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AFR: Sociology of Urban Poverty Final

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This paper is a research project of an ongoing issue in our black community. Stigmas in the media of “Negros” have followed us in a very modern derogatory present day form. Our people have lost their way once more, getting wrapped up in the fame, and padding these people pockets with money with our cliché ignorance of history. One main focus is our African American females and how we are seen in the eyes of many.

Drawing and pen pointing a time in history contrasted to present day I have found that not many things have changed. Technology in a way has taken its toll on this issue, and our own choices. We have fought as not only a race, but as women to earn the much little respect and rights we claim today. The media has found its way to put not only all women but in particular African American females on the number one pedestal of sexually exploiting ourselves. Not only in music videos, but TV shows, and magazines even music lyrics.

I find this as a huge problem because there is more to us than just our bodies and degrading ourselves. Even though where there’s a negative there’s some positivity. We have plenty of African American actresses, public figures, and artist that will present whatever they do respectfully. This paper is not to offend anyone or their choices in life but, to point out and raise the question has history repeated itself? This paper also can be used as an informative subject of history.

In life as people of free will, we can choose to progress or let history repeat itself. In doing research and discovering how women of color are perceived in the media I’ve found that not much has changed. Black women because of our physical body structure are seen as sexual beings, and this leaves us open for stereotypes. These stereotypes can be traced from back into history as far as the 1800’s. There are categories in which black women are viewed in such as, mammy, coons, or jezebels. From where the disrespectful depictions first began in 1813 you can see very little change in display now in the 2000’s the only change is in the language in the way we are disrespected, but it varies within generations.

The media such as TV and music continues to depict women of color as being nothing more than our bodies. These women who are now in the viewing of the public eye such as; Nicki Minaj and Erica Mena are some prime examples of a flash of the past why is it that these women will sell their souls for being seen as sex objects rather than standing up for a change? These women are supposed to be our youth’s role models. Women of today’s society live their lives based on what they see on TV, or hear in music lyrics. These women are what our young black females are looking up to. Our youth are the future and if this is what they are looking up to will the history of black women change?

Derogatory images are found everywhere; on magazine covers, advertising, television and movies. Theirs this one way portrayal how the heterosexuality of males use the female body as advertising vehicles, and it limits the way we are seen, respected, and our interaction with others (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). “Some people say that it’s just boys being boys, but it can have a lot to do with boys figuring out that girls are there for men to sexually objectify or to be men sexual play things” (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). Many media images are written off as “only pictures” it remains a huge part of our culture, and unfortunately have real life-implications for viewers, and consumers (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). These women become to be seen as dime a dozen, eye candy, and in many cases worthless. These stereotypes play a huge role on not just our gender, but our race. Sharpley says “sexist music videos set a view of women of color that’s not radically different from the views of 19th –century white slave holders (Sharpley-Whiting, 2007).With these intentions and views of African American women you would think they would choose other wise of degrading themselves. Unlike in slavery times we now have a choice not to degrade ourselves. These stereotypes not only come in between the way others see us, but it puts a wedge in bringing our communities together as a race. Day by day we are turning on each other. Our bodies are ours and what we choose to do with it should not determine who we are. Choices we make in life can determine who we are.

Introducing an interesting historical figure Sarah Baartman is a huge example for this project. Has history really changed? Or has it repeated itself as a reader of this paper you can decide. Sarah Baartman can be considered as what we know today as the first video vixen. Sarah was displayed as a “freak” because of her unusual physical body features. Baartman was born in 1789, and worked as a slave in Cape Town. (Davie, (Updated) 2012). She was discovered by a British ship doctor William Dunlop. Dunlop persuaded her to travel with him to England. Dunlop had a clear plan to display her as a freak of scientific curiosity, and of course make a profit (Davie, (Updated) 2012).

Baartman had a large buttocks and genitals which is not unusual for African Americans. In the early 1800’s Europeans were obsessed with her physical appearance. The Europeans began to view women blacks in particular as inferior and oversexed (Davie, (Updated) 2012). Baartman’s features proved evidence of prejudice, and she was treated like a freak exhibit in London.

Along this degrading career path she gained the name “Hottentot Venus” (Davie, (Updated) 2012) . “Hottentot was a name given to people with cattle. They acquired cattle by migrating northwards to Angola and returned to South Africa with them about 2000 years before the first European settlement at the Cape in 1652. Khoisan is used to denote their relationship to the san people. The label “Hottentot” took on a derogatory connection and is longer used” (Davie, (Updated) 2012).

