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Stereotypes, subliminal messaging and stigma – Blackness and racism in the United States of America.

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The United States of America – a land believed to be of the free, where anyone can go and succeed; an environment that is portrayed as allowing anyone who works hard enough to become who they want to be and it is advertised that with hard work comes success. However this most surely is not the case and with the prevailing animosity being brought to attention by media coverage the dystrophies within this country will be explored and examined. This essay will aim to highlight the negative racial relations between African Americans and the white American population. Throughout the essay the history of America will be discussed in order to see how it is a further catalyst for the difficulties the black community face today. The history of slavery and colonialism will be delved into to understand how it has led to the inequality black men, women and children face in modern day America.

The issue of colourism will be discussed-this is the process of judging the black community both internally and externally based solely on their skin shade-and how this affects the physical opportunities for black individuals and also how this process is a tool for psychological oppression. Within this topic it will be explored how slavery caused this phenomenon and how modern standards of beauty and success allow it to thrive and influence the black community so heavily.

Continuing with the aesthetic representation of black individuals the topic of how black females are seen as commodities in the western hemisphere will be explored. Within this topic the essentialism of black features will be explored. The American slave trade will be discussed as to how it has affected the white population's attitudes towards black women's bodies and how the black woman was and still is portrayed as a disposable commodity. To explore what may have influenced American attitudes the topic of racial science will be looked at and how its wide-spread influence encouraged a nation to see the black woman as a labourer but also a comforter behind closed doors. Within this section an original analogy will be expressed that believes the oppression of black women is still present, them being valued as a commodity has not died, but instead has morphed into a modern view where black women are subliminally compared to indulgent foods.

The final section will address the vilification of the young black male. Within this section the history behind why the police system holds racist and stereotypical views towards this group will be explored. This section will aim to understand why young black males have been given the stereotype of the brute and how racist ideologies have trickled down to modern perceptions and now affect our judicial system. What further will be addressed in this section is how the effects of institutionalised racism are detrimental to the success of black males by parcelling out unfair sentences to this minority group and how black men are being made subordinate through the use of police propaganda perpetuated through false drug statistics. Also this section will highlight how white supremacist ideals are making the minority group the enemy.

This essay will aim to understand the discourses perpetuated through media and social interaction. Dr Yaba Blay states that we live in a system where we say that beauty is

in the eye of the beholder but we have to question to ourselves, who is training that eye? (Blay 07)

Colourism and a culture of hierarchies.

'Colourism is the prejudicial treatment and discrimination of individuals falling within the same racial group on the basis of skin colour.' (Harring 2014) This hierarchy is based on the lightness of an individual's skin tone and also whether or not their features are more Euro-centric. Even though colourism is an issue within the black community, which is perpetuated by members of this community themselves, the phenomenon arguably was brought about by the harrowing effects of slavery. Before the contemporary and emphatic effect and practice of colourism can be explored and discussed the history of how this conspicuous hierarchy came to be created must be delved into.

From 1619 to 1865 black African people who were brought to the United States of America were in a period of enslavement. This was a period when these human beings were considered to be 3/5th of a human being, treated like cattle and compared to primates. (Grills 2011). For 246 years, black people were considered not worthy of rights. Progression in history then allowed a movement from 1865 to 1964 which was emancipation from slavery but arguably without a plan. Black slaves who were now American citizens were put into this period of post-enslavement, a type of limbo if you will that gave them only very basic rights in the USA. What needs to be addressed here is that for years the black-American community were not even considered human beings by the white -American population. What encouraged this animosity that the slave community were subject to, were Afro-centric features which included dark skin. From this conspicuous hate and belief that the black 'species' was inferior brings around the catalyst for the self hate and loathing that allows colourism to exist today.

