journal of Sports History,* Fall 1998: (25:3) 538.

butler's accent. When Donnie refuses to cooperate, Debbie threatens to send him back to Borneo via special delivery. Marianne, the mother, says that Kenya has a law against sending live children through the mail. Debbie retorts, "You'd never let them throw your oldest daughter in an *African* prison.) Meanwhile, Eliza has entered the forest to prove how brave she is and Darwin goes with her. Darwin tries to stop her as they travel deeper and deeper into the forest.. Eliza says that she is determined to prove that she is braver, "And show that dumb Juka that [she's] just as brave as he is." Darwin retorts, "And just as dumb!"

Needless to say, all the horrors of Juka's stories come true. Eliza tries to rationalize each incident, the monster with claws, the huge mud pool that pulls people down and the giant warriors that eat children. As Eliza and Darwin are chased through the forest, melodramatic background music makes sure that the viewer anticipates trouble. Although most of the event can be explained by thorn bushes, a search party and bushbabies, Eliza is convinced that the little girl is real. The dialogue between Darwin and Eliza illustrates how even though almost everything can be explained, in the end they are in a foreign, and unexplainable place.

> *Darwin:* It's just like those kids told you. Everything they told you was here, *was* here...Eliza continues to explain away each situation, but events contradict her bravado.
>
> *Darwin:* And the giant warriors?
>
> *(Eliza tries to comfort Darwin)*
>
> *Eliza:* They weren't that tall. Darwin, let me tell you about legends...they're just these stupid stories that have been told for *so* long that people forget they're make-believe. My grandmother had a name for the flamingo in her yard. That didn't make it real.
>
> *Darwin:* But we're in Africa and the flamingoes *are* real.
>
> *(scary, eerie "haunted" organ music--bird cries--tribal drumming and chanting)*[46]

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46 *Wild Thornberrys* television show taped in 1999.

At the end of the story Juka says that Masai are excellent but it is good to be a Thornberry too. "You are Thornberry but we would like you to be Masai too." Everyone dances together as drums are played and people chant around the fire. The last frames of the cartoon zoom to a tree where the leaves form the eyes and face of the little African girl who disappeared in the forest. The uneasy ending cements Eliza's new understanding that strange things in Africa cannot be explained away like her grandmother's flamingoes. The viewer will not forget that "Africa" is a strange and scary place.

Click to see part of *The Wild Thornberrys* cartoon taped in 1999.

Figure 11 A Section of *The Wild Thornberrys* Cartoon.

Many images of Africa and Africans work to make African people insignificant or invisible. If African people are included they are relegated to less prominent positions just like the earlier image below. The following trade card uses a hippo to advertise vinegar--a hippo that takes center stage. Miniature Africans make the scene more exciting as they come up from behind wielding spears. But, the Africans are too minor to pay attention to.

Figure 12 Hippo Scrap.

Contemporary photo essays and fashion magazines use the landscape of "Africa" to contrast with fashion models, or evoke images and ideas of unlimited wildlife. In the July 1997 edition of *Town & Country* magazine, Susan Jennett Bleecker's article "Deep in the Heart of Africa" begins with:

> When I was a child, I became a devotee of a well-known grocery chain. Why? From there, once a week for sixteen weeks, the family shoppers would come home holding the latest volume of the *Golden Nature Encyclopedia*--free, with a minimum purchase. I read and reread all sixteen volumes for years, and even by the age of 11 I could spout statistics about every creature from the aye-aye to the zebra. But statistics don't tell you how another creature plays. Or smells. Or sounds. Or is like you. Or is very unlike you indeed. All that would have to wait another thirty years. All that would have to wait for Africa.[47]

Bleecker continues to describe her holiday to South Africa and its game reserves. She ponders whether she is safer in the violence of Johannesburg or the "bush," and seems to relive her childhood imagination rather than her actual experience. When Bleecker is awakened by sounds in the night, her fiance Lex tells her to come back to bed. She retorts, "But there's something out there!" "Of course there's something out there, says Lex, "We're in Africa. Remember? Slipping slowly back into bed, the newly resurrected 11-year-old remembers. Remembers pictures of the beast king devouring his prey. Remembers a child's sharp fear of the dark."[48] Although the photographs show that Bleecker's adventure is actually in the carefully constructed environment of a luxury game-park camp, with good food and many servants, she is unable to disassociate her childhood images with the reality around her. She is "seduced" by the things she finds part African, part post-modern and part pure fairy tale." Bleecker does not acknowledge the black South Africans in the photographs that accompany the article, and by default they become equal to the animals in her wildlife-filled, safari adventure. She marvels

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[47] Bleecker, Susan Jennett. *Town & Country* (July 1997), 66.

[48] Bleecker, Susan Jennett. *Town & Country* (July 1997), 66.

about the "grazing-style lunches delivered upon request by the staff," and the fantasy of how "'Tarzan and Jane' perfectly describes the atmosphere of Makalali's sleeping huts."[49]

A recent children's book ensures that like Susan Jennett Bleecker new generations of Americans will learn to name and "own" the "aye-aye through the zebra." *The Jungle ABC*, (1998) perpetuates stereotypes of Africa and Africans that make it seem like a much earlier publication. Images of the jungle, exotic flowers, animals, bananas, "cookie-cutter" people who are all the same, and fear for a dark and different place are encoded in its images and very short text. Each letter of the alphabet is illustrated to further elaborate on the following text:

The jungle way
by night
and day
is full of
cries
and amber
eyes
while Zulus
prance
in
snake-like dance
to
grooves hypnotic
quite
exotic

Figure 13 The Jungle ABC

[49] Bleecker, Susan Jennett. *Town & Country* (July 1997), 68.

SECTION THREE

INVENTING AFRICAN AMERICANS: CHILDREN, WOMEN AND MEN

Literally tens of thousands of objects were made in or with the image of African Americans and produced in the United States, Europe, and Asia from the 1840s to the late 1950s. Some were manufactured by large national companies, and others were made for regional or local markets. Many extant examples of these are found on the shelves of resale stores and flea markets where the residue of typical households often end up. The objects are almost completely derogatory, with exaggerated features used to "prove" that African Americans were not only different but inferior as well. Common household goods--advertising cards, postcards, housewares, toys, games, kitchen utensils and decorations--reinforced stereotypical notions about African Americans and worked to cement them in the collective consciousness of Euro Americans. The wear and tear on examples of collectibles that survive show that they were used constantly. Kenneth W. Goings argues that "using them in an everyday, familiar manner,...the user consciously and unconsciously accepted the stereotypes they presented. Such objects of material culture gave a physical, tangible reality to the idea of racial inferiority. They were the props that helped reinforce the distinct racist ideology that emerged after Reconstruction."[50]

> These caricatures and stereotypes were really intended as...prisons of image. Inside each desperately grinning "sambo" and each placid three hundred pound "mammy" lamp there is imprisoned a real person, someone we know. If you look hard at the collection and don't panic...you will begin to really see the eyes and then the hearts of these despised relatives of ours. Who have been forced to lock their spirits away from themselves and away from us...I see our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, captured and forced into images they did not devise, doing hard time for all of us. We

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[50] Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), iv.

