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Symposium: Sex for Sale: The **White Man's Burden: Gonzo Pornography and the Construction of Black Masculinity**

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SUMMARY:

... While there have been some new players added to this debate recently, specifically post-modern feminists, there are still clear divisions between those feminists who argue that pornography is, in its production and consumption, a form of violence against women, and those feminists who see pornography as having subversive and potentially liberatory consequences for women's sexuality. ... " Although radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin did talk about the sexualization of racism in pornography, there has been limited analysis of how pornography mobilizes and assimilates racial discourses in ways that speak to white male viewers, the "assumed spectators," according to the pornography trade journal Adult Video News (AVN). ... " It is argued in this Article that this white racist construction of black male sexuality is what drives IP and serves to heighten the sexual tension in the pornography while simultaneously making this country an increasingly hostile and dangerous place for people (especially blacks) who fall outside the markers of whiteness. ... While each of these genres employs specific mechanisms of representation, white-owned media has tended to bifurcate blacks into the "good" images of Uncle Tom and the Mammy, and the "bad" images of the Buck and the Jezebel, with each having links to the politics of slavery. ... However, as I have argued elsewhere, the mainstream pornography industry has, until recently, largely ignored black bodies unless it was to demonize them as pimps, prostitutes, rapists, or gorillas. ... Indeed, in many such movies, regular reference is made to the white woman's distaste for white penises after she has sampled a "real man's" penis. ... It would seem that any movement away from the "hood" and towards whiteness, however tenuous, contaminates black masculinity with whiteness and weakens the primitive maleness defined as "inherent" in all blacks. ... As McBride argues: Here in the form of typical images of black men in the mediated context of black gay porn, the viewer can enjoy fantasies about his sexual relationship to blackness without having to account for the possibly troublesome dimensions of the brand of thinking about race that he must necessarily bring to these images for them to work their magic, so to speak. ... Interracial Pornography as the New Minstrel Show The pleasure that white audiences receive from consuming images of blacks is complex and rooted in the politics of whiteness as an identity that affords status, privileges, and a sense of belonging to some mythical (glorified) racial group. ... Whiteness as an identity is a meaningless concept outside of the constructed notions of blackness that whites have produced and circulated in popular culture.

TEXT:

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Introduction

Much has now been written about the divisive nature of the so called "porn wars" that ripped through the

feminist movement in the 1980s and 1990s. ⁿ¹ What was previously a somewhat agreeable alliance between radical and liberal feminists turned into the full scale battle that continues today, albeit in a somewhat muted form. While there have been some new players added to this debate recently, specifically post-modern feminists, there are still clear divisions between those feminists who argue that pornography is, in its production and consumption, a form of violence against women, and those feminists who see pornography as having subversive and potentially liberatory consequences for women's sexuality. While I set my arguments within a broadly defined radical feminist paradigm, it is my contention that both sides have tended to assume a gender system which is race-neutral, an assumption that cannot be sustained in a country where "gender has proven to be a powerful means through which racial difference has historically been defined and coded." ⁿ² Although radical feminists such as Andrea Dworkin did talk about [*284] the sexualization of racism in pornography, ⁿ³ there has been limited analysis of how pornography mobilizes and assimilates racial discourses in ways that speak to white male viewers, the "assumed spectators," ⁿ⁴ according to the pornography trade journal Adult Video News (AVN). ⁿ⁵

There is a long history of racial tension between black and white feminists, with black feminists arguing that much of mainstream (white) feminism excludes an analysis of how race and class mediate the material experiences of "women." ⁿ⁶ I would argue that this exclusion can also be seen in much of the feminist analysis of pornography, which celebrates the pornographic text as subversive and polysemic - to the point that the preferred reading, which foregrounds women's sexual subordination, is mocked for being essentialist. ⁿ⁷ Failing to locate the pornographic text in the context of the very real economic and social inequalities, that define the lives of poor whites and people of color, results in an understanding of pornography that is decontextualized from power relations, truncated, and of limited value to those who exist outside the privileged contours of academic intellectual life.

Although radical feminists have explored the links between poverty and recruitment in the pornography industry, they have tended to assume that the pornographic text works to elevate all men in similarly discursive ways. While there is little doubt that most heterosexual pornography categorically defines men as the "fuckers" and women as the "fuckees," this has very different meanings and consequences for white men and black men. Nowhere is this made clearer than in a cartoon by Eric Decetis, a freelance cartoonist whose work appeared in Hustler in the 1980s. ⁿ⁸ The cartoon depicts a huge, ape-like "black" man with his arm around a small white female with a black eye and a swollen, bright red vagina hanging down to the floor. On his shirt is written "Fucker," on hers is "Fuckee." While all women in Hustler cartoons are constructed as "fuckees" in one way or another, it is the woman with the "black" man who is shown as brutalized, battered, and marked as victim. This cartoon, along with centuries of lynching, forced imprisonment, and media spectacles (such as the Willie Horton controversy, and the O.J. Simpson trial) [*285] make apparent that it is black men, not white men, who carry the legal and social burdens of being the "fucker" of white women. Indeed, black men are fast becoming, in the world of mainstream electronic pornography, the most sought after "fuckers" of white women. These images carry no more liberatory potential than Gus, the would-be rapist in what could be termed one of the first mass distributed interracial pornography movies, namely Birth of a Nation (1915). ⁿ⁹