Dr Tifase Webb-Msemaji comments that slaves were stratified depending on their complexion. He believes that 'the racism we have amongst ourselves as people is a direct backlash of slavery'. He further goes on to highlight that there was a 64 degree chart based on colour. Slaves were allocated jobs and status based on the published chart. (Msemaji 2011). Many have questioned how a chart and an ideology from 200 years ago can still affect such a large community today. Dr Daryl Rowe would argue even though there have been movements to encourage black pride with such sayings as: 'the blacker the berry the sweeter the juice' and "'The African race is a rubber ball. The harder you dash it to the ground, the higher it will rise", we still live a system where lighter skin is favoured and where a white supremacist framework is ubiquitous and valued (Rowe 2011). For example out of 196 issues of cosmopolitan magazine, 175 issues feature white women. Of the five front covers that do feature a woman of African- American heritage they are all light skinned with Euro-centric features. (Cosmopolitan statistic 2015).

All dystrophies within a community have to start from somewhere, so it would be necessary to understand where these ideas stem from and from how early the black community is indoctrinated with these ideologies. Clark and Clark conducted an experiment where they measured young black children's preferences to race, racial awareness, and racial self-identification. The black children were shown a white doll, a brown doll and a black doll. They were then asked to point to the doll that:

- 1) you like to play with or like best,
- 2) is the nice doll
- 3) looks menacing
- 4) is a nice colour
- 5) looks like a white child

- 6) looks like a black child
- 7) looks like a negro child (Please note the different use of language here as many negative connotations are associated with the word. There is a significant difference to the response here if the Clarks were just asking the children to point at a 'black' child)
- 8) looks like you.

The study revealed that 67% of black children preferred to play with the white doll, 59% chose the white doll as the nice doll and 60% chose the white doll as being more beautiful. Additionally 59% chose the darkest black doll as the one that 'looks menacing'. Interestingly overall only 58% of black children, reluctantly I may add, selected the black doll as the one that 'looks like you'.

What this study demonstrates is that black children have an inclination to prefer and respect the white form or the lighter shade more. The study also shows that there is a correlation between the most negative comments and associations with the darkest doll. The children also have a reluctance to identify themselves with the aesthetic that matches them the most closely, due to the messages and stigma that have been associated with dark skin. The study also found that black children tended to reject their own ethnic group. (Jordan 2009)

It has been previously explored that slavery was the reason that colourism came about, but why is it still surviving in modern-day free America now? Dr Roland Bontelle would argue that colourism is not a natural process. It is a social and political construction that was created and is still used as a tool to oppress and discriminate (Bontelle 2011). If children from such a young age are being conditioned to think this way and it is not a natural process, we have to explore the sources and attitudes that are being expressed to these children and are influencing them from an early age.

Referring back to the catalyst to this all, colourism has come about because in colonialism a hierarchy is always needed for the system to work. This hierarchy came from a scientific and therefore an empirical belief that black individuals were inferior: 'Cuvier linked race with hierarchies and superiority with whites at top' (Law 2010) Hunter writes that 'during slavery, jobs on the plantation were often assigned by skin colour creating animosity among slaves'.(Hunter 2005). This is due to that fact that slave owners and colonisers saw the black form as inferior- therefore if someone was lighter skinned, they were deemed to be less connected with the black species and in turn they were considered more beautiful, efficient and also intelligent. Okazawa Rey supports the argument that these ideologies have infected the minds of the black community with common patterns which have found 'The lighter the girl, the more money and prestige she was apt, and expected, to marry'. It has also been found amongst the black male community that they verbalise and express that a lighter skinned woman is favourable over a dark skinned woman. She found that from the black men she interviewed they believed lighter skinned women to be more desirable, to be seen as more of an accolade and deemed prettier by the black male community than a darker skinned female. (Okazaway rey 2008) A valid point that needs to be addressed is the environment that many of these modern American children are being brought up in. America is a capitalist meritocratic society where you are conditioned to be the best you can and reach the top. Daryl Rowe would agree that if one's aesthetics fit the ideals of those at the top, fit the ideals of those creating the hierarchies and fit the ideals of those who define what is beautiful, successful and superior, then those at the bottom, looking up, will strive for that: 'Given the preference that was shown to mulatto slaves, it is not surprising to find that light -complexioned blacks find preferential treatment in 'freedom' as well'. (James and Wilson 2008)