> can liberate them by understanding this. And free ourselves. --
> Alice Walker (commenting in 1981 on the Janette Faulkner
> Collection of Stereotypes and Caricatures of Afro-Americans)[51]

My observations in this paper are based on vast collections of older "contemptible collectibles"[52] and printed ephemera, as well as current advertisements, commercials, and print materials. All the examples exist alongside others that portray white people in very different and positive ways. To understand how these images of African Americans work, it is important to understand that they are designed to contrast with images that portray "normal," refined white people. This is apparent in the contrasting images of children and their mothers that follow:

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[51] *Prisoners of Image: Ethnic and Gender Stereotypes.* (New York: Alternative Museum, 1989).

[52] Since hearing someone use this term to describe the derogatory objects created to represent black people, Patricia Turner has used it and I also choose to.

Figure 14 Clark's Mile-end Spool Cotton--Girl with Spoon.

Figure 15 Clark's Mile-end Spool Cotton--Girl with Glasses.

The images of the white girls on the trade cards above promote civility and accomplishment. The cards are designed to evoke sympathy with cute children who exist in comfortable, furnished and refined homes, unlike the child in the following series of cards. (Throughout this document click on the image caption to go to more information.)

Figure 16 His father would not know Him.

In the previous images, a black child is the center of ridicule and we are expected to laugh at "its" expense. The mother is depicted at work and the child's mishaps are the result of going to work with her. The humor relies on the assumption that the black child is not considered worthy of, nor should it expect, a gentle and safe environment. A white viewer "in the know" would find the mishaps hilarious especially since the black child becomes "white." Unlike the girls in the two previous cards and others that show white children, there is no attempt to define the black child's personality or even gender.

The next card depicts a well-dressed and precocious white child who shows concern for his little sibling. Everyone depicted on the card is focused on trying to create the best environment for the sick baby. The brand name of the yeast works to create the idea that the child is in good and "safe" hands, and it is actually in its mother's hands. The humor is at the expense of Dinah, the African American servant. The precocious child points out that, "Dinah says Warner's Safe Yeast is the best thing she knows of to raise him." The child is used to make the point that the black woman obviously does not

understand the subtleties of American English, is not as intelligent as a white child, and does not know much about raising children. These attitudes contradict the fact that many African American women were the primary care providers for many white children, and ran the master's house as well as their own homes.

Figure 17 Warner's Safe Yeast is the best thing she knows of to raise him.

Extensive scholarship chronicles the history of how black people are portrayed in the United States and the western world.[53] Since many of the objects and images that stereotype and ridicule Africans and African Americans have been saved and preserved, as well as reproduced for nostalgic reasons, they are not difficult to find. The late 19th and early 20th century examples of advertising cards illustrated in this paper were collected in two scrapbooks now housed in Special Collections at the University of Iowa Archives. While most trade cards were produced in major cities, they were distributed and collected by customers all over the United States--even in small towns like Marion and Cedar Falls, Iowa. Trade cards with copyright dates from the late 1880s were handed out for many years afterwards, glued into scrapbooks, and viewed repeatedly. Like the many examples in other archival collections, the scrapbook donated to the University of Iowa by Virginia Edwards was passed down from her grandmother who was born in Fontanelle, Iowa in 1878. The caricatured images of "Africa" and African Americans (black people) are designed to cement stereotypes. They make attitudes and misinformation "real" since they symbolically represent real people and were designed to be collected and owned. Some of the cards were created as a series and present "information" and "knowledge," much like contemporary educational cards do. Scenes of famous cities, world fairs, exotic animals, and people of the world co-exist with cards that ridicule and belittle.

The following cards rely on the same compositions and shapes of objects to place the children in a similar category. The idea that all the children are "below" the economic level and expectations of an invisible but superior white and wealthier viewer is the common denominator. Like other cards that depict poor white children, the humor relies

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[53] Goings' *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping,* Pieterse's *White on Black: Images of Blacks and Africans in Western Popular Culture,* and Turner's Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture, are good sources.

on knowledge of images of black children and watermelons. Many other images and objects showed African American children eating watermelon and this stereotype provides the set up for the joke in this series. The black child is depicted without shoes and with the usual piece of watermelon. Even though one of his hands is raised to defend himself from the large wasp about to strike, the child does not seem capable of protecting himself. Could the choice of insect be a conscious pun or a sub-conscious manifestation from the depths of the White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant mind? In the second card, and in order to ridicule the "poor white" child, the familiar shape of a slice of watermelon has been transformed into a slice of white bread. This child is in the process of escaping from a pig that presumably wants to steal his food. Unlike the black child, the white child is much more animated and seems likely to figure out how to hold on to his share. A third card (not shown) in this series presents a white female child with a bowl that repeats the shape of the watermelon and bread in the other two. Even though the female child is grouped with the other children there are subtle hints to her slightly higher place in the hierarchy. She wears shoes and unlike the other two, eats with a spoon rather than her hands.

Figure 18 Child with Melon.

Figure 19 Child with Bread.

Although a few of the trade cards, like the one above, ridicule "poor white trash," most of the images of Euro Americans present pale children, men and women engaged in serious and "civilized" activities. These cards provide stark contrast to the images of African Americans, Africans, Native Americans and Asians in these early forms of product commercials. Many of the "humorous" images do not relate to the commodities they advertise. Advertisers seem to have assumed that ridicule at the expense of non-white people would promote consumers to make purchases.

The following trade card is just one example which presents Chinese Americans as people who eat rats. The man is placed in the same category as the dog--they both eye the rat as a tasty morsel. Other trade cards, advertisements, and contemptible collectibles also attacked other non-white groups of people. To maintain the socially constructed position of white supremacy demands constant and calculated attack on any group that might one day pose a threat.

Figure 20 White Rats. Two minds with but single intent, two hearts that beat as one.

Printed stereotypes are often transformed to appear in the third dimension. The contemptible collectibles produced in the United States from the 1840s on and then later reproduced, were functional items that were used by the person who owned them. They were "ideal" African Americans because they sat quietly, deferentially, and happily, waiting to be put to work--or choked by pennies in the case of money banks. Although many African Americans have struggled to destroy the racial and gender stereotypes that link them to slavery and the past, their struggle is not over. The sheer number of examples of contemptible collectibles bears witness to the millions of people who learned from them. In his book, *Mammy and Uncle Mose,* Kenneth W. Goings discusses the mass-produced "jolly nigger" bank:

> [It]...may serve as a graphic representation of this whole era in the history of black collectibles from the 1880s to 1930s. The name itself is indicative of how African Americans were treated during the period. The "nigger" appellation given to products of the era, such as "Niggerhead Clams" (the clams, supposedly like their namesake, were hard as rocks, and apparently both could be opened if you hit them hard enough) and "Niggerhair Chewing Tobacco" (it was thick and tightly packed), shows just how demeaning everyday objects could be for African Americans.[54]

By 1880 African American men had "gained" citizenship and voting rights, but Euro Americans would not accept their new status. African Americans were continually reminded of their past slave status by the ever present images, jokes and innuendoes that continued to surface in popular culture. Generations later some of the most tenacious stereotypes that are kept alive are those that portray the black underclass. Since these stereotypes come to represent all black people in the minds of the white collective consciousness, all African Americans are denied the opportunity to escape them. It was/is much more comforting when constructing the White/American versus Black/American paradigm to think of "happy, smiling darkies" than a free people. These stereotypes are sometimes so entrenched that remarkably any American can fall prey to using them.

