

CHAPTER 2

EMBODIED REPRESENTATIONS

TOOT TOOT HEY BEEP BEEP. In 1979, disco diva Donna Summer (né LaDonna Gaines) had two smash hits that carried the same theme. Sung with a seductive brazenness by the African American Summer, “Bad Girls,” an ode to “dirty bad” prostitutes who combed the streets at night, and “Hot Stuff,” a sexually aggressive call out to find a “warm-blooded lover,” both described wild women on the loose. In fact, the allure of Summer’s sexy lyrics so captivated listeners that her initial breakout single, “Love to Love You Baby,” which featured Summer’s own (faked) orgasmic moans and groans, was quickly remixed into a seventeen-minute-long track that played in discos everywhere. Many argue that Summer helped usher in a new era for female music performers by making iconic the image of the disco queen with her songs about sexually liberated women set to pulsating background beats. However, Summer’s rise to fame followed a familiar path for black women and recalled a much longer sexual history for many women of color in the United States and abroad.

Living in Europe during the early years of her career, Summer met songwriter-producers Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte, who cowrote a number of songs for Summer that in 1974 resulted in her first full-length album, *Lady of the Night*. As its title suggests, the album created a sexual persona for Summer that set the stage for the trademark hit “Love to Love You Baby” and caught the attention of U.S.-based Casablanca Records. Its president, Neil Bogart, and Moroder soon began capitalizing on Summer’s sexually charged image

by producing a series of records that featured the singer cooing about various sexual exploits or coyly lamenting her fate as a lonely forsaken lover. Performed in revealing outfits that were meant to mirror the dance scene where her music played, Summer's live appearances further blurred the distinction between her and the wanton women she sang about. As critic Judy Kutulas contends, this called into question the reasoning for Summer's popularity.

In her essay "‘You Probably Think This Song Is About You’: 1970s Women's Music from Carole King to the Disco Divas," Kutulas sees "the looming presence of Moroder as a kind of producer-pimp [that] consigned [Summer] to the category of musical slut. Summer was a commodity, an object." Kutulas further argues that Summer's 1970s eroticized image consciously eschewed the proud Afrocentric iconography of the Black Power Movement in favor of whiteness and "stereotypes of African Americans as more sexual and passionate." Ultimately, Kutulas reads Summer as a sellout. More precisely, she posits her sexuality as the currency of exchange.

It is significant that Kutulas considers the adoption of the image of the black nationalist female rebel preferable to the hypersexual images of black women that have long circulated in mainstream popular culture. On the surface, the former certainly appears much more powerful and dignified, but memoirs such as those written by former Black Panthers Elaine Brown and Assata Shakur, who describe having to give up sex on demand and being physically abused by their male comrades, complicate an easy condemnation of Summer's decision (if she had one). Be it as a down-with-it soul sista or a reigning disco diva, neither role was completely freeing for Donna Summer or most black women of her era. Too many racist and patriarchal interpretations of their sexuality stood in the way.

Legacies of the Past

Historically, black women have struggled to control representations of their sexuality, and the line between their sexual agency and the sexual exploitation they face has often been blurred. While patriarchy

subjects almost all women to some form of a virgin-whore sexual dichotomy (more commonly known as “good girls vs. bad”), women of color carry the extra burden of being judged through the additional prisms of race and class. The experiences of colonization create images of women of color that are based on racial identity and further affected by their class standing. In the case of African Americans, slavery set in motion a dynamic around black women’s bodies that limits positive representations of their sexuality and their ability to play with sexual roles. As slaves, black women had to contend with the mandate that their bodies were someone else’s property. That made their abuse—through forced impregnation, rape, and other forms of assault—justifiable and expected.

As a result, the complexity of African American women’s sexual agency has been largely reduced to polar images of good and bad. Most conspicuous are the mammy and jezebel stereotypes, which surfaced during slavery and continued in its aftermath. Female slaves were largely relegated to fieldwork, but in wealthier homes many also provided domestic care. According to historian Patricia A. Turner, most house servants were young (few slaves lived long lives), relatively thin (food was scarce), and often mixed race and light skinned (a result of sexual intercourse between white owners and slaves). However, they rarely have been portrayed this way. The mammy caricature depicts house servants as elderly women with pitch-black skin and obese bodies. Emphasizing an overly maternal nature and joyful disposition, it also suggests a deep-seated loyalty and love for her owner’s family and contentment with her situation. In contrast, the jezebel appears as a physically attractive mulatto who assumes power through sexual cunning. Considered promiscuous, the jezebel supposedly entices white men with her insatiable sexual appetite. The reality, however, is that mummies and jezebels were more frequently distortions of the same person.