Venus is the Roman goddess of love, a cruel reference to Baartman being an object admiration and adoration instead of the object of leering and abuse. (Davie, (Updated) 2012) Baartman spent four years in London, and forward on to Paris where she continued the rounds of degrading shows and exhibitions. (Davie, (Updated) 2012) When the people became tired of the “Baartman Shows”, she was forced to turn to prostitution. The vast foreign culture, climate, and abuse of her body forced her to her death in 1815 at the age of 25. Her cause of death may have been what we know now as syphilis. (Davie, (Updated) 2012)

A French scientist by the name of Georges Cuvier made a plaster cast of her body, and removed her skeleton, brain, and genitals and displayed them in bottles at the “*Musee deL’Homme*” in Paris. (Davie, (Updated) 2012) For 160 years her remains were on display but removed from public view in 1974. In 1994 president Nelson Mandela requested her remains be brought back to her home in South Africa. (Davie, (Updated) 2012) “The French government took eight years to pass a bill to prevent other countries from claiming the return of their stolen treasures and to allow their piece of “Scientific curiosity” to return to South Africa” (Davie, (Updated) 2012).

January 2012 Sarah Baartman’s remains were returned and buried on South Africa’s Women’s day, at Hankey in Eastern Cape Province (Davie, (Updated) 2012). Sarah Baartman lived a life of cruelly gender race exploitation, and now is finally at rest in peace.

This story can be seen in today’s society of main stream media only less gruesome. In an article of the New York Times “Protesting demeaning Images in the media”, by Felicia R. Lee, explains how African American females of today are being exploited. Lee explained how protesters of the black and Latino community began to protest media companies. The protesters want media companies to develop a “Universal creative standard” for video’s and music that include prohibitions on some language and images. “Video vixens and foul-mouthed pimps and thugs are widespread and infect perceptions of ordinary non-white people” (Lee, 2007).

Among these protesters were the chair women of the National Congress of Black Women and members of other civil rights advocacy groups. “Rallies were taking place as civil rights leaders, cultural critics and others use the moment to debate how to represent the diversity of black life while minimizing offensive words and images” (Lee, 2007). These protesters felt the big issue in distinction between standards and censorship. They also want to make it clear that there protest is not anti-BET or anti-hip-hop, but to attack damaging stereotypes. (Lee, 2007) “Media company Viacom claims their standard for language and images already prohibits some of the gratuitous violence and drug use in music video’s” (Lee, 2007).

“ They also claim they are too concerned about negative portrayals of African Americans in the media and claims to be taken a pro-active approach with programming that respects freedom of expression and serves with diverse interests” (Lee, 2007). “BET network has long been criticized for showing raunchy music videos and narrow views of black life. These past years BET began to widen its scope with new shows intended to offer broader look at black life, that include contest for gospel singers and reality shows about affluent teens” (Lee, 2007). Even with these protest slow progression continues but will it be too late until greater action is taken. This topic relates to this course in the sense of how we are taught how to think by these images. As a race we follow too much instead of leading. Our women are being exploited everyday on National television and no one seems to be doing anything about it.

Our communities will remain the same in poverty if we do not come together to help each other over come the minor stigmas associated with our race. These females of today have a choice to say “NO”, to exploitation and play over sexualized rolls in the media. Sarah Baartman didn’t have a choice she was a slave anyhow, and so many strong black women fought for our civil rights to prove ourselves worthy as equality to men. Women of today’s society need to take a stand for something and rise above these stigmas.

Personal experiences have also landed because of how society thinks today. My generation ‘90s babies have no respect for one another. Guys aren’t asking females had in marriage any more. Guys hardly take females out on dates, meet their parents or have and interest in them after one night. I believe these images are poisoning the minds of society. Too many things are becoming accepted in the world today. People rather let things go on the way that it is without taken a stand for something.

As a female I take pride and I am very grateful for the woman who fought for my rights and freedom. They have simply paved the way for me to even be allowed to gain an education, and to be able to have my own opinion and views on life. These derogatory stigmas drawn a huge gap between females and society, and we are being used and displayed as nothing more than our bodies. They call it entertainment I call it disrespect, because this is not only how African American women are seen in the media, but how we are able to find placement in society. I choose this topic because it hits at home in some ways. As a young black female growing up in a house hold full of females I learn to value myself more than just my looks. As a young lady I feel I am not able to feel comfortable in my own skin because I have the media saying that it’s okay to be over sexualized in society.

People of my generation seem to live their lives as if there on TV, and I believe the media has a lot of responsibility on how people act in my generation. Even though we have plenty of inspirational powerful African American females figures displayed on the media, these negative stigmas still sticks around. Will we rise up to promote change or will we continue selling our souls and degrading our race? One day I hope and dream of becoming a social worker, and change starts here and now. If we don’t fight for how society perceives us as a woman of color have we really gone far? Have our great civil rights leaders and public figures wasted there time to fight for us to be free today? So my question still remains have history repeated itself?

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