Recent articles in AVN ⁿ¹⁰ have called attention to the fact that the fastest growing and most bootlegged internet pornography is "interracial pornography" (IP). While web sites advertise a multicultural mix of males and females, by far the dominant performers are black men and white women. With titles such as Black Poles in White Holes, Huge Black Cock on White Pussy, and Monster Black Penises and Tight White Holes, the male viewer knows what to expect when he punches in his credit card numbers. Although there are sites that advertise Asian and Latina women, there are very few sites with Latino and Asian men and white women. Indeed, if the heterosexual male wants to gaze at Asian or Latino men, then he has to move into a truly forbidden world for straight pornography, namely gay pornography.

Analyzing the role of racial representations in pornography is, I argue, key to understanding how

pornography works as a discourse, as it explicates taken-for-granted assumptions about what makes pornography pornographic. If, as radical feminists argue, pornography is pleasurable because it sexualizes inequality between women and men, then the more degraded and abused the woman, the greater the sexual tension and thrill for the male viewer. It is hard to conceive of a better way to degrade white women, in a culture with a long and ugly history of racism, than having them penetrated again and again by a body that has been constructed, coded, and demonized as a carrier for all that is sexually debased, namely the black male.

I. Pornography and Masculinity

In order to explore the way that race functions in pornography, it is important to first examine the contemporary world of internet pornography, since the explosion of electronic pornography has had enormous implications for content as well as form. Mainstream pornography today looks nothing like the scrubbed, sanitized world of Playboy. In place of the "girl next door," smiling suggestively at the camera with her legs partially spread, is the girl that pornography consumers wish lived next door. Mainstream movies today are [*286] populated with what the male performers call "cum buckets," "sluts," and "cunts" who love pounding anal, oral, and vaginal sex, who enjoy being smeared with semen and see their lives' goals as breaking the record for the greatest number of "gang bangs" within a twenty four-hour period. Threaded throughout all these movies is an overt hatred for women that is evidenced in the dialogue and the fascination with body-punishing sex, such as frequent references to how much the woman can take before she breaks. Paul Little, AKA Max Hardcore, became famous (and rich) for his particular style of pornography that specializes in extremely violent and degrading sex. On his web site, he boasts, "Max wastes no time, gagging girls on his cock and pissing down their throats before he even learns their email addresses." n11

This type of violent pornography popularized by Max Hardcore helped to define the contours of present-day gonzo pornography. n12 By far the biggest moneymaker for the industry, this type of pornography makes no attempt at a story line, but is just scene after scene of violent penetration, in which the woman's body is literally stretched to its limit. One of the newer marketing ploys in gonzo is called ATM (ass to mouth), where the male performer anally penetrates a woman and then sticks his penis into her mouth, often joking about her having to eat shit. In this pornography the code of debasement is most stark. There is no apparent increase in male sexual pleasure by moving directly from the anus to the mouth, outside of the humiliation that the woman must endure. To argue that the pleasure of heterosexual pornography for men is not somehow wrapped up in the degradation of women is to ignore the multiple verbal and image-based cues that form the codes and conventions of mainstream pornography. n13 Moreover, failure to see pornography as a text about the elevation of men and the degradation of women also misses the role that pornography plays in the production of masculinity as both a category of material existence, and an identity that is contested, negotiated, and in need of constant reproduction. n14

It is now a given in much of academic feminism that masculinity and femininity are social constructs that work together to produce a gender system that is fused with inequality, hierarchy and violence. n15 Until recently, much of the analysis of masculinity sought to explain how hegemonic masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, where hegemonic masculinity is [*287] unproblematically coded as white. However, as many black scholars have argued, n16 white hegemonic masculinity is always in negotiation with black masculinity as the two exist in what James Snead calls "a larger scheme of semiotic valuation," n17 in that the elevation and mythification of white masculinity relies on the debasement of black men as sexual savages, Uncle Toms, and half-wits such as Stepin Fetchit. Patricia Hill Collins goes further by arguing that black masculinity is so debased by white culture that it becomes a fluid category whereby any man of color can become marked as black should he in any way fail to conform to the strict disciplinary practices of white masculinity. n18

However, what constitutes hegemonic white masculinity is itself a moving target that depends on the socioeconomic dynamics of a given time and place. In the United States, and indeed most of the Western world, there is a general consensus that a real man (read: white) works hard, puts food on the table and an SUV in the driveway, shows some interest in his children's welfare, and exhibits a somewhat restrained set of sexual practices within state-sanctioned heterosexual marriage. On virtually every level, black men are defined by white culture as failing to meet the standards of white hegemonic masculinity. They are portrayed as shiftless, they need welfare to get food for their families, they drive pimp cars (when they can afford cars), and they engage in what Cornel West mockingly refers to as "dirty, disgusting, and funky sex." ⁿ¹⁹ And this is the problem for white men. While they would not swap their material privileges with black men, many white men would indeed like "black" sex as it is seen in the white racist imagination, as "more intriguing and interesting." ⁿ²⁰ It is argued in this Article that this white racist construction of black male sexuality is what drives IP and serves to heighten the sexual tension in the pornography while simultaneously making this country an increasingly hostile and dangerous place for people (especially blacks) who fall outside the markers of whiteness.