Colourism is a powerful system that keeps the black community subordinate and is a system that is so powerful as it is perpetuated within the community itself. 'It is a system that has strengthened over generations and is the internalisation and degradation of what it means to be black'. (Grills 2011). Dixon and Maddox would agree that Afro-centric features are portrayed and made to be associated with negative features in the western hemisphere. Whereas 'skin colour and features associated with whites, such as light skin, straight noses and long straight hair take on the meanings that they represent: civility, rationality and beauty'. (Hunter 2005) These subliminal indications that perpetuate this phenomenon can even be found in daily English vocabulary with such words as 'fair' being used to describe not only a just situation but also complexion.

What has been explored is that colourism is a phenomenon that was summoned up and forced onto the black community through racism and a belief that this foreign species was in fact inferior. Colourism has been able to thrive due to the fact that the successful system of colonialism and slavery needed a hierarchy and, with that, a mentality needed to flourish that would keep a large group of people subordinate. Colourism can be seen to be perpetuated in language and media. It is a system that allows Euro-centric ideals to govern and it allows white culture to alienate men, women and children which has detrimental psychological affects. It has been believed that colourism hinders self esteem confidence and self belief amongst black people and has also been discovered to be a cause of anxiety within the black community(Wilson and Hall 1992)

Black female bodies as a commodity in the United States from 1864 to present.

A commodity is defined as a raw material or primary agricultural product that can be bought or sold or also defined as a useful and valuable thing. This section will highlight how the United States of America treats black women's bodies like commodities and how black women's bodies are hyper sexualised, and made comparable to objects that can be valued, graded and sold. This argument will be demonstrated through the history of black women's bodies and through the initial interactions the white male population had with the black female. An original analogy of how this commodification did not stop at 'freedom' for blacks but has instead transformed into a modern and subliminal way of informing people that black women do not own their own bodies and that their bodies can be traded and rated against their will, will be also be put forward. What this section will aim to explore is why black women's bodies have been seen as so useful but have become reviled rather than revered.

Black women's bodies have been used as a tool to allow the white woman to feel superior and as an object for white men to conquer but never adore. Black women have been seen as agricultural tools during slavery and they were valued primarily for their productive capability. (Wallace Sanders 2008) In one of the earliest black feminist analyses of European constructions of African female sexuality Barbara Omolade makes the assertion that when white men met African women in 'the heart of darkness' – mother Africa, they face each other as conquered and conqueror. (Wallace sanders 2002) The gross mistreatment of black women by white men was ignored, the white man's behaviour was deemed excusable due to prevailing scientists 'hypothesising that dark skinned people have strong libidos and drawing on the old discursive strategy of sexual fantasy long associated with the language of exploitation, conquest and domination'. (Law 2010). Black females were seen as primitive and in turn deemed sexually available tools because they were instinctively and intrinsically lascivious therefore they exploitation was not a heinous crime but a natural response to their believed gross promiscuous nature.

Black female bodies have been used as commodities in slavery. They were used to feed the children of the slave owners, to satisfy the sexual needs of the slave owner and to tend to the labour required by the slave owner. These archaic attitudes have trickled down into modernity and still affect the psyche of the majority now, so much so that Aubrey argues that these effects are psychologically damaging modern American women and she believes that black women have come to view themselves as objects and judge themselves on their aesthetics and their functions because that is what western society judges and therefore values them on today.(Aubrey 2011)

Now that slavery is over the truncation of black women's ridicule has not begun. These attitudes have manifested themselves from slavery due to the fact that black women have been seen as exchangeable and tradable. (Cotton 13) The end of slavery has not brought around the death of attitudes that see black women as taboo and a treat to indulge in occasionally and in private. The western hemisphere believes and demonstrates that 'there is nothing sacred about the black woman's body' and therefore this use of them is justified and has been excused for so long that it is now normal behaviour to believe that the black woman doesn't truly own her own body. (Wallace sanders 2008) Wallace Sanders would agree that these ideologies have been able to thrive due to the American ideals behind business and 'the profit motive and the insatiable desire for cheap labour during slavery and in the New World reinforced the images of African women as beasts of burdens and workholders. The commodification that black women suffered from during slavery has morphed into a subliminal modern form-black women are now likened to food, a vital source that can rot, be exchanged, bought and valued accordingly.