Most female slaves were sexually exploited and objectified, indiscriminately. The distinction between “good” and “bad” black women was created to justify the different sexual roles that they were



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The caricature of the mammy, which presented domestic slaves as loyal, nonthreatening, and content in their servitude, allowed viewers to see slavery as a benign institution.

forced to perform. As mammies, the emphasis was on their domestic duties. Making them appear old, dark, and obese served to desexualize them so as to diminish the threat of their presence in their owners' homes. The implication was that the owner and other male family members, who were already predisposed to see dark skin and overweight bodies as ugly, would not be attracted to a mammy and, thus, she would not disrupt the wife's place within the home. As a nursemaid to the children, the mammy had a cheerful attitude that eclipsed the fact that she was denied her own children, including often having to give her breast milk to the owner's children instead of her own. This docile image allowed white owners to appreciate the benefits of

the black female body without feeling remorse over how those benefits were gotten. However, sexual relations between white men and female slaves did occur and rebellions did take place. Consequently, the figure of a scheming, self-serving jezebel offered an explanation when female slaves misbehaved.

The idea that people of African descent were innately lustful preceded U.S. slavery. European colonists in Africa regularly criticized the inhabitants' sexuality, often focusing on their lack of clothing as proof of their lasciviousness. Tying this flawed logic to other erroneous assumptions about intelligence, morality, and sophistication, Europeans justified their enslaving practices as necessary to their overall efforts to "civilize" the African continent. This polarization between cultures created a sharp contrast between Europeans and Africans. However,

Hottentot Venus

Born in 1789, during a period of great strife and violence in South Africa, Saartjie (pronounced “Saar-key”) Baartman stands as one of the country’s most emblematic figures of European colonialism. Known as the “Hottentot Venus,” Saartjie was exhibited extensively throughout England and France as a female monstrosity. Specifically, Saartjie’s buttocks and genitalia provided Europeans with “proof” that Africans were racially inferior, sexually primitive, and prone to perversion. In reality, however, Saartjie Baartman’s tragic fate illustrates the far-reaching effects of racism and misogyny on the black female body.

“Hottentot” is a Dutch term that was derogatively applied to the Khoi Khoi people. Saartjie was a member of the Khoi Khoi clan, a prosperous cattle-herding tribe that populated much of the Cape Colony region in South Africa. However, after the arrival of Europeans at the start of the 18th century, life began to change as the colonists’ interest in the country’s land and resources led to battles with the country’s governing tribes. By the time of Saartjie’s birth, the Khoi Khoi had seen all of their wealth lost and the majority of their people killed or enslaved.

Saartjie was a direct victim of her community’s upheaval. Her mother died shortly after her birth, and her father was killed during a land dispute when Saartjie was a teenager. Soon after, Saartjie was captured and taken to Capetown, where she was sold into servitude. She became the property of a freed black hunter who sent her to work as a maid and nanny for his brother’s family. While in their service, Saartjie met Alexander Dunlop, a British military doctor who visited the home. Fascinated by her appearance, Dunlop became convinced that Europeans would pay great sums of money to view Saartjie’s “unusual” physique. As scholar Sander L. Gilman explains, “The nineteenth century perceived the black female as possessing not only a ‘primitive’ sexual appetite, but also the external signs of this temperament, ‘primitive’ genitalia.” As was traditional in her culture, Saartjie’s labia and surrounding genitalia had been extended to form what Europeans called an “apron.” While the practice was considered beautiful by Saartjie’s tribe, and intended as part of a woman’s initiation into

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adulthood and marriage, as Gilman notes, Europeans took the alteration of her genitalia as a confirmation of the Africans' pathological nature. To Dunlop, this was part of the attraction. Naming Saartjie after the seductive goddess, Venus, he believed she would enthrall many viewers with her otherwise "repelling" features.

In 1810, Saartjie arrived with Dunlop in London at the age of twenty-two and almost immediately became a sensation. Scantily dressed with tribal ornaments, she stood on a stage while crowds paid handsomely to see her protruding buttocks. Because of obscenity laws, her apron was displayed only during private exhibitions. Abolitionists in London attempted to block Saartjie's performances and fought for her release. However, a court ruling determined that Saartjie had willingly entered into a contract with Dunlop and was not being mistreated. Because Saartjie was illiterate and may not have been clear about Dunlop's intentions, critics have long seen this decision as fraught with prejudice.

Eventually, the allure of an exotic, seminaked African woman faded in England, and Dunlop, quick to cut his losses, sold Saartjie to a French travelling circus. As part of the circus, she was displayed in a cage, billed as a freak, and even beaten on occasion. By 1815, the circus was losing money and decided to release Saartjie, penniless, into the street. She spent the next year getting by through prostitution. She suffered from alcoholism, and her health deteriorated. In 1816, Saartjie collapsed in her bathtub and died. While the cause of her death is unknown, many critics

the dialectic failed to account for their regular and close interactions that exposed more similarities than differences and disproved most of the colonists' biased views. In the case of U.S. slavery, the jezebel figure became a way to mediate between how a white society conceived of female slaves and who they actually were.