II. Black Bodies in White Living Rooms

Academic analysis of the representation of black women and men has a long and rich history in this country. Scholars have explored images of blacks in movies, television, pornography, advertising, and music as a way to delineate the contours of the white racist imagination. While each of these genres employs specific mechanisms of representation, white-owned media has tended to bifurcate blacks into the "good" images of Uncle Tom and the [*288] Mammy, and the "bad" images of the Buck and the Jezebel, with each having links to the politics of slavery. ⁿ²¹ The role of the "good" black was to allay white fears of an uprising and to render invisible the very real commodification of humans in a country that was ostensibly founded on freedom. The "bad" black, on the other hand, served to legitimize the overt violence, lynching, and rape of blacks by positioning blacks as violent, in need of policing, and as a threat to white stability if left uncontrolled. ⁿ²²

One theme that undergirds the dichotomous portrayal of blacks is the notion of the controlled versus the uncontrolled sexualized body. The Mammy and the Uncle Tom are both desexualized: him for his age, kindly gentle manner, and allegiance to whiteness; her for her enormous body, jet-black skin, and allegiance to whiteness. The "bad" blacks, in sharp contrast, display their deviance as rooted in uncontrollable sexual urges played out on the bodies of white men and women. Within the ideological discourse of slavery, black female slaves were seen as having an animalistic, smoldering sexuality which rendered the white slave owners helpless and thus not responsible for the rape of black women. This image stood in opposition to the construction of the white woman who, as reproducer of the heirs to property, was defined through the discourse of the cult of "true womanhood," which marked white womanhood as chaste, meek, and obedient to male power. ⁿ²³ What threatened to disrupt the flow of property from one (white) generation to the next was, of course, the black man with his out-of-control savage desire for white women. He had to be stopped, and any manner of violence, from lynching to castration, became legitimized as a normalized practice for the social control of black men. Reality played no role in this process, as the rape and slaughter of blacks were recoded into a discourse about racial purity and the defense of white womanhood.

Although today we have more images for blacks than Gus and Aunt Jemima, there is still a racial coding suggesting that blacks have bodies, but not minds. ⁿ²⁴ The images of blacks that circulate in white media have rearticulated the slave ideology to fit in with the contemporary obsession with having the perfect body. Black men, whether athletes or hip-hop artists, are admired for their cool, muscular, hard bodies when they are located within the safe, contained space of a mediated image on a screen. However, as Collins points out, should these same men be seen wandering around white suburbs, their coolness soon gives way to mass white fear and calls for increased police [*289] presence. ⁿ²⁵ Black women, unless they look like Halle Berry or play prostitutes on shows such as Law & Order, are largely contained within

sitcoms that target young black viewers. The new crop of young actresses that grace the pages of People Magazine, US Weekly, and Cosmopolitan is blinding in its whiteness, and bloneness (for example, Jessica Simpson, Hilary Duff, Britney Spears, Scarlett Johansson, Paris Hilton, and Charlize Theron).

The one genre of media that deals clearly and unapologetically with bodies is pornography. The promise of this genre to its audiences is that, indeed, these bodies will be out-of-control. They will erupt, writhe, contort, and orgasm before the movie ends, and in pornography not defined as interracial, these bodies will be white. In a society that has historically controlled white bodies, it is quite remarkable that such a genre ever existed without foregrounding black bodies. However, as I have argued elsewhere, ⁿ²⁶ the mainstream pornography industry has, until recently, largely ignored black bodies unless it was to demonize them as pimps, prostitutes, rapists, or gorillas.

Today, the pornography industry enjoys a level of mainstreaming that is unprecedented, with many of the major distributors having economic ties to the largest global media corporations. ⁿ²⁷ This increase in the production and consumption of pornography has caught even the pornographers off guard, with many articles in AVN discussing how the industry is like a runaway train with no one knowing how long the profits will keep rising. What is clear, however, is that they need to keep producing movies that offer varied types of "excitement," since there are limits to how many ways you can show a white man penetrating a white woman. The ATM subgenre mentioned above is one new variation on a theme, as is the use of bizarre "sex toys" such as speculums and the so-called reality pornography which "captures" unknowing couples having sex that looks like the "regular" sex in pornography.