The first contemporary example is the sugar statue in New York portraying a typical mammy figure. The mammy figure was made out of sugar with essentialist features such as large breasts, a conspicuous vulva and a tie in her hair: particular features that American media and scientists promote as the image of the black women, a grotesque image that was either to be used or ridiculed. (Humphreys 2009) Many articles also found a large proportion of the spectators to be taking sexually suggestive photos with the statue and posting them to Instagram. (Knafo 2013). What needs to be noted here is her robust figure was made from a commodity that was once highly valued but can now be bought for pennies, the statue was made from a substance that attracts flies and can also rot, it was also made from an item that in the modern educated capitalist world you are told you shouldn't have too much. It is bad for you so you may enjoy it in moderation. This analogy is supported as Shapiro believes that by portraying black women in such a way through popular art and culture and by commodifying their bodies and making them into nothing more than objects , gives excuse to the terrible behaviour they have suffered at the hands of slavery and also alleviates any white guilt or responsibility. (Wallace Sanders 2002)

The second contemporary example is the beauty industry and particularly mainstream makeup. For people of a lighter complexion make -up is called 'fair' 'ivory' or 'normal', whereas if we begin to delve into shades for females of a darker complexion they are always likened to food: 'cocoa,' 'mocha,' 'coffee,' 'caramel,' 'cinnamon'. These significant linguistic changes create a difference between the females. The reason these labels are so damaging is because they are products that are appealing to the masses but what is not highlighted and made conspicuous in these names is the history it brings and what memories they stimulate. 'Living in a world where white folks are no longer nursed and nurtured primarily by black female caretakers' people do not look at these products and see that this is a modern and subliminal way of hinting to the masses that 'black women were a commodity available to anyone white who could

pay the price' (Hooks 2002) and still now are seen as a less desirable female, who can be tried but never appreciated or adored. In concordance Hooks states that these types of mainstream labels are popularising representations that would have thrived during slavery and still now can be used as a tool to indicate to black females that they are still organic spectacles that were exploited for the use of slavery and capitalism that led society to believe she was different and only capable of working with and supporting the labour of the earth.

These representations that the make-up industry promotes again coincides with the pattern of black females being likened to a product that can be valued and sold. It compares black women to products that are deemed indulgent, items that are only meant to be treats. It has been argued that these comparisons have been used as a tool to assert control over the black female by hoping they will passively absorb these mainstream representations. Again this can be likened to slavery where black females were bombarded with the images and ideas that represented black females as expendable. Now modern advertising and media is still perpetuating this idea that black women can be valued, devalued, tried and consumed.

The vilification of the black male, how a brute is born and bred.

As explored in the previous section, when the black female was compared to an animal it was her lasciviousness and her sexual desires that were believed to be her determining primitive feature. However with the young black male it is that he is a 'brute negro'- a stereotype that is predominant in the minds of Americans'. (Wallace Sanders 2008) What this section will highlight is how America has vilified and alienated the black male. This section will explore how stereotypes from slavery may still influence the American bureaucratic mind-set today and from that how black males are disadvantaged, persecuted and incarcerated unfairly.

The American media is a very powerful tool and the visualisation of black males through the media, film and television has created a culture that views black males as criminals and as being predisposed to anti social behaviour. (Tony 11). As Du Bois excellently puts it 'crime is a phenomenon of organised social life, and is the rebellion of an individual against his social environment'. Du Bois believed many black males who were moved from their homelands were uncomfortable and in turn this caused a lack of harmony with the new conditions which led to crime. Due to these situations in the south the idea of an aggressive and wild 'negro slave' was promoted and instilled a fear in the white American population. (Carby 1998)

Du Bois' writings were a retort to the writings that were racial prejudices from white scholars such as Hoffmann in regards to crime statistics involving black men in Philadelphia and the south. Many of the virulently racist social Darwinist critiques of black life were published during this time and white scholars during this period of post enslavement believed that crime rates increased in Philadelphia due to the fact that black men were now free and also they were inherently more susceptible to criminality than their white counterparts.