Even though material culture is often disregarded when social structure and social interaction is studied, looking at objects can provide a more complete picture. The contemptible collectibles that were mass produced from the 1840s to the 1950s, where later revived in the 1980s. They now command high prices as collectors fight over them. These especially distorted and grotesque images worked to shape the ideas of many Americans. African Americans were portrayed not only as subservient and powerless, but also with grossly distorted and caricatured features. "The most derogatory items date between [the] 1880s and 1930s. These articles depict exaggerated facial features and expressions and are painted bright primary colors. The faces later became more relaxed,

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[54] Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 20.

the colors a softer pastel..."[55] An article in the Tuesday, April 13, 1999 *Des Moines Register*, reports that the "Market for black collectibles is hot--and controversial. Many African-Americans have worked hard to eradicate the items, yet there is growing demand for them by collectors, many of them black."[56] The resurrection of these collectibles demonstrates the power of ideas, particularly racist ideas, to revive if given just a little nurturing.[57]

It is important to remember that, during the time that the production of contemptible collectibles was at its height, African Americans and Euro Americans lived legally separate lives. Most people lived in distinct neighborhoods, attended separate schools, worshipped at different churches, and did not mix as equals at public facilities. Since white Americans usually saw African Americans as servants at home or menial laborers at work, the stereotypes were never challenged. African American professionals and other members of the black middle class were made invisible by calculated stereotypes and segregation.

Contemptible collectibles became popular at specific points in American history and for very specific reasons. Objects made from the 1880s through the 1930s are some of the most racist and reflect what was happening politically in the United States. The retreat from Reconstruction, and the agreement to let the South handle its racial affairs as it saw fit, affirmed racist attitudes. Anyone who wanted to ridicule the newly freed African Americans felt authorized to do so. The sour grapes in the following trade card do not only describe the grapes used to make vinegar. The "punch line" relies on the

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[55] Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), xvii.

[56] *Des Moines Register*, April 13, 1999.

[57] Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1.

knowledge that African Americans felt betrayed after emancipation and the card's message is a counter-attack to black opinion.

Figure 21 Sour Grapes.

Technology fostered the ideas and arguments of the new consumer society of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As in earlier times pamphlets were published and speeches given. Along "with the simultaneous expansion of consumer society, racist notions could also be spread by the rapidly developing technology of the

"new advertising."[58] As the 20th century draws to its close, public culture and its messages are still driven by the momentum of technology, image, rhetoric and power.

After the Civil War, the nature of prejudice changed. Before the fighting, there had clearly been racism in the North, but the circumstances of African Americans were seen as a southern problem. When the South surrendered and the country decided to reunify, the newly freed African Americans became a national concern. People in the North as well as the South were open and receptive to racial propagandists. The anti-black sentiment that grew out of the war and Reconstruction era was used to establish African Americans as both inferior and as the source of most of the nation's problems. Physical slavery was replaced with white supremacist ideology that focused on proving racial inferiority and permeated the consciousness of white people in the United States.[59] Even though African Americans had been freed and had legally been made equal, they were still treated as "different" and inferior to Euro Americans and therefore inferior. The effects of this "ideological backlash" were blatant and quick. For generations African Americans had experienced violence--from their capture and removal from African soil, to the torture designed to break them, and then the lash of the master's whip during slavery--but the violence carried out in the South in this period became specifically deliberate and systematic.

The methodical torture of lynching and burnings in the late nineteenth century was performed for the benefit of spectators, and illustrates the degree to which many whites had come to think of black men and women as less than human. Although the actual violence may have been carried out by members of the "lower" classes of whites,

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[58] Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 7.

[59] Goings Goings, Kenneth W. *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping.* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 7.

the "upper" classes also participated. Jurors, judges, lawyers and enforcement officers also played their parts. They condoned the violence either actively or by their silence.[60]

White men who already viewed "their women" as possessions, believed that black men were after their "goods." They concocted stories and rationalized their behavior by spreading fear of the "threat of black men." White women were controlled since they lived in fear of being raped by bestial black men, and at the same time fantasized about the possibility. White cultural and religious attitudes at the time emphasized controlling animal-like or natural urges and sex was considered the great taboo. Many images rely on this tension to perpetuate the idea that black men are oversexed. The following trade card "x-ploits" the idea of an x-rated relationship. In the image, the black man serves the white mistress, and the text implies that he would be willing to do more.

[60] Litwack, Leon F. "Trouble in Mind: The Bicentennial and the Afro-American Experience." *Journal of American History* 74, no.2, September, 1987. 315-337. 326

Figure 22 To X-tract X-tasy from X-istence without X-travagance Drink McLauglins XXXX Coffee.

This exotic fantasy is still very much alive in contemporary popular culture, as a commercial for Uncle Ben's rice illustrates. In a commercial titled "Passion Lesson #1," thunder and lightening strike as a white couple cooks rice together. The female narrator says:

> "From now on every night would be filled with endless variety. Only Uncle Ben's could satisfy his appetite, and mine. Fifteen ways to serve some passion with Uncle Ben's. And you thought rice was boring. Stir up some passion."[61]

At the end of the commercial Uncle Ben's image on the rice box is forced to sanction the fantasy with a knowing wink. A wink that implies that the viewer is privy to the broader context of the commercial. Obviously rice is not considered an aphrodisiac, so why "serve some passion with Uncle Ben's" and why does Uncle Ben wink? The information in the commercial is packed into thirty seconds but rides on a long history of imagined relationships between white women and black men. Passion in stirred up when "Uncle Ben's" is added to the couples relationship and also by the inference that a black man is watching.

In yet another commercial, images, music and words are combined to perpetrate the fantasy. A woman's voice sings:

> Sweet dream tonight, I'm dreamin'...under the silvery moon...
> Sweet dream tonight, I'm...under the silvery moon...[62]

A man's voice is heard as a woman with a flowing, gauzy dress serves tea. The world, and especially the colonized world are represented by Arabic and South Asian architecture--reassembled in this dream world. It is no coincidence that the woman is serving tea along with another product of colonization, sugar. In the middle of the

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[61] Uncle Ben's Rice television commercial taped in 1999.

[62] Serta Mattress television commercial taped in 1999.

commercial sugar cubes are tossed like dice, and the whole commercial works to promise that "all" is not lost.