According to AVN, IP is emerging as the biggest single growing category with nearly one in four new films fitting into this sub-genre. ⁿ²⁸ A recent article quotes a producer who says "right now interracial gonzo is probably the strongest genre... . The demand for interracial far outweighs all the other formats of gonzo." ⁿ²⁹ While there are both black and white pornography producers and directors, the audience for IP is overwhelmingly white, according to the on-going studies conducted by Dr. Robert Jensen. ⁿ³⁰ The [*290] obvious question here is: why do white men want to gaze at, and masturbate to, black penises penetrating white women's vaginas, mouths, and anuses, given the historical coding of the black penis as defiler of white womanhood and emasculator of white masculinity?

III. Interracial Pornography: Looking for the Primitive (Black) Male

The most startling fact that jumps out at anyone who surfs these sites is the absence of men of color who are not black. A more precise term for interracial would be black men and white women, but in a society where the color line is defined by the binary black/white categorization, such precision would be redundant. This binary system has engaged many theorists who seek to interrogate how race has been constructed in American history against the backdrop of slavery. One insightful analysis is offered by James Snead, who writes, following W.E.B. Du Bois, that the "Negro" is "the metaphor ... the major figure in which these power relationships of master/slave, civilized/primitive, enlightened/backward, good/evil, have been embodied in the American subconscious." ⁿ³¹ This does not mean that other races don't exist in America, but that blacks are the "idealized" other, and different racial groups float between the two poles of the color line, depending on their economic, social, and cultural status. ⁿ³² And since pornography is not a genre known for its subtlety, when it deals with race, it deals with the clear, uncomplicated racial categories that define American society, ideologically if not materially.

Since the race of the performers is the key to marketing IP, it is not surprising that the black male tends to be very dark-skinned and the white woman very blonde. While skin color can vary among blacks, blonde hair is a clear signifier of white womanhood. Although much has been written about the racial politics of black women's hair, ⁿ³³ one of the most telling incidents in American movies is the makeover that was done of Fay Wray, who played Ann in the original King Kong. ⁿ³⁴ A natural brunette, the producers decided that since she was starring opposite "the tallest, darkest leading man in Hollywood,"

n³⁵ she should wear a blonde wig, n³⁶ thus emphasizing her whiteness against his blackness.

[*291] One of the most popular series of IP movies is called Blacks on Blondes, which features blonde women with multiple black men. As in most IP, the blonde performer is "applauded" for being able to take a black penis in her white mouth, vagina, and anus. In one particular movie with "Liv Wylder" we see an example of a theme running through IP, namely the emasculation of the white man by the big black penis. The text on the site reads:

Bring out the cuckold mask again! Time for another white couple to live out their naughtiest fantasy, and thanks to Blacks On Blondes for making it happen! Liv and Hubby have been married for a few years, and she wears her ring proudly. But lately the spark has left the bedroom, if you know what I mean. A few e-mails later, and we've got Hubby in a cage while Boz and Mandingo work Liv over. And when I say they work her over, we mean it. She takes so much black dick it amazed even us. The best part of this whole deal was the end: after Liv has about a gallon of cum all over her face and clothes, and grabs a plastic bowl - for Hubby to beat off in. He does, and his wad was weak, and Liv lets him know that. n³⁷

The white man's body is literally and metaphorically contained in this movie by both his whiteness and the physical cage in which he is locked during the sex scenes. References to his poor performance in bed ("the spark has left the bedroom") and his ineffectual semen ("his wad was weak") stand in sharp contrast to the size of the black men's penises, the skill of their sexual performance ("they work her over, we mean it") and the amount of semen they produce ("a gallon of cum"). And to illustrate where the white woman's allegiance lies, the last line lets us know that Liv is only too happy to ridicule the husband in front of the black men. Indeed, in many such movies, regular reference is made to the white woman's distaste for white penises after she has sampled a "real man's" penis. It is thus apparent why one popular series of IP films is called Once You Go Black ... You Never Go Back. n³⁸

In heterosexual non-interracial pornography, it is the woman's body that is scrutinized, talked about, focused on, and visually interrogated. In IP it is the black penis that becomes the star of the show. Indeed, on one site where users post their reviews of movies, there is a debate going on about the apparent authenticity of the black penis in the movie, White Meat on Black Street. n³⁹ Some of the viewers are clearly disturbed by what they see as the fake quality of the penis, while others express a desire to have such a penis. While the race of the users are not clear from their names (most use "anonymous"), the tone of [*292] the posts suggest white male readers. One particularly observant viewer, "ramjet" wrote on February 9, 2006:

If you want the best available proof of the fake penis being used, check out the 5th MPEG video in respect of Ruby at the 1:30 mark. The dick is a different color to its "owner" and, more importantly, YOU CAN SEE WHERE IT ENDS AND HIS REAL COCK FITS IN TO IT. The fake has fully come away from his body and a his real balls have fallen out underneath. Case closed. n⁴⁰

This "heterosexual" viewer seems more entranced by the black penis than by the white woman's body: his sense of betrayal at having paid to see a real black penis, and instead getting what he sees as a fake one, is palpable. Ramjet's sense of betrayal makes sense only within the context of the goods offered to the consumer of IP. Throughout the websites, advertising texts, and movies, adjectives such as "huge," "enormous," "monstrous," "gigantic," and "unbelievable" appear with mind-numbing monotony. The camera lingers on the black penis; the female body is interesting only in terms of how much penis she can tolerate. This contrasts with an on-going theme in white-on-white pornography where questions are asked regarding the ability of the white man's penis to satisfy the insatiable woman. Such a question would of course make no sense in IP and speaks to the taken-for-granted racist assumption about black

men's sexual prowess/savagery, which is the underlying theme in these movies.