Most African women entered U.S. slavery through slave auctions, where they were often exhibited naked and exposed to humiliating physical examinations. From the outset, their sexuality was considered an object of public spectacle. This continued with a heavy focus placed on their sexual reproduction. Female slaves were frequently pregnant either as a result of force or coercion (work-free days or extra food

believe that it was a combined result of her alcoholism and fatal pneumonia. Some also suggest that she may have had syphilis, which affected her nervous system. In either case, her death once again catapulted her into the limelight as doctors interested in promoting scientific arguments about race rushed to examine her body. Subsequently, her body was dissected and a plaster cast of it was made. Saartjie's brain, skeleton, genitalia, and body cast were then bought by the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, where her body parts were frequently exhibited until the mid-1980s.

With the fall of apartheid in the 1990s, interest in Saartjie once again resurfaced as demands for the return of her remains to South Africa grew more persistent. In fact, throughout the decades, many South Africans had waged campaigns for her return, each urging for a proper burial in her homeland. In 1994, then-president Nelson Mandela began to seriously negotiate the issue with French president François Mitterrand. At first, the Musée de l'Homme and other French museums protested, fearing this request would initiate others by countries that had been similarly "plundered by colonial adventurers." However, the significance of South Africa's political changes and the added pressure of women's rights activists, artists, academics, politicians, and international groups forced the French government to seriously consider the proposal. The bill passed, and on April 29, 2002, Saartjie Baartman's remains were turned over by the museum and sent to Johannesburg. One hundred eighty-seven years after Saartjie's departure, she was returned to her homeland and finally laid to rest.

were common incentives); even prepubescent girls were encouraged to become sexually active in order to prepare them to "breed." In a few rare cases, female slaves were also hired out as prostitutes. Each of these factors contributed to the notion that black women were hypersexual and obscured their actual position as victims of rape and exploitation. In turn, this gave white men—owners, male family members of owners, and field overseers—the excuse to dismiss any sexual misconduct on their part. They could recast their abuse as the result of falling prey to the female slave's wiles.

By focusing on female slaves' sexuality, the jezebel stereotype also redirected attention away from the significant ways that black female

slaves deceived their owners. As activist and scholar Angela Davis asserts, slave women were far from docile. In “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Roles in the Community of Slaves,” Davis cites numerous examples of resistance that black female slaves waged against their owners to assist their own communities. Besides working toward buying relatives’ and friends’ freedom, slave women poisoned food and set fire to their masters’ homes. They also participated in large-scale revolts, wielding weapons and risking death alongside their male counterparts. Even in minor ways such as feigning illness to avoid work, black female slaves countered their oppression. Yet despite such valiant efforts, it is the persistently negative images of black women as mammies and jezebels, frequently captured in popular culture (think of films such as *Gone with the Wind* and “Black Americana” collectibles), that remain vivid in the U.S. popular imagination. Similarly, it is the violence of these historical events that has left black women stigmatized and vulnerable to other negative representations.

During the Reconstruction period (1865–1877) immediately following slavery, the battle for sexual autonomy continued as many former female slaves moved north and became employed as domestic workers. As historian Darlene Clark Hine explains, the lack of other job opportunities and the low wages that drove most domestic work made it nearly impossible for black women to be economically self-sufficient. As a result, many relied on housing from their employers, an arrangement that increased the likelihood of their exploitation. In addition to facing unfair job demands and extended work schedules, black domestic workers found themselves subject to sexual advances by their employers. Even those who lived away from their place of employment faced challenges in exercising control over their bodies. Some found it financially necessary to engage in prostitution and other sex work, while others encountered sexual violence from men in their own families and communities. Yet despite the numerous affronts, few were willing to publicly acknowledge their situations.

Many black women chose instead to foster what Hine calls a “culture of dissemblance” around their shared experiences of sexual violence. To

handle the trauma of sexual violence that could resurface at any moment, many black women learned to “dissemble,” or conceal the truth of their inner lives. Hine suggests that their secrecy about rape or other forms of sexual assault that they experienced became a means of deflecting the already negative connotations attached to the black female body. The burden of sexual stigma rooted in the antebellum period, coupled with the shame and intimidation attached to their lives as “free” black women, made any mention of sexuality a precarious topic for discussion. Within their own community, it reopened wounds and threatened to expose how black men had internalized sexism and misogyny. To an outside, still largely prejudiced, white community, it confirmed claims of a degenerate morality. Indeed, until the late 20th century, any woman—regardless of race—who accused a man of sexual assault was immediately regarded with suspicion. For African American women, the racial dimensions of such a charge only intensified the issue.