There is a place where telephones can go unanswered and it's perfectly acceptable to have tea with your high school sweetheart and Cornelius from Planet of the Apes. And you are cordially invited to visit each and every night by Serta. We make the world's best mattress.[63]

The message is that in a white woman's dreams she can have both the "all-American" male and the "monkey in the suit." It is "perfectly acceptable" to own up to and enjoy the fantasy as long as it remains a fantasy and doesn't creep into the "real" world.

Yet another commercial shows a white couple in a small row boat. A black man rows the boat up to an island from a large cruise boat which is visible in the distance. As they reach the shore, drums begin to pound and the couple jump out of the row boat and run through an area of large leaves (read jungle). The couple comes upon a group of "happy black people" dancing around a fire. Most of the people are black men and the commercial concludes with the silhouette of the couple kissing with a sunset in the background. As the commercial progresses, a woman's voice proclaims:

> "Folklore has it that the spices they cook with in the West Indies...are aphrodisiacs...As if in a place like this you need any help. Royal Caribbean. Like no vacation on earth."[64]

In image after image, African American men shuffle between being portrayed as passive "uncles," violent thugs, and virile beasts--sometimes all at the same time. Black men are usually portrayed as poor imitations of white men. The trade card below depicts a "monkey in a suit" who has been sent out to kill the goose and turkey for a Christmas feast. Whether this meal is for his own family or his employer is not clear but it can be

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[63] Serta Mattress television commercial taped in 1999.

[64] Royal Caribbean television commercial taped in 1999.

presumed that either way this character is not manly. Instead of killing the birds, the monkey puts down his axe (which he holds with his tail) and pets the animals. The supposed humor of the card relies on the understanding that a "real man" is higher in the hierarchy and superior to animals. A "real man" would not hesitate to kill the birds. The stereotype of black man as "killer" is preempted in the overriding desire to show him as inferior. The title of the card also works to exclude the "monkey in the suit" from being considered a normal man or human. The traditional, biased myth is that Thanksgiving is a holiday when "Americans" give thanks for their prosperity and usually ignores the perspective of the slaughtered turkey. Like the historic occasion Thanksgiving supposedly marks, a white perspective is presumed. The "monkey in the suit" is shown as not human enough to understand that the turkey is a lesser animal. A "real American" would know what to do with a turkey at Thanksgiving.

Figure 23 Thanksgiving Morning.

African American women are also continuously attacked. They are stereotyped as unselfish "mammies" or oversexed and disgusting versions of womanhood. They obviously do not take good care of their own children, preferring the children of their employers. Trade cards present images of black women who are not as feminine as white women, even though they might have some of the same clothing. Black women are presented as clumsy and ignorant. In many examples of popular culture they are invisible. A comparison of the following images of white women and black women illustrates the stark difference between how the two groups are imagined. These images also served to socialize and create context for the women who used them. White women are depicted as weak and fragile creatures who need to be treated with care. Black women are presented as grotesque and inferior versions of white women who can never measure up to their mistresses. As mentioned earlier in this paper, many of these trade cards were collected as a series. We can only imagine what ridicule the visual punch line of the "back view" of "Beauty on the Street--Front View" delivers. (Throughout this document click on the image caption to go to more information.)

The following trade card also presents an image of white women that is in stark contrast to the images of black women. One woman in this scenario is weak, trembling, and has a headache and palpitations. The other woman says that thanks to Carter's Iron Pills, she is now stronger. The weak woman is not ill but rather one of the women that Carter's Iron Pills are recommended for. The back of the card states that "Carter's Iron Pills for the blood, nerves and complexion...[are] recommend[ed] to every woman who is Weak, Nervous and Discouraged: particularly those who have Thin, Pale Lips, Cold Hands and Feet, and who are without Strength or Ambition." There is an emphasis on the fact that the pills will improve the quality of the blood.

Figure 24 Carter's Iron Pills for the Blood, Nerves and Complexion--front.

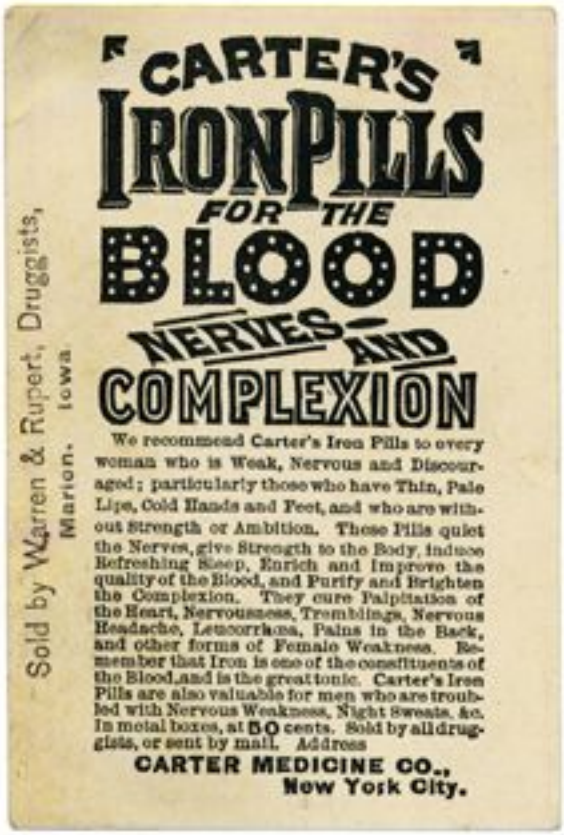

Figure 25 Carter's Iron Pills for the Blood, Nerves and Complexion--back.

Figure 26 The Blue Danube Waltz.

The implications of "The 'Blue Danube' Waltz" card are meshed in the longstanding debate between the "classical and superior" construction of western music versus the "primitive rhythms" of African music. The fact that the African American woman represents the non-European and would dare to think that she can dance the waltz is the set up for the ridicule. It is presumed that she can not represent all things refined and graceful, and that "her" music is inferior. This argument is still popular now. The rhetoric and "research" of *The Mozart Effect*, claims that classical music has life altering powers. The best-selling book, *The Mozart Effect* offers dramatic accounts of how doctors and other health care professionals, musicians, and shamans use music as an aid in healing anxiety, cancer, high blood pressure, chronic pain, dyslexia, and even mental illness. Students who sing or play an instrument have scored up to 51 points higher on

SAT's than the national average."[65] Of course, the only "classical" music that has these inherent and superior powers, is that of Northern Europeans. No research is cited to show that "non-classical" music has an opposite or detrimental effect. The superiority of "white music" is presumed.