In addition to the text which foregrounds the black penis, there are secondary themes that suggest that it is not just any black man who can perform. The black men are often described as thugs, pimps, hustlers, Hip-Hoppers, mofos, and bros who live in the "hood" and drive "pimp-mobiles." The class markers here make apparent that it is working class black men who are sexual savages, and the most esteemed is the "black pimp," who keeps his girls in line and has taught them all they need to know about being a "ho." Pimp themed movies abound in IP, where the black pimp is defined as the "king of the hood" who uses the particular skill that black men "innately" have of combining sex and violence to turn black "bitches" into "hos." Sites such as Pimp my Black Teen ⁿ⁴¹ and She got Pimped ⁿ⁴² focus on the supposedly unattractive nature of black women and the skill of their pimp to transform them into acceptable looking prostitutes. The Pimp my Black Teen site boasts "We find ordinary looking black teens from the ghetto and pimp them out extreme-makeover style!" ⁿ⁴³ This site, like many others, has pictures of so- [*293] called "before and after makeovers" in which a teenage black woman is shown in sweat pants and jeans for the "before," and sexy, revealing underwear for the "after." An example of the text underneath the pictures is "Denna was just too hot to be all ghetto'd out, so she was our next project. She wasn't that bad to begin with, but once we done her all up, she was super fine. She got all worked up when our man went down and got her pussy drenched" ⁿ⁴⁴ Above the text are pictures of "Denna" giving oral sex to a black male.

These sites that show the "conversion" of "hood rats" to presentable "hos" trade on many long-held racist beliefs regarding black women. Although coded as less attractive than a white woman, a black woman has historically been represented in popular culture as having an overt and illicit sexuality that makes her an "ideal" whore. ⁿ⁴⁵ Moreover, her manner is equally unattractive; whereas the white woman supposedly knows her place in the patriarchy, the black woman has been depicted as loud-mouthed, overbearing, and masculine in her demeanor, and thus an emasculator of black men. ⁿ⁴⁶ Indeed, the racist belief is that if the black man is to have any hope of maintaining his masculinity in the face of this onslaught, then he must put his woman in her rightful place, which is, according to Pimp My Black Teen, underneath black men.

Should the black man rise above the "hood" and enter the middle class, however, he would then cease to be an "authentic" black man and would thus be rendered invisible in IP. The middle class black man is missing from these movies because his class mobility and his allegiance to a more "educated" form of masculinity render him white. In her analysis of images of black working class and middle class men in the media, Patricia Hill Collins makes a similar argument when she suggests that "less emphasis is placed on Black men's bodies within representations of middle-class Black men than characterizes representations of working-class Black men." ⁿ⁴⁷ It would seem that any movement away from the "hood" and towards whiteness, however tenuous, contaminates black masculinity with whiteness and weakens the primitive maleness defined as "inherent" in all blacks. Interestingly, the black pimp, no matter how wealthy or respectable he becomes, is seen by the pornography industry as always holding onto his black masculinity. Ice-T, the pimp-turned-rapper-turned-actor, has certainly come a long way from his days as a pimp, but for all his "respectability" as a detective (who fights sex crimes) on the hugely successful Law & Order SVU series, he still carries weight as an authentic black man when he narrates the recent hard-core movie called Ice-T's Pimpin' [*294] 101, which AVN celebrates as an exciting addition to the pimp porn-movie genre. ⁿ⁴⁸

The pimp, thug/hustler black man of the "hood" with the out-of-control body is not only a favorite of white straight men, but also seems to be a popular object of desire for gay white men. Titles such as Blacks on White Boys, Ebony Dicks in White Ass Holes, and Black Bros and White Twinks make clear who does what to whom in interracial gay porn. The "hood" once again figures largely on the websites where users are encouraged to become site members by clicking the mouse, which will let them "Join Our MemberHood." ⁿ⁴⁹ It seems that white gay men can buy their way into the hood for a short, and

contained, time.