Du Bois questioned this and believed that increased crime rates were due to poor socio-economic situations. Sutherland supported Du Bois and believed that the increased crime rates were a 'reflection of the bias against the negro because of the prejudice against the race. However even if the statistics are completely reliable, they involve a comparison of groups that differ economically, educationally, socially and racially' (Sutherland 2002) What is demonstrated here is that potentially when Du Bois was writing black males were committing more crimes but not because they were genetically predisposed as Hoffman would believe. Hoffman believed slaves committed fewer crimes during slavery only because they were detained and once free

they were able to do as they wished. But Du Bois' modern analysis concludes that they committed such acts because they were subject to economic and social conditions post-slavery that have caused such scenarios where crime is the last resort.

Hallet believes that the social injustices many black males face today are due to racial biases. He believes them to come from stereotypes that stemmed from slavery and also findings that stemmed from post slavery but still resonate in society today, describing it as a power game that 'subordinates black men in the process' (Hallet 06). This vilification of the black male is very much present in modern America today-shown in such statistics as one third of all black males in the United States of America today can be expected to go to prison in their lifetime, compared to one in seventeen white males. Racial minorities in the United States, especially blacks, are far more likely to be arrested than white Americans (Whibey 2015). From 1980 to 2010 police arrested black youths for drug crimes at more than twice the rate of white youths, even though a 2012 study found that white high school students were more likely to have abused illegal drugs than black students in the same time period. (Whibey 2015).

It has also come to media attention more recently the amount of black lives lost to police brutality with such names as :Eric Garner who was strangled in Staten Island New York in July 2015; Michael Brown who was shot in Ferguson Montana in August 2014; Tamir Rice a boy of only 12 years of age who was shot to death in Cleveland Ohio in November 2015; Walter Scott who was shot to death in North Charleston South Carolina in April 2015. It can be argued that the police forces are more inclined to act forcefully when it comes to the black community due to trends and expectations. Marcus argues that this is not due to patterns but in fact is an institutionalised racism that encourages profiling and stereotyping from the top down. Further statistics support this vilification and, in turn, extermination of black males as in the state of Missouri black males are killed by law enforcement officers twice as frequently as white males and nationwide the rate at which black males are killed by law enforcement is three times higher than that of white males. (Whibey 2015) Wallace Sanders believes that black males have been advertised as the brute and the enemy, they have been advertised as the beast who is going to taint the precious white female and the beauty of America. Therefore the white American male has taken it upon himself to eradicate this threat to true American purity. (Wallace Sander 2008)

It can also be argued that black offenders end up in the criminal justice system and prison disproportionately compared to their numbers in the population. This is due to a racial bias that can be found in the system that intentionally victimises black males (Webster 2011). What needs to be addressed here is why these ideologies are so embedded and why that these individuals are being incarcerated so unfairly and also losing their lives. Further critics argue that these acts are unjustifiable and are used as a tool to assert political dominance over the black man, perhaps a dominance that society has had since slavery and can not release (Tony 11). These modern stereotypes and judgements have manifested themselves from archaic views about the black male. It was widely believed in the southern states that black males were closer to apes than human beings. From this scientifically supported belief, many believed that the animalistic trait made black men brutish, aggressive and cruel. (Marcus 11) In turn it was widely agreed upon that black men had more of a susceptibility to being criminals due to their closeness to primates. Harry J. Anslinger created articles stating that marijuana would make black men sexual predators and rape white women (Marcus 11) and cocaine made 'darkies' think they were better than the white man even though cocaine was more commonly used amongst the white population.