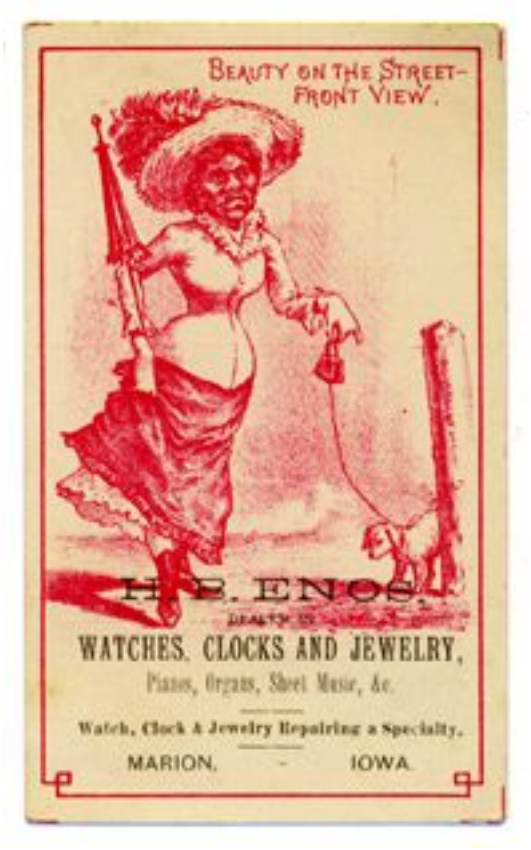

Figure 27 Beauty on the Street--Front View.

Spurred on by ideas of anthropology, eugenics and social Darwinism, the passionate belief that African Americans were subhuman was also combined with the creation of a "new tradition"--the myth of the "Old South"--a place where all Euro

[65] Information on the *Mozart Effect* can be found at http://www.howtolearn.com/Mozart.html; INTERNET.

Americans had black servants or slaves and an essential doting mammy. The post Civil War south became an idyllic place where all the servants or slaves were "happy" to be working for the master.

The following trade card presents an idyllic scene where a black, county doctor bounces a small child on his knee as a slightly older one looks on. At their feet is a doctor's bag with medical instruments, and the small child holds a book. While the scene may seem to tell the story of a kind and gentle country doctor, it is an invented scene. Most African Americans were excluded from even conceiving of studying to become a doctor during the time period it depicts. For the white viewer or customer, the information on the card is reassuring and might very well be "cathartic" as they draw a sigh of relief. Since the characters on the card represented "black people" to white Americans, the misinformation implies that health care and education were readily available to African Americans. History records a very different tale.

Figure 28 The Country Doctor.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger explain that there is probably no time and place which historians study where "tradition" has not been reinvented.[66] This is especially obvious when a rapid transformation in society (in this case the Civil War) weakens or destroys the social patterns for which the old traditions had been designed and necessitates the quick invention of new ones. The violence, the Black Codes, the mythologizing, and the marketing of contemptible collectives were all attempts to "restore" the old patterns of the plantation system. Since the old society could not be

[66] Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition.* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983.)

replicated exactly, "new traditions" were created to "reconstruct" a suitable past, and the myths flourished.

The mass-produced collectibles may have been an attempt to reassert Euro American control by symbolically allaying white status anxiety.[67] Since the relationship between Euro Americans and the slaves had been paternalistic with the masters "benevolently" caring for their supposedly childlike slaves, contemptible collectibles seem to have filled the void by providing miniature representations that could be easily manipulated. Seen in this light, the mass-produced objects carry a message of violence because they are used--easily controlled--unlike real African Americans.

Many of the people who identified with the Old South believed in the "Cult of the Lost Cause" and convinced themselves that the South had been on the verge of creating a civilization far superior to the one that existed in the North. They associated themselves with the knights of medieval and hierarchical England. They had supposedly lived by their own unique and unbreakable code of honor; had administered their plantations in an enlightened and progressive manner, and produced happy, smiling darkies who knew their place in society and were content with their servitude.[68]

These notions took care of the South's past, and then Henry W. Grady, Richard Edwards, and others began to describe a wonderful future for the New South. The New South was envisioned as a place where blacks and whites existed peacefully. Unlike the Old South, the economy would not be bound by a one-crop plantation agriculture but blossom with a combination of industry and scientific agricultural practices. Most importantly, this New South, because of its exemplary performance would take its rightful place as the leader of a reunited nation.

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[67] Dubin, Steven C. "Symbolic Slavery: Black Representation in Popular Culture." *Social Problems*, 34, no.2, April 1987), 131.

[68] Gaston, Paul M. *The New South Creed.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 9170), 81.

For white Southerners, these myths were just what they were looking for. Residents in the North had tired of the conflict and were unsure of how the slaves, now freed and legally equal, should be treated. Everyone was only too willing to accept the "New South" solution. Joel Chandler Harris's "Uncle Remus" tales became very popular since they further elaborated on the myth. A typical story tells how Uncle Remus saves his master by shooting a Yankee soldier who comes to free him. This proves that he chooses to put his master's welfare ahead of his own: "Do you mean to say," exclaimed Miss Theodosia, indignantly, "that you shot the Union soldier, when you knew he was fighting for your freedom?"[69]

For southern readers, Harris allows the soldier to die in the story. For national readers, the soldier only loses his arm, and he is nursed back to health by Uncle Remus and a southern belle. Later, the soldier marries the southern belle in a obvious metaphor of reunion between North and South.[70] As this century comes to a close, many people still believe that things aren't like the "good old days." The implications of going back in time are ignored or perhaps longed for subconsciously? A recent series television commercials for the Hershey chocolate bar capitalizes on this notion with its slogan, "Change is Bad." Each commercial makes sure to proudly proclaim that the Hershey bar "has not changed" since the 1880s.

Another character who plays an enormous part in constructing American collective consciousness is Topsy from *Uncle Tom's Cabin:*

> Miss Ophelia asks Topsy: "Do you know who made you?""Nobody, as I knows on," said the child, with a short laugh.The idea appeared to amuse her considerably, for her eyes

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[69] Harris, Joel Chandler. *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings.* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880. Oxford, 1974. New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 214.

[70] Harris, Joel Chandler. *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings.* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1880. Oxford, 1974. New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 214.

> twinkled, and she added,"I spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody never made me."[71]
>
> She was one of the blackest of her race; and her round shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth half open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas'r's parlor, displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her woolly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning, over which was oddly drawn, like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity. She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging; and stood with her hands demurely folded before her. Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance,--something, as Miss Ophelia afterwards said, "so heathenish..."[72]

Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Euro American abolitionist and best-selling author created the first truly famous "pickaninny" in her 1852 antislavery saga *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Stowe studied slave narratives, abolitionist tracts, and interviewed Euro Americans who had firsthand knowledge of slavery to write the story of Topsy--a slovenly dressed, uncultured, and uncared-for slave girl. Stowe wanted to write an accurate description of southern life. From her research she came to understand the conditions slave children were born into. She created the irascible Topsy to argue that even under the care of a very long-suffering and religious person (with true Victorian values) a child born into slavery was destined to be an untamed "wild child."[73] When Topsy is put in the care of a New England-born abolitionist she continues her slovenly ways no matter how hard Miss Ophelia tries to correct her. Only when Little Eva, her young white playmate/mistress preaches to Topsy about salvation, does Topsy's character improve a little. Before Little Eva, the angelic young white mistress dies an early death

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[71] Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly.* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 356.