In his analysis of the visual and verbal clues that inform the fetishized and commodified black males in IP gay porn, Dwight A. McBride suggests that such images "presume a viewer who is other to the experience of the man represented in the films." ⁿ⁵⁰ Moreover, the racial ideologies that make these images intelligible and pleasurable are the very ideologies that underscore mainstream white racism. As McBride argues:

Here in the form of typical images of black men in the mediated context of black gay porn, the viewer can enjoy fantasies about his sexual relationship to blackness without having to account for the possibly troublesome dimensions of the brand of thinking about race that he must necessarily bring to these images for them to work their magic, so to speak. ⁿ⁵¹

These "troublesome dimensions" are what need to be explained, not only for gay IP but also straight IP, and indeed for many of the images that have circulated and continue to circulate in white-owned and white-consumed media. IP does not exist in a world of its own, but rather draws from, and contributes to, the hegemonic ideologies of race in America that have justified, legitimized, and condoned deeply-rooted systems of racial oppression. However, the way that IP articulates and rearticulates these ideologies is linked to the particular form of pleasure that it offers its readers, namely (white) masculinized sexual pleasure.

IV. Interracial Pornography as the New Minstrel Show

The pleasure that white audiences receive from consuming images of blacks is complex and rooted in the politics of whiteness as an identity that [*295] affords status, privileges, and a sense of belonging to some mythical (glorified) racial group. ⁿ⁵² The above mentioned argument articulated by James Snead, that the debasement of blacks is linked to the elevation of whites, is not hard to grasp given the vicious stereotypes of blacks as savages, Coons, half-wits, Mammies, and Jezebels. Whiteness as an identity is a meaningless concept outside of the constructed notions of blackness that whites have produced and circulated in popular culture. Thus, in this wholly mythical world, to be white is to be the opposite of black: hardworking, law abiding, intellectual, rational, and sexually restrained and controlled. These are all traits that in the everyday world have very real currency, providing status to those who operate with a clear allegiance to the culture of whiteness. However, the world of pornography is actually a parallel universe where, for at least the time it takes to get aroused and ejaculate, the currency is one that is in direct contradiction to whiteness. In this world, the traits of whiteness are indeed a burden for the white man, since restraint of any type threatens to undermine the full sexual pleasure that can be achieved with a bevy of "sluts," "whores," and "cum buckets" willing to do anything you want. In this world, the mythical black man who is uncontrolled, unrestrained, animalistic, and savage will always trump the uptight, contained, and penis-challenged white guy. Why, then, do white men who do not, in the real world, take kindly to seeing themselves as demasculinized by black men, buy IP?

To look for possible answers to this conundrum, I suggest we go back in time and examine another genre that poses similar questions for historians of race, namely, the Blackface minstrel shows that swept through America in the 1830s and 1840s. Much has been written about the politics of these shows, the ways in which they encoded blackness, and the pleasures they afforded the white, mostly male audiences through displays of white actors in blackface performing "blackness" by singing and dancing. ⁿ⁵³ Gerald R. Butters suggest that once given the mask of blackness, white men could "sing, dance, speak, move, and act in ways that were considered inappropriate for white men." ⁿ⁵⁴ While there is general agreement that these shows were unapologetically racist, historians suggest that multiple and contradictory pleasures were afforded to the audiences, in that they identified both with and against the white performers in black face.

Part of the identification process was facilitated by the fact that these shows did not employ unrecognizable songs or melodies; instead, the musical [*296] style and structure borrowed heavily from European patterns. What was different, however, according to Deane Root, was in the style of the performance of the songs, which was "much cruder. It was ... foreign. Out of the culture... . They were trying to exaggerate and make [something] (sic) exotic." n55 In IP, the "songs or melodies" n56 are indeed similar to white-on-white porn since the sex acts between black men and white women are the recognizable anal, vaginal, and oral penetrations. However, the style is, in a sense, exaggerated and cruder in its focus on "big black dicks" pounding away at "small white orifices" that are stretched, as the Eric Decetis cartoon mentioned above so clearly illustrates, to foreign proportions. n57 The aim here, however, is not so much to make the performance exotic as it is to make it erotic, since the sexual pleasure of IP is intensified by the increased sexual abuse of the woman, and the (partial) identification of the viewer with the hypersexual black male.

The fact that black men perform black pornography, rather than white men in blackface, speaks to the ways in which white ownership of media and pornography has defined and continues to define the contours of blacks playing blacks as whites see them. When black men were eventually allowed on to the stage, they had to cork their faces and behave as the whites did in black face. n58 The reason for this, argues Mel Watkins, is that whites assumed that the minstrel shows depicted something real and essential about blacks, because the shows "were advertised as the real thing. In fact, one group was called 'The Real Nigs' ... they were advertised as 'Come to the theatre and get a real look into what plantation life was like'... It was advertised as a peephole view of what black people were really like." n59 Rather than a peephole, IP porn is a peepshow for whites into what they see as the authentic black life, not on the plantation, but in the "hood" where all the conventions of white civilized society cease to exist. The "hood" in the white racist imagination is a place of pimps, hos and generally uncontrolled black bodies, and the white viewer is invited, for a fee, to slum in this world of debauchery. In the "hood," the white man can dispense with his whiteness by identifying with the black man, and thus can become as sexually skilled and as sexually out-of-control as the black man. Here he does not have to worry about being big enough to satisfy the white woman (or man), nor does he have to concern himself with fears about [*297] poor performance or "weak wads" or cages like poor hubby in Blacks on Blondes. Indeed, the "hood" represents liberation from the cage, and the payoff is a satiated white woman (or man) who has been completely and utterly feminized by being well and truly turned into a "fuckee."