Black women’s marginalization within mainstream white culture made addressing physical safety singularly a black women’s issue. As Hine notes, while the lynching of black men became a topic of public outcry and garnered wide attention, the rape of black women remained a minor point of commentary. More frequently, it was cited as another example of how black men were psychologically affected by failing to protect their women. Consequently, these factors shaped the focus that the issue of black female sexuality ultimately took. For black women, sexual autonomy became framed as a crusade for preserving their chastity, causing it to become even more deeply entrenched in discussions around class.

Black women were among the earliest advocates for legal protection against rape. In particular, women’s clubs such as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), founded in 1896, and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), founded in 1935, lobbied for specific legislation that would “defend their name.” At the core of their protests was a subtext that black women’s physical safety was inextricably tied to persistent accusations of immorality and sexual perversity. Advocates believed that as long as there was no

legal recourse to prevent the sexual harassment of black women, their character would remain in question, making actual incidents of sexual assault more easily dismissible and further perpetuating stereotypes that dehumanized them.

Assumptions about black women also formed a barrier for those attempting to gain social mobility. General prejudice kept most African Americans shut out of the higher-class echelons. Any hint of an active sexuality was read as a confirmation of black hypersexuality and fueled arguments that the black community was inherently savage and less socially evolved. As a result, early crusaders worked extensively to downplay sexuality altogether, which along with the shame that the “culture of dissemblance” hid, eventually drove most expressions of black female sexuality underground. This made sexuality more often a source of repression. For the majority of black women who were also working class, it became a taboo subject to avoid at all costs.

The Politics of Sexuality

As we look at the mass proliferation of sexual imagery in our culture today, the negative history of black female sexuality might no longer appear relevant. Images of black sexuality—female and male—are abundant in the 21st century and, at first sight, seem rather distant from the manipulated images of mammies and jezebels. For instance, since Donna Summer’s hits of the 1970s and ’80s, more recent popular music has given us “female power” songs such as “Independent Women” by Destiny’s Child and “A Woman’s Worth” by Alicia Keys as well as numerous sexually explicit rap stars such as Lil’ Kim and Missy Elliott, who argue for sexual pleasure on their own terms. Within the world of sports, tennis champs and sisters Venus and Serena Williams have transported the powerful nature of their physiques from the court, where it makes them exceptional athletes, to the store racks, where it helps them sell sexy sportswear and clothing lines. To some, examples such as these would suggest that black women have taken control of their historically hypersexualized portrayals precisely by exploiting them.

Yet as sociologist Patricia Hill Collins asserts in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, “In the post–civil rights era, gender has emerged as a prominent feature of what some call a ‘new’ racism.” How people see African Americans as men and women as well as their perceptions of African American masculinity and femininity still affect the types of “opportunities and discrimination African American women and men encounter in schools, jobs, government agencies, and other American social institutions.” In many ways, argues Collins, African Americans have not escaped the binds of the double consciousness that W. E. B. DuBois described before the civil rights period. Black men and women must still live in a culture saturated with stereotypical images that presume to represent them. In fact, she contends, to fully understand the far-reaching effects of racism on the African American community, one must consider how dominant representations of African Americans (including the mammy and jezebel images) meaningfully affect how African American men and women treat *each other*.

In 1974, a group of black feminists who called themselves the Combahee River Collective issued “A Black Feminist Statement,” one of the most significant documents to address the interlocking issues of class, gender, and sexuality within the African American community. Describing a number of personal experiences, the essay illustrates why addressing the sexual politics within their own community is crucial to the overall survival of African American people as a whole. In the statement, members of the collective write about the pressure they felt growing up to conform to the standards of white culture—to be “quiet” and “ladylike”—and they address their growing awareness of the “threat of physical and sexual abuse by men.”

Only later, as part of the collective, however, did the women realize the extent to which issues of gender and sexuality divided their community. For several of the women, these divisions became most apparent when they decided to pursue an education. As they write, “We discussed the ways in which our early intellectual interests had been attacked by our peers, particularly Black males. We discovered that all of us, because we were ‘smart’ had also been considered ‘ugly,’

i.e., ‘smart-ugly.’ ‘Smart-ugly’ crystallized the way in which most of us had been forced to develop our intellects at great cost to our ‘social’ lives. The sanctions in the Black and white communities against Black women thinkers is comparatively much higher than for white women, particularly ones from the educated middle and upper classes.” Critics such as Collins would argue that the “sanctions” that the collective cites are central to the sexual politics that African Americans have internalized from the dominant culture and that perpetuate the sexism and misogyny against black women.