[72] Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin or, Life Among the Lowly.* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), 351.

[73] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 13.

which prompts changes in all of the major characters, she convinces Topsy that Jesus has room in his heart for the likes of her.

Stowe wanted her audience to sympathize with the tragic circumstances that produced neglected children such as Topsy. She hoped the book would inspire readers to campaign for the abolition of slavery so that there would be no Topsys in the future, but, in fact, quite the opposite happened. Topsy caught the imagination of the public. Her kinky hair, filthy clothes, mischievousness, and barely distinguishable language was reproduced in numerous stage shows based on the novel.

Stage Topsys and the other "pickaninny" characters who emerged were happy, mirthful characters who reveled in their misfortune. Their awkward speech, ragamuffin appearance, devilish habits, and butchered English were the sources of humor in the minstrel and Tom shows that remained popular from the early 1850s until well into the twentieth century. Theatrical producers took a character originally intended to generate disgust for slavery and reinvented her as one whose careless actions and carefree attitude suggested that black children could thrive within the confines of the "peculiar institution."[74]

Topsy-like images are evident in all forms of contemptible collectibles. Most dolls and other children's toys that portrayed African Americans were given the physical characteristics that Stowe gave to Topsy. In fact, one toy called a Topsy/Eva or Topsy/Turvy doll features two dolls who share one body. The prissy, well-dressed, blond-haired, white doll changes into a grotesque, thick-lipped, wide-eyed, sloppily dressed black doll when turned upside down:[75]

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[74] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 13.

[75] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 14.

> Most children played with black dolls that had rough woolly hair, thick bright-red lips, and patchwork clothing. "The 1945 Sears catalog featured a black doll whose outfit was held together by a safety pin. The costume on a 1937 puppet has a prominent patch. If a boy is shown in overalls, they are either too short or one of the shoulder straps droops. The dresses worn by little girls are either torn or too short, or both. Even when a child is wearing a complete, clean outfit, some portion of it is out of place. Sometimes the child fortunate enough to have a complete ensemble has trouble keeping it. The once-popular children's book, *The Story of Little Black Sambo,* highlights the trouble faced by the young hero as he tries to keep his colorful set of clothing. However, these children were lucky to have any clothes at all. In other artifacts inscribed with images of black children, the pattern is the same. The Gold Dust Twins had plenty of gold but no clothes. A wine crate label depicts a naked black infant sitting in the middle of a field, while a souvenir bank consists of a naked black infant sitting on two bananas. Images rarely depict a clean, well-dressed black child.[76]

African American children were presented in patched together clothes or even naked, to communicate that they were less than human, and ideas of "savage" and "animal-like" were reinforced. When postcards, sheet music, and other objects depicted environments or backgrounds they usually showed African American children out of doors. A background of crops associated with Southern plantations often sets the scene with happy, satisfied black babies perched on baskets of cotton or tobacco. "Older children crawl on the ground, climb trees, sit on top of logs--all animal-like postures--often portrayed side by side with animals. The trademark for Two Coons Axle Grease contains an image of a half dressed black child holding a raccoon. The cover of a washable fabric children's book entitled *Pussies and Puppies,* contains one image of a puppy dog, one image of a pussycat, and one image of a poorly dressed black child."[77]

> Black children are never too far from watermelons or alligators. They are shown running toward the former and away from the latter. Postcards, souvenir pencil letter/opener sets, pipes, and cigar box labels are all objects that contain alligator/African-America images. Even more plentiful than such pairings are those in which

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[76] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 14-15

[77] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 15.

> black children are presented with their mouth stretched open over an obscenely large slice of watermelon.. These watermelons convey dual messages. First, they impart that black people naturally prefer foods that they can eat with their hands. Second, the image of a small black child's head peering over an oversized chunk of watermelon suggest that his or her nutritional needs can be supplied by easily accessible crops that grow profusely.[78]

Patricia A. Turner raises the question as to what extent contemptible collectibles might mirror a genuine reality of African American history. She thinks it is probably safe to assume that slave children were poorly dressed since slave families were rarely given clothes for children not old enough to work. She also surmises that slave children were sometimes found in baskets of tobacco and cotton since they were sent to work in the fields at very early ages. They probably even ended up with a certain amount of rapport with the animals they spent so much time with out of doors. But Turner understands that the overgeneralizations in a stereotype are purposeful. The stereotypes perpetuated by contemptible collectibles transformed the horrors of slavery into comforting artifacts that suggested that black children prospered in spite of the abuses inflicted on them.

> Happiness is a seedy slice of watermelon. Picture postcards featuring poorly dressed little black children romping in cotton fields suggest that if they had been given a choice, they would have chosen to spend their days in the field rather than in a schoolroom. Thus consumers bought products inscribed with images that contradict the harsh and uncomfortable realities.[79]

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[78] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 15.

[79] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 16.

Figure 29 Sapolio, Enoch Morgan's Sons Scouring Soap.

Even when the images and subjects are children, the stereotypes implicate all African Americans. Since children are not able to care for themselves, parents are supposed to take care of them. Many Euro American, twentieth century consumers unconsciously assumed that ante-bellum African American parents had full control over the appearance and behavior of their families. In the attempt to justify their treatment of African Americans as second-class citizens, Euro Americans constructed the idea that slave parents were indifferent to their children's needs. Of course, they failed to acknowledge the Euro-induced economic factors that contributed to the slovenly appearance and substandard education of black children.

For more than a hundred years, the American public--African American and Euro American--watched a parade of plucky "pickaninnies" as the example of African American children. Characters like Buckwheat, Farina, Urkel,[80] and others in film and

[80] Buckwheat and Farina are some of the best-know pickaninnies from the 1920s film series, *Our Gang* Urkel is a later pickaninny character from the 1990s television series *Family Matters.*

television, reinforce the stereotypes recreated in contemptible collectibles. It was not until the 1960s that the television show "Julia," (1968) featured a well-dressed, well-groomed, well-mannered, well-spoken black male. Even when the "pickaninny" image was questioned and started to disappear from the American landscape, jokes and riddles kept the stereotypes alive. Racist jokes and riddles became even more popular in the post-civil rights era since they are not tangible.