But before we celebrate the IP text as subversive and liberatory, we need to put the text in the context of the material world of racist America. The body that is celebrated as uncontrolled in IP is the very same body that needs to be controlled and disciplined in the real world. Just as white suburban teenagers love to listen to hip-hop and white adult males gaze longingly at the athletic prowess of black men, the white pornography consumer enjoys his identification with (and from) black males through a safe peephole, in his own home, and in mediated form. The real, breathing, living black man, however, is to be kept as far away as possible from these living rooms, and every major institution in society marshals its forces in the defense of white society. The ideologies that white men take to the pornography text to enhance their sexual pleasure are the very ideologies that they use to legitimize the control of black men: while it may heighten arousal for the white porn user, it makes life intolerable for the real body that is (mis)represented in all forms of white controlled media.

To ignore the racist codings of black men in pornography in favor of a simplistic, decontextualized reading of the pornographic text as subversive is to operate in a world of white privilege where being a "fucker" is a status symbol with no real-world burden. This burden belongs instead to the black male and, of course, the entire black community, and as long as academic discourse continues to assume a de-racialized woman or man, then our work will have little meaning outside of the few who have access to elite academic institutions. Meanwhile, the pornography industry can continue, unencumbered by academic or cultural criticism, to produce images that make Birth of a Nation look like the good old days.

Legal Topics:

For related research and practice materials, see the following legal topics:

Computer & Internet Law
 Censorship
 Obscenity & Indecent Speech
 Criminal Law & Procedure
 Criminal Offenses
 Sex Crimes
 Sexual Assault
 Rape Elements
 Evidence
 Scientific Evidence
 Blood & Bodily Fluids

FOOTNOTES:

n1. For an example of the debates in feminism on pornography, see Avedon Carol, *Nudes, Prudes, and Attitudes: Pornography and Censorship* (1994), and Ann Russo, *Feminists Confront Pornography's Subordinating Practices*, in *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality* 9 (Gail Dines et al. eds., 1998).

n2. Robyn Wiegman, *Feminism, 'The Boyz,' and Other Matters Regarding the Male*, in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* 173 (Steven Cohan & Ina Rae Hark eds., 1993).

n3. Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (2d ed. 1989).

n4. The concept of the "assumed spectator" was developed in Media Studies to explore how the text constructs the reader within a specific subject position. When AVN talks about the viewer of interracial pornography, he is assumed to be a white male because neither whiteness nor maleness is marked as a category of existence; instead they are both normalized. When the writers of AVN talk about women and/or blacks as consumers, then they specifically mention gender and/or race.

n5. Adult Video News is the industry recognized leading trade journal, and is widely quoted in mainstream media. Testimony to its status is the AVN awards show that takes place every January in Las Vegas. Modeled after the Academy Awards, the leading pornography performers and producers compete for the awards which are then displayed on the websites of winning films and performers.

n6. For an excellent analysis of the long standing tensions between black and white feminists, see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (2d ed. 2000).

n7. For an example of such work, see *Porn Studies* (Linda Williams ed., 2004).

n8. Eric Decetis, *Cartoon* (on file with author).

n9. See *The Birth of a Nation* (David W. Griffith Corp. 1915).

n10. See, e.g., *DRM Versus P2P: Point, Counterpoint* (Tripp Daniels ed.), *Adult Video News Mag.*, May 2003, http://www.avnonline.com/index.php?Primary_Navigation=Editorial&Action=print_Article&Content_ID=105809 (last visited Apr. 10, 2006).

n11. See *Who the Hell is Max Hardcore?*, <http://www.maxhardcore.com/whoismax/index.htm> (last visited Apr. 7, 2006).

n12. For a discussion of Max Hardcore's role in making pornography sexually violent, see *Max Hardcore Porn Star*, <http://max-hardcore.excaliburfilms.com/AVN/Max-Hardcore-Biography.htm> (last visited Apr. 16, 2006).

n13. For a fuller discussion on the ways that the pornographic text constructs women as the degraded "other," see Robert Jensen, *Cruel to be Hard: Men and Pornography*, *Sexual Assault Report* 33 (2004), available at <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/%7Erjensen/freelance/pornography&cruelty.htm>.

n14. For an analysis of how pornography is implicated in the construction of hegemonic masculinity, see

John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to be a Man* (1989).

n15. See, e.g., R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (1995); Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (1998).

n16. See, e.g., Dwight A. McBride, *Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality in America* (2005); Mark Anthony Neal, *New Black Man* (2005).

n17. James Snead, *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side 4* (1994).