The term “smart-ugly” is likely to conjure memories of that brainy awkward girl from your high school days. As we know, beauty and intelligence are supposed to be mutually exclusive, but as we also know, there are indeed women who embody both qualities. However, what distinguishes this general characterization of women as either/or from the collective’s term “smart-ugly” is that most young white women, especially those from higher classes, tend to belong to communities that support their intelligence and offer successful role models who look like them (i.e., white and female). There are far fewer examples and opportunities for young women of color. Indeed, for women of color who come from struggling communities, the decision to seek out an education is likely to place them in an isolated position and simultaneously distance them from their former surroundings. Thus, being smart comes with heavy consequences. For instance, the Combahee River Collective’s members paid for exercising their intelligence by being outright ostracized and rejected by their black male counterparts. Their “social lives”—whether that meant dating, family gatherings, or friendships—were affected when they chose to educate themselves. What made them “ugly” to the men in their community was not their looks; it was the threat that their education posed. It was their ability to insert themselves into the community in ways that did not require them to be subordinate or docile. Beyond drawing out differences in class, being educated laid bare the unfair gender treatment that women received from men and led them to question why they had ever endured it.

While education inspires self-empowerment and can provide members of a community with a weapon to fight outside oppression, it also exposes problems that lurk *within* an oppressed community. Too often, black women are criticized for being overly aggressive, demanding, or even selfish, hence “ugly,” when they seek to improve their lives. The implication is that, by choosing to pursue a course that can remove them from their immediate surroundings and make transparent class differences that also encompass gender discrimination, black women reject the supporting role that they are expected to play for men. In turn, falling back on the sexist notion that intelligent women are unattractive, black men—and the community itself—fail to account for their own oppression and rely instead on intimidation and blame to suppress their sisters and bolster a dangerously false sense of power/pride in black masculinity.

The 1992 rape case involving Mike Tyson and Rhode Island beauty contestant and college student Desiree Washington offers a good example of this scapegoating. Although one can speculate about what actually happened, the African American community’s reaction to the rape charge against Tyson was stalwartly one sided, as Gayle Pollard-Terry reports in a *Los Angeles Times* story. Several male community leaders came out vehemently in his support and urged others to do the same. At one rally sponsored by the 8.5 million–member National Baptist Convention, the organization’s then-president Reverend T. J. Jemison reminded the crowd, “Our brother needs us.” Nation of Islam leader and cosponsor of the event Louis Farrakhan was cruder in his remarks: “You bring a hawk into the chicken yard and wonder why the chicken got eaten up. You bring Mike to a beauty contest and all these fine foxes just parading in front of Mike. Mike’s eyes begin to dance like a hungry man looking at a Wendy’s beef burger or something. She said, ‘No, Mike, no.’ I mean how many times, sisters, have you said ‘No’ and you mean ‘Yes’?”

Both Jemison and Farrakhan exact loyalty from their black sisters and the community as a whole by using a language of guilt and blame. Moreover, their words underscore the persisting vestiges

of slavery by encouraging a culture of silence and denial around the issue of rape. Embedded in their statements is the implication that women are sacrificial. In Farrakhan's case, he suggests that they are also likely duplicitous, which recalls the sexually negative images of the jezebel. Neither man acknowledges that many black women have suffered by *not* speaking out. As sexual assault expert and journalist Lori S. Robinson notes, many black women are in fact reluctant to report sexual assault because they feel compelled to protect the men in their communities and families. They are also wary of an unjust penal system and recognize the potential damage to families in removing men from their households. However, as women, their dedication to their community is often overlooked or taken for granted. More often, their race is emphasized against their gender and sexuality, which are both disparaged or ignored. Comments such as Jemison's and Farrakhan's emphatically make clear the depth to which the dominant culture's assumptions about the black female body have affected the black community's treatment of it. In addition, they illustrate the pervasive nature of the violence that surrounds black women's lives.

Colonizing Bodies

Foregrounding the history of black women in this chapter on sexuality offers an opportunity to create a comparative framework for looking at the experiences of other women of color. It also provides a contrast for discerning how issues of class, gender, and sexuality are often specific to one's racial/ethnic background. For example, how do Asian American women, Native American women, or Latinas fare in their own communities in relation to the experiences of colonialism, physical violence, sexual stereotyping, and exploitive capitalism? What overarching issues shape the lives of women of color that allow us to discuss their sexualities collectively? Similarly, how do different sexualities and gender identities (e.g., lesbianism, bisexuality, transgenderism) create particular discussions or crossover experiences between and among ethnic groups? Are there shared methods of resistance and subversive expression? And how is Donna Summer still relevant to these conversations?