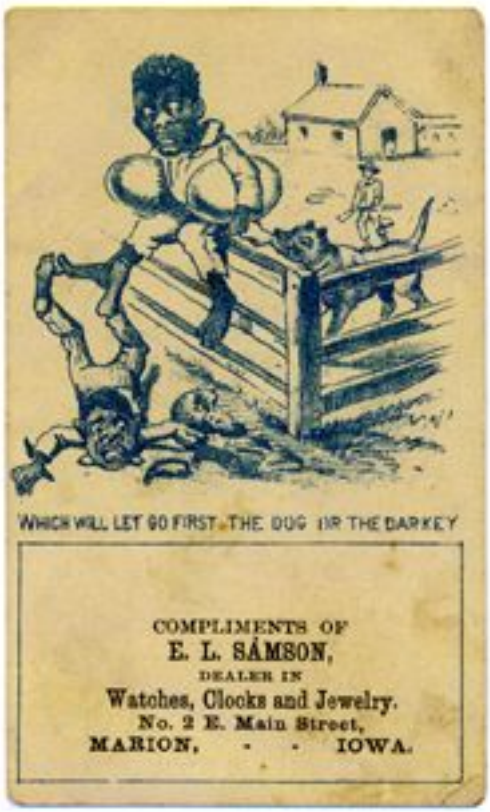

Figure 30 Which will let go first, the dog or the darkey?

Racial, social, political, economic, and gender-related forces set the scene for the creation of contemptible collectibles, and together they have and continue to have a profound impact on the consciousness of the American population. Turner writes:

> It is likely that the notion that black children are animal like and savage has influenced public policy. After all, leaders in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s grew up and absorbed the images discernible in the popular culture of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. In these decades, access to African American history as we know it today was limited. It seems safe to assume that in making decisions and forming policies about educational entitlement and support for underprivileged families, some elected and appointed public servants still envision the undeserving raucous, ill-kept black children prominently displayed in advertising copy and picture postcards.[81]

In Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need, Axinn and Levin write:

> The commonly held view of human nature unquestionably contributes to the nature of the response to human need. A belief in the superiority of any group in the population--indeed, any racial, ethnic, religious, or sexual hierarchical ordering--becomes a basis for discrimination and exploitation. Certainly, the history of social welfare in the Untied States reflects this in its insistence on blaming the victims. In the nineteenth century, Americans used Social Darwinism to rationalize greed; more recently sociobiology has filled the same function.[82]

We know that visual stereotypes are psychologically damaging and socially distancing. Through early and wide exposure to them in comic books, on television, in school books, and through general socialization in and out of the family, we are taught **not** to rely on our own experiences.

Even after the institution of slavery was abolished, Americans continued to construct ways of buying and selling the souls of black folk. Contemptible collectibles were made by and for Euro Americans. Manufacturers did not miss their opportunity to capitalize on the racism that has long permeated our society.

These collectible objects can all be described by what they symbolize--a racist, or more specifically, an antiblack element--obvious in their unchanging depiction of

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[81] Turner, Patricia A. *Ceramic Uncles & Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture.* (Anchor Books, 1994), 17-18.

[82] Axinn, June and Herman Levin. Social Welfare: A History of the American Response to Need. (New York: Longman, 1997), 7.

offensive characteristics. Because these objects were so inexpensive and mass-produced they were purchased for lower-middle and working class homes. These Americans provide a "buffering" position in "controlling" minority groups in society since they generally identify with their race instead of with their class. This is an age-old form of identification in the Western world and serves the interests of the upper classes. Contemptible collectibles and their stereotypes are deeply rooted in the American collective consciousness which continues to resist change. They have played a considerable part in constructing the white supremacy paradigm that many Euro Americans choose to perpetuate and utilize as a basis for public policy.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the 20th century white supremacist ideas and attitudes may seem more covert, but it is this very fact that should be taken as a warning. Observations of popular culture overwhelmingly show that attitudes have not changed dramatically from those identified by Frederickson. The United States still has its share of overt Negrophobe that results in hate crimes, urban poverty, and is apparent in the inequity in incarceration and prison sentences. Many white Americans still feel that they are in a "paternalist" position since they believe that black people do not understand or get the big picture if they try to express their perspectives and experiences of racism. Most white Americans still can not comprehend that the very color of their skin provides them with privilege that they take for granted. This prevents them from understanding racism in our society. As Frederickson observed in the early United States, there still is "[w]idespread, almost universal, agreement," on what a black person is in contrast to a white person. This assumption pervades the consciousness of all Americans and the distinction is made daily, sometimes in the matter of split seconds. Often in just enough time to reach for a gun.

Popular and material culture presents images that still stereotype and perpetuate the idea that "[b]lacks are physically, intellectually, and temperamentally *different,* from whites."[83] Whether this is pointing out inferiority or presumably meant as a compliment, the underlying idea is difference. Ideas of difference permeate out collective consciousness and are ingrained in our national psyche of the "American Dream." Although legislation is a necessary step in ensuring equality for all Americans, it is only the first step. A step that was taken over a hundred years ago. To finally move forward into the 21st century we need to be especially vigilant in identifying how old ideologies

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[83] Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 321.

are still reinforced and perpetuated by popular culture. This can only by achieved by evaluating and interpreting the words and images that uphold white supremacist notions. Even though we are constantly influenced by these ideas, often without even realizing it, for the most part they remain unchecked. In order to defeat this insiduous strain of racism it has to be identified and acknowledged by all Americans whose "reality" is constructed around it. Since the ideologies and stereotypes of white supremacy reinforce and ultimately direct our public policies it is absolutely necessary that we work to break the vicious cycle that consumes us.

At the end of the 20th century the media, movies, and television still select black Americans to represent "the poor," unwed mothers and welfare abusers. This constant information reinforces ideas of different intelligence, temperance, enterprise or initiative that very real non-white children and adults have to combat every day. The debate over hate crime legislation is evidence that many people in the United States find it acceptable that certain citizens live under the pressure and terror of white supremacist ideas. The number of African Americans who still survive below the poverty line and the number of black men in prison are real examples of racism unidentified and unchecked. In a multitude of ways, contemporary popular beliefs defend the status quo as the natural state of humans and the inevitable response to "difference." The fact that the very concept of "racial difference" is a social construction is not acknowledged.

At this point in time, the language of Frederickson's list of universal racist attitudes held after the 1830s until the early years of this century, might seem to belong to the past. However, an honest and deeper discussion of its points prove that things have indeed stayed "very much the same." For instance, "miscegenation" as a word is now not used as frequently since people elect to discuss "mixed or bi-racial marriages" or "mixed heritage." This old double standard has only recently received media attention that has finally acknowledged the very old and purposefully overlooked story of the children fathered by the founding fathers of the United States. Many generations of African

Americans have known that they are the descendants of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, or other slave masters. While white Americans have disregarded oral histories, generations of African Americans have passed the information on and real, live people challenge the history books. Since white supremacist ideas inform the very basis of who is considered "American" many people still believe that these descendants of slave and master are fabricated stories. DNA testing supports the oral histories as factual and accurate accounts. If things really "have gotten better," this issue would not provoke such arguments. As white Americans try to hold onto the "American Dream" of their textbook heroes, the issue of how insiduous racism is in our society is conveniently ignored.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks at the end of the century, is that many Americans still believe that racial prejudice and antipathy is a natural and inevitable response between "whites" and "blacks." More than one hundred years after the legal end of slavery, the lines of division between "black" and "white" are often just as real as before. Although African Americans have been freed from legalized subordination, as a group of people they have not been afforded equal status. Since individual African Americans have managed to reach high levels of financial and professional gain, many people assume that any person who does not manage to fulfill their "American Dream" is responsible for their own failure. Americans have remained "color blind" with the emphasis on "blind." Current popular attitudes seem resigned to support the status quo and like people at the turn-of-the-last century many people still are resolved that only some sort of superhuman intervention is capable of obliterating the innate sense of human difference.

Prior to this century and at its beginning American attitudes overwhelmingly reflected the idea that a biracial equalitarian (or "integrated") society was either completely impossible or could be achieved only in some remote and almost inconceivable future. The institutional and individual violence against Africans and

African Americans (black people) in the United States is preceded by a long history that for all practical purposes destines black Americans to continued subordination in its many forms--slavery, some form of caste discrimination, and symbolic and physical attack.

Honest and critical interpretation of late twentieth century material and popular culture in the United States proves that Americans have not genuinely altered the "common sense" of the majority. Most Americans may be physically moving into the next century but we are firmly holding onto our beliefs from the past, and material culture continues to feed the old belief systems. The deep roots of racism are often hidden and entwined in our individual and national consciousness. The only hope we have of digging these roots out is by acknowledging that they exist and remaining alert enough to identify how they support racism in our daily lives.

APPENDIX A: IMAGE INFORMATION AND PERMISSIONS

Figure 1. A Merry Christmas. From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "A Merry Christmas."

Figure 2. The knife shut up...front. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "The Knife shut up, His head dropped off, [']He didn't know twas loaded." H. Sear's & Son Cutlery. Chicago Lithography & Engraving Company.

Figure 3. The knife shut up...back. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "The Celebrated Queen Razor" Chicago Lithography & Engraving Company.

Figure 4. An Absorbing Subject. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "An Absorbing Subject."

Figure 5. Compliments of the Domestic Sewing Machine Co. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "Compliments of the Domestic Sewing Machine Co."

Figure 6. Election Day (His First Vote.) From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed:"Election day (his first vote.)"

Figure 7. Too Much "New Years." From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: Too Much "New Years."

Figure 8. Nike advertisement. Published in *Rolling Stone*(March 18, 1999), 16-17. Figure adapted by the author.

Figure 9. American Heart Association brochure. Copyright 1995. Used with permission of PhotoDisc:

Figure 10. The Shades of Night. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "The Shades of Night."

Figure 11. A Section of *The Wild Thornberrys* Cartoon. Used with permission of MTV:

Figure 12. Hippo Scrap. From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries.

Figure 13. *The Jungle ABC* Text from*The Jungle ABC.* Roberts, Michael. New York: Calloway--Hyperion, 1998. Figure adapted by the author.

Figure 14. Clark's Mile-end Spool Cotton--Girl with Spoon. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "Clark's 'Mile-end' Spool Cotton" The back of this card is inscribed: "The Best Thread for All Sewing Machines is Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton. (Trade Mark) Best Six Cord in White, Black, and All Colors." Copyright 1887 by Donaldson Brothers, N.Y.

Figure 15. Clark's Mile-end Spool Cotton--Girl with Glasses. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "Clark's 'Mile-end' Spool Cotton" The back of this card is inscribed: "The Best Thread for All Sewing Machines is Clark's Mile-End Spool Cotton. (Trade Mark) Best Six Cord in White, Black, and All Colors." Copyright 1887 by Donaldson Brothers, N.Y.

Figure 16. His father would not know him. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa

Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "1st. Flour Up. 2d. Flour Down. 3d. Well floured 'jes look at dis yer chile, even his father would not know him."

Figure 17. Warner's Safe Yeast is the best thing she knows of to raise him. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "Up with the sun. Warner's Safe Yeast. Precocious Youngster: Mamma, what's the matter with baby? Mamma: Ah, Darling. Baby's very sick, I'm afraid we won't be able to raise him. Precocious Youngster: Try this Mamma, Dinah says Warner's Safe Yeast is the best thing she knows of to raise him. Mensing & Stecher, Roch. N.Y."

Figure 18. Child with Melon. From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries.

Figure 19. Child with Bread. From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries.

Figure 20. White Rats. Two minds with but single intent, two hearts that beat as one. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "White Rats. Two Minds with but Single Intent, Two Hearts that Beat as One. Copyrighted 1881. Go To R. A. Magee, In A. B. Dumont's Furniture Store, To see the finest Line of JEWELRY in Marion. Fresh Goods Just Received. "

Figure 21. Sour Grapes. From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "Sour Grapes. The Alden Fruit Vinegar. Donaldson Brothers N.Y."

Figure 22. To X-tract X-tasy from X-istence without X-travagance Drink McLaughlins XXXX Coffee. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card

is inscribed: "To X-tract X-tasy from X-istence without X-travagance Drink McLaughlins XXXX Coffee."

Figure 23. Thanksgiving Morning. From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of the card is inscribed with: "Thanksgiving morning."

Figure 24. Carter's Iron Pills for the Blood, Nerves and Complexion--front. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "Carter's Iron Pills for the Blood, Nerves and Complexion. Don't rise--I know how you feel--Weak Back, Trembling, Palpitation, Headache.--I've had all--But thanks to Carter's Iron Pills I am fully restored and can guarantee they'll do as much for you."

Figure 25. Carter's Iron Pills for the Blood, Nerves and Complexion--back. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The back of this card continues to promote "Carter's Iron Pills for the Blood, Nerves and Complexion." Some of the restorative powers claimed by the company are that "These Pills quiet the Nerves, give Strength to the Body, induce refreshing Sleep, Enrich and Improve the quality of the Blood, and Purify and Brighten the Complexion."

Figure 26. The Blue Danube Waltz. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of the card is inscribed, "The 'Blue Danube' Waltz."

Figure 27. Beauty of the Street--Front View. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of the card is inscribed, "Beauty on the Street--Front View."

Figure 28. The Country Doctor. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The

front of the card is inscribed, "Ayer's Cathartic Pills. The Country Doctor. Copyright, 1883 by J. C. Ayer & Co. Lowell, Mass."

Figure 29. Sapolio, Enoch Morgan's Sons Scouring Soap. From the Don Padilla Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. This card promotes Enoch Morgan's Sons scouring soap. Among the long list of properties advertised on the back of the card is the fact that "It will polish Tin, Brass, Copper and Steel Wares of all kinds better than Emery or Rotten Stone." The Hand Sopolio is, "the Best and Cheapest Toilet and Bath Soap in the Market. Removes Stains of All Kinds, and leaves the Skin White and Soft. Copyrighted 1882 by Donaldson Brothers."

Figure 30. Which will let go first, the dog or the darkey? From the Virginia Edwards Collection. Used with permission of the Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries. The front of this card is inscribed: "Which will Let go First the Dog or the Darkey. Compliments of E. L. Sampson, Dealer in Watches, Clocks and Jewelry. No. 2 E. Main Street, Marion, Iowa."

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