n18. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics* 186-87 (2004).

n19. Cornel West, *Race Matters* 83 (1993).

n20. *Id.*

n21. For a historical analysis of the images of black masculinity, see Wiegman, *supra* note 2, at 173-93. For a historical analysis of the images of black femininity, see Collins, *supra* note 18.

n22. Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* 9-16 (1993).

n23. Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* 23-26 (1987).

n24. In his discussion of the black male body, Kobena Mercer examines the ways in which the racist construction of the black man as all body and no mind has informed Western photography. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* 131-38 (1994).

n25. Collins, *supra* note 18, at 153.

n26. See Gail Dines, *King Kong and the White Woman: Hustler Magazine and the Demonization of Black Masculinity*, 4 *J. Violence Against Women* 291, 291 (1998).

n27. See Gail Dines, *From Fantasy to Reality: Unmasking the Pornography Industry*, in *Sisterhood is Forever* 306 (Robin Morgan ed., 2003).

n28. *Ethnic Diversity in Adult: Can't We All Just Fuck Along?*, *Adult Video News Mag.*, May 2003, http://www.adultvideonews.com/cover/cover0905_01.html (last visited Apr. 18, 2006).

n29. *Id.*

n30. Telephone Interview with Dr. Robert Jensen, Professor of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin (Apr. 3, 2006).

n31. Snead, *supra* note 17, at 2.

n32. The study of how different racial and ethnic groups became "white" illustrates the fluid nature of "race" and identity in this country. For a particularly insightful analysis, see Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (1995).

n33. See, e.g., Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power and Black Women's Consciousness* (2000).

n34. *King Kong* (RKO Radio Pictures 1933).

n35. This is how the producer/director of *King Kong*, Merian Cooper, described *King Kong* to Fay Wray. Snead, *supra* note 17, at 20.

- n36. Biography for Fay Wray, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0942039/bio> (last visited Mar. 20, 2006).
- n37. BlacksonBlondes.com, <http://blacksonblondes.com/main.php?pg=6> (last visited Mar. 20, 2006).
- n38. For a description of the content of these movies, see [searchextreme.com](http://www.searchextreme.com), Once You Go Black ... You Never Go Back, http://www.searchextreme.com/series/Once_You_Go_Black..._You_Never_Go_Back/97899206841 (last visited Mar. 20, 2006).
- n39. See Sir Rodney's Guide to Online Erotica, <http://www.sirrodney.com/singlereview/White+Meat+On+Black+Street#readerreviews> (last visited Apr. 3, 2006).
- n40. Sir Rodney's Guide to Online Erotica, <http://www.sirrodney.com/singlereview/White+Meat+On+Black+Street#readerreviews> (last visited Apr. 3, 2006).
- n41. Pimp My Black Teen, <http://www.pimpmyblackteen.com/> (click on "Agree/Enter" hyperlink) (last visited Mar. 20, 2006).
- n42. She Got Pimped, <http://www.shegotpimped.com/>(click on "Agree/Enter" hyperlink) (last visited Mar. 20, 2006).
- n43. Pimp My Black Teen, http://www.pimpmyblackteen.com/index.phtml?wm_login=warned&warned=y (last visited Apr. 7, 2006).
- n44. Id.
- n45. See Carby, *supra* note 23, at 30-34.
- n46. For a discussion of the ways in which black women have been masculinized in white pop culture, see Collins, *supra* note 18.
- n47. Id. at 169.
- n48. Dan Miller, IVN To Release Fatt Entertainment's Ice-T's Pimpin' 101, *Adult Video News Mag.*, Dec. 2002, http://www.adultvideonews.com/bone/by1202_04.html (last visited Apr. 10, 2006).
- n49. Twinks from the Hood, <http://www.twinksfromthehood.com/?revid=14522&pid=51&track> (last visited Apr. 2, 2006).
- n50. McBride, *supra* note 16, at 103.
- n51. Id.
- n52. For a fuller discussion on how whiteness is socially constructed, see George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics* (1998); Ignatiev, *supra* note 32; and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1991).
- n53. For a fuller discussion of the politics of black face, see Gerald R. Butters, Jr., *Black Manhood on the Silent Screen* (2002); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Black Face Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1995); and Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (1998);
- n54. Butters, *supra* note 53, at 10.

n55. Excerpts from the PBS program, American Experience, Stephen Foster, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/foster/sfeature/sf_minstrely_3.html (last visited Mar. 20, 2006).


n56. For an analysis of how pornographic films can be likened to musicals, see Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* 130-52 (1989).

n57. See *infra* p. 284 and note 8.

n58. This is not to argue that blacks simply mimicked the whites in black face as there were some real attempts by black actors to provide a more humanized, authentic version of black life. However, there were very real limits to this. Butters, *supra* note 53, at 11-12.

n59. Excerpts from the PBS program, American Experience, Stephen Foster, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/foster/sfeature/sf_minstrely_5.html (last visited Mar. 20, 2006).

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