Native American scholar and antiviolenace activist Andrea Smith posits, “If sexual violence is not simply a tool of patriarchy but also a tool of colonialism and racism, then entire communities of color are the victims of sexual violence.” Smith’s assertion illuminates the reasoning behind Patricia Hill Collins’s call for a sexual politics analysis. The sexual violence done to the bodies of women of color provides a paradigm for understanding how the dominant culture treats its communities as well as how the communities treat themselves. Consider how Rayna Green arrives at what she calls the “Pocahontas perplex.”

Green argues that even before Europeans had the physical image of the princess Pocahontas to employ as an icon, they had already created the symbol of the Native woman to represent the New World. Depicted as similar to a Greek goddess but imbued with images of a wild nature, “the bare-breasted, Amazonian Native American Queen” appeared as “the sole representation for the Americas” from 1575 to 1765. The image recalled a nurturing Mother Nature figure whose body, or unfamiliar landscape, also presented danger and peril. She was admired but untamable. However, her daughter, the princess, raised with exposure to European settlers and knowledge of their ways, provided the necessary bridge to overcome these fears. The princess’s youth made the feasibility of assimilating Native Americans into Western culture more possible in the settlers’ imaginations and, as such, she was portrayed as bearing a physical resemblance to Europeans. Her nobility also bestowed her with a sense of purity and civility considered uniquely Western. By creating a female image that was more like them than like other Native Americans, Europeans, and later American settlers, conjured an acceptable partner for themselves. The discovery of Pocahontas, the Powhatan Indian who befriended Virginia settlers and supposedly saved one of their own from death, only served to bring to life this otherwise improbable female figure. Even so, there was only one Pocahontas, and the details of her story have always been dubious at best.

In Disney’s animated version, Pocahontas not only defies her father to rescue John Smith, but she also falls deeply in love with the colonist.



Photo by Terri Castaneda

This limited-edition Barbie doll features singer-actress Cher in a replica of the Native American costume that designer Bob Mackie created to promote her 1973 song “Half-Breed.” Although Cher’s Native American roots are sketchy at best, her over-the-top public displays depicting her heritage in the stereotypical representation of an Indian princess have been a hit with fans.

In actuality, Pocahontas married a different Englishman, John Rolfe, and it appears unlikely that she ever had any romantic feelings for Smith. There is also some doubt about the rescue. However, the intertwined elements of love and sacrifice are not lost in most tales told about their encounter. The supposed Pocahontas-Smith romance symbolizes the desire that Europeans often felt for Indian women and the submission to that desire that they imagined the women would be willing to provide. Here was a woman, noble and innocent, who willingly sacrificed herself, and possibly her people, for a rogue white male hero. Like the black mammy, the Native princess supported the colonizer’s actions. Her presumed participation in his plans made her a co-conspirator and her benign character made her physically appealing. However, as they did for the mammy and the jezebel, these traits also presented a problem.

Tied up in their relationships to both white and Indian men, flesh-and-bone Indian women complicated the princess iconography. The princess’s sexuality was attractive to colonists only as long as it was not exercised. However, real Indian women had Indian male partners, mothered Indian children, and were lusted after by white men. Consequently, as Green notes, “The Pocahontas perplex emerged as a controlling metaphor in the American experience.” The “princess”

was an abstraction that suggested that Indian women encouraged the conquest of their land and people. In reality, however, the concrete experiences of Indian women and the sexual violence they experienced through colonization required a different figure: the “darker, negatively viewed sister, the Squaw.”

Rather than a fantasy colluder, explains Green, the squaw was a distorted scapegoat meant to relieve white men of the guilt they felt for their sexual attraction to Native women and the violence they perpetuated in response to it. To mask the colonizers’ violence against the indigenous people of America, they cast Indian women as inherently savage. Like Indian men, squaws were constructed as possessing failing morals, including drunkenness, thievery, and laziness. In addition, as a female figure supposedly opposite of the princess, the squaw was depicted as lascivious, poor, fat, and ugly. Sound familiar?

Body Counts

In February 2000, the U.S. Department of Justice released a report that stated, “Native Americans are twice as likely to be victims of violent crime than any other group. They have the highest suicide rates in the nation. They are twice as likely as any other ethnic group to be arrested for an alcohol-related offense, and four times more likely to spend time in jail.” More alarming, the report revealed that Native American women experience a level of violent crime that is nearly 50 percent higher than that reported by black males. According to an Amnesty International 2005–2006 study, homicide is the third-leading cause of death among Native American women, and they are victimized 2.5 times more often than other ethnic groups. In addition, one in three Native American women will be raped at some point in their lives, a rate that is more than double that for non-Native women. In most cases, their attackers are non-Native. Equally disturbing, domestic violence is extremely high in reservation communities, with more than 75 percent of murders of Native American women committed by someone they knew. These startling figures reveal the multiple sites of violence that intersect Native American women’s lives. Like African

Yellow Woman

“Stories will help you be strong,” asserts writer Leslie Marmon Silko. Growing up on a Laguna Pueblo Indian reservation in New Mexico, Silko often struggled to make sense of her mixed-race heritage. Her appearance made her different, and she realized this held the potential for isolation. Her relationship with her elders, however, and the stories they told, taught Silko to view her differences positively. In particular, the tales of Kochininako, or Yellow Woman, presented a role model whose very strength and allure were based on what set her apart. Yellow Woman was often drawn away from her people and engaged in acts that required courage and will. At the same time, she was a figure whose uninhibited sexuality defied stereotype. In her work, Silko revives Yellow Woman’s complex representation to present her as a significant counterimage to the negative portrayals of Native American women that are so often perpetuated in mainstream American culture.

There are many stories of Yellow Woman’s adventures, but the most common one entails her saving her people. A drought threatening to starve Yellow Woman’s community forces her to venture out far away from her village in search of water. Happening upon a fresh spring, she stops to fill her water jar. However, she is interrupted when out of the pool emerges a handsome man dressed in buffalo skins. Inexplicably drawn to him, Yellow Woman has no time to react when the man transforms himself back into his original shape as Buffalo Man and whisks her off on his back. Together, they ride across the plains, falling deeply in love. Yellow Woman tells Buffalo Man of her community’s struggles, and he responds by sending back his people so they can provide their bodies as food for her starving village. Eventually, she returns and her people warmly embrace her. In some versions of this tale, Yellow Woman is married, but her love affair is never condemned. In others, she brings back twin boys who eventually become heroes to the community.

There are other stories about Yellow Woman’s adventures, as Silko notes. For example, in one tale, Yellow Woman is out hunting rabbits to feed her family and must outwit a monster that chases her. In another that

Silko wrote for her collection *Storyteller*, Yellow Woman is a modern-day, spiritually lost Native American woman who finds herself caught up in a liaison with a mysterious Navajo man named Silva who steals cattle from white ranchers. He repeatedly calls her Yellow Woman but she initially rejects the name, convinced it is part of a history that has died with her grandfather, who told the stories of Yellow Woman. Eventually, however, her journey with Silva becomes one of rediscovery, and upon returning home, she decides to become the new storyteller, ensuring not only the memory of her grandfather, but also that of this legendary figure.

Throughout these stories, Yellow Woman serves as a resource to her people by being different from them and sometimes going against social convention. As scholar Paula Gunn Allen notes, “The stories do not necessarily imply that difference is punishable; on the contrary, it is often her very difference that makes her special adventures possible, and these adventures often have happy outcomes for Kochinnenako and her people.” Similarly, explains Silko, “Sometimes an individual must act despite disapproval, or concern for appearances or what others may say.” Kept alive by the Keres people who inhabit the Laguna and Acoma Pueblos in New Mexico through the retelling of her passion and conviction, Yellow Woman provides Silko and other contemporary Native American women with a way of imagining themselves separate from the virgin-whore dichotomy that Western society imposes. Instead, for many, she is a reminder of their culture’s powerful feminist history.

In addition, Yellow Woman’s sexuality offers a positive example for women. Her sexual freedom is celebrated and considered empowering. As Silko emphasizes, sexual repression was a result of Western colonization and not natural to the ways of her people. Yellow Woman “has courage to act in times of great peril, and her triumph is achieved by her sensuality, not through violence and destruction.” This latter point is key to understanding the significance of women within the greater cosmology of the Keres people. Yellow Woman’s stories “emphasize her centrality to harmony, balance and prosperity of the tribe,” explains Allen. For the mortal Native American woman, it similarly implies an acceptance and appreciation for the various differences that make women valuable to the whole community. Yellow Woman is a life-affirming creator and, as her female descendants, so can other Native American women be.

American women, Native American women experience violence in profound ways that demonstrate the extent to which issues of sexuality converge with those of race and gender.

In fact, the Pocahontas perplex's self-loathing squaw actively haunts the lives of contemporary Native American women. Working as a rape crisis counselor, feminist scholar and activist Andrea Smith discovered that every Native American female survivor she ever treated at some point admitted to her, "I wish I was no longer Indian." For these women, being sexually assaulted was intricately tied to being both female *and* Native American. They saw their violation as a consequence of possessing either or both of these characteristics. Like Green, Smith contends that the true origin of this dual victimization lies in the history of colonialism that American Indians suffered at the hands of European settlers. Exploitation of Native American female sexuality, she argues, was used as a means of exterminating a population and usurping its property: "The project of colonial sexual violence establishes the ideology that Native bodies are inherently violable—and by extension, that Native lands are also inherently violable."

Tracing the ideology that leads to the sexual dehumanization of Native American women begins with understanding how Manifest Destiny shaped much of the Euro-American expansion across the Americas. As European settlements gave way to an American government and Euro-American culture, a sociopolitical doctrine began to take form that assumed the United States had the ordained right and responsibility to spread its culture and acquire territory. By the mid-1800s, this concept of white supremacy and domination became actively employed to remove people from their lands and force them to assimilate to a Euro-American society. As a result, physical bodies became a primary target. Foremost, American colonizers organized their efforts as attempts to improve communities that they saw as essentially flawed. As their European forebears had done with African people, white Americans used stereotypes of Native American sexuality as justification for their actions against them. As Smith explains, "In the colonial imagination, Native bodies are . . . immanently polluted

with sexual sin.” This thinking eventually set forth a culture of violence toward Native American communities that had a direct impact on Native American women. Racist and patriarchal in nature, the violence that Native Americans experienced also fostered misogyny and self-hate among the tribes themselves.

In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen identifies the negative characterization and abuse of Native American women as a “synchronistic” result of colonization: “Patriarchy requires that powerful women be discredited so that its own system will seem to be the only one that reasonable or intelligent people can subscribe to.” Before European contact, many tribes functioned as matrilineal cultures and women held a variety of leadership roles. Consequently, Allen argues, colonizing Native American communities required in part undermining the position of Native American women. Forcing women to lose political power and social status not only accelerated the subjugation of Native people, but it also shifted blame and anger toward women. Through time, this manifested itself through the community’s own neglect and abuse of its women. As Smith notes, whereas before European contact tribes dealt swiftly with the few incidents of gender violence that occurred, as centuries passed, most became lax in their punishments and some Native American community members even came to view sexual violence as “traditional.”

In addition, discrepancies between tribal justice systems and U.S. federal law enforcement often hinder the legal prosecution of sexual violence offenders. For example, Smith cites the various problems that arise from the simple fact that rape falls under the Major Crimes Act. Because the act limits the ability of Native American tribes to prosecute serious offenses, most tribes rely on the federal court system to handle rape cases and few have established codes of their own to address them. However, rape cases in general are difficult to pursue, and the added obstacle of having them occur on Indian territories leaves most U.S. attorneys unwilling to prosecute them. Furthermore, even when tribal courts attempt to try a rape case, the Indian Civil Rights Act (ICRA) of 1968 limits them to issuing maximum one-year sentences.

Yet perhaps most frustrating and symbolic of the “inherently violable” ideology of Native American women that Smith identifies is the fact that “tribes do not have the right to prosecute non-Indians for crimes that occur on reservations.” At the same time, reservations are usually located far from state and county law enforcement agencies and officers themselves are often reluctant to respond to rape cases since they are not compensated for their time from either the federal government or tribal communities. Even when state or county law enforcement does arrive at a crime scene, it does not have jurisdiction on reservation lands. As Smith concludes, “So, unless state law enforcement is cross-deputized with tribal law enforcement, *no one* can arrest non-Native perpetrators of crimes on Native land.”

Fatherly Fallacies

The broad sexual license with which Native American women’s bodies have been treated is particularly troubling when considered alongside the frequent representations of white men as protectors of women of color. For instance, Paula Gunn Allen cites the hypocrisy of the U.S. government’s insisting that tribes such as the Iroquois and Cherokee institute “democracy” in their communities before granting them federal recognition and protection, yet forcing them to adopt a democratic process by which the only officials given political power are men elected primarily by nontraditional community members. This is illustrated in the signing of the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, which resulted in the tremendous loss of the Cherokee Nation’s Southeast territory. As historian Theda Perdue notes, no woman was included in the process. This exclusion signaled a dramatic shift from the traditional Cherokee ways of the previous century, when women had held significant positions of leadership. The paternalism that Allen and Perdue describe has been a crucial tool of colonization as men of color have adopted patriarchal practices but have still been forced to assume an inferior role within the colonizer’s overall power structure. Moreover, the persistent depiction of men of color as hypersexual savages from whom white men must protect their women (and, in a benevolent gesture,

also women of color) further encourages paternalism by promoting the notion that white men are heroes and defenders of civilization. In return, white men receive entitlement to the ownership (and violation) of women of color.

Paternalism is one of the greater forces shaping the sexual politics between communities of color and the dominant culture. Perhaps this is in part what makes Donna Summer's pop singer persona particularly objectionable when subjected to race and gender analysis. For all its titillating lyrics, most of Summer's early music projects the image of a sexually adventurous woman who nevertheless needs male guidance or direction. Indeed, the same can be said of Summer herself, who despite her own ambition relied on the assistance of men such as Moroder and Bogart to "make it" in the entertainment industry. Songs such as "Last Dance," in which Summer wants a lover "Beside me, to guide me / To hold me, to scold me," emphasize the