Looking more closely at the vilification of black men through drug use, black males are far more likely to be persecuted for this crime. 14 % of the Black- American community take drugs whereas 37 % of the African -American community are incarcerated for this offence (Whibey 2015). What the statistics show is that there is an unfair bias in the system that leans towards white supremacy standards that implicitly try to sabotage black males' chances of success. Helmer would agree as he believes historically in the United States drug prohibition has employed racist theories which have promoted negative representations of black drug users. This white led drug culture alienated them by advertising they were deviant and creating a stereotype that still resonates today. In turn African -Americans now constitute 80 % of those sentenced to federal prison for crack cocaine even though 2/3rds of crack cocaine users are white or Hispanic. (Blackman 2004)

FBI director James B. Tunley states that the police are more inclined to cross the street if they see two black boys compared to white boys due to cultural expectations and white supremacist propaganda in the police force. Sampson and Wilson would agree that these historical ideas are still influencing the west today and argue that white drug culture assumes that black males will indulge more recklessly than whites so therefore they are prosecuted more severely. She further goes on to say that this perpetuation of black deviance is a tool to keep white supremacy thriving and use a minority as a scape goat for a nation. (Whibey 2015)

Conclusion

The essence this essay has highlighted and captured is that a past is emphatically capable of hindering the growth and success of a community as a whole. This essay has shown that the black community has been subjected to scrutiny, stereotypes and stigmas through the practice and success of transatlantic slavery. The damaging attitudes that are causing the truncation of success to the black community have been uncovered through the exploration of the issues of colourism, commodification of the black female body and the vilification of the black male. What has been exposed in the first section is that a system that was created in order to sustain a capitalist colonialist system was in fact successful but not only did the United States enslave African -Americans physically but it also enslaved them mentally. This is a mentality that still today affects the community from the inside out. What has been demonstrated is that an archaic hierarchy has thrived off the broken mentality of a people and still thrives in the modern day black community as a system that creates animosity amongst the black community and perpetuates white supremacist ideologies. In order to find a solution to this psychological destruction it has been highlighted by psychologists that we need to inhibit these thoughts from a young age as this is a learnt process not one of a natural adaptation.

Leading onto the mental growth and repair of the black community the imagery based section, which explores the idea of black women as commodities, follows. This section

was able to identify with the history of the black female and her relationship with the white male and the white female and allows us to understand that the black woman was seen as a hybrid of a lustful creature but also in concordance a grotesque beast. Furthermore it was understood that the black female was solely seen as a labourer and a possession of the white man who could be used accordingly. It was discovered that by demeaning the black female to nothing more than an object it excused and alleviated the white man of any atrocities. Black females were able to be demeaned to nothing more than merely commodities due to popularised science and ideas that believed they were distant from the pure angelic European female and therefore could be subject to scrutiny and harsh labour. This section drew a contemporary relevance by making an original analogy to black women still being seen as commodities that do not own themselves by using contemporary examples to highlight how the USA uses subliminal messaging to remind black females of this. It highlighted how black females are often likened to food, especially food that is rich and indulgent. In a modern capitalist society where one's slim figure and healthy diet is an indication of wealth and education, it is in this sphere that black females are being compared to foods that are taboo and are considered to be bad for you-the types of indulgent foods you must only indulge in occasionally. Thus black women are viewed as a product that can be valued and devalued at the hands of capitalism.

Finally this essay highlights the vilification the United States media and judicial system extends to young black males. Again a history of the United States needed to be explored in order to understand the contemporary examples. Once the history was uncovered what was understood was once again that the black community was believed to be animalistic and it was also believed that the black man's primitive nature encouraged intrinsic criminal tendencies. Further evidence was uncovered to demonstrate the racial bias in the system that is an implicit attempt to eradicate the feared being that is the young black male.

This essay has highlighted the many injustices that are perpetuated in the United State of America. What needs to be understood is all these horrendous inequalities that the black community are suffering from today are the consequence of a harrowing past. In order to move forward we need to understand the catalyst for the hindrance because 'nothing, absolutely zilch, happens without a past'. (Zachary 2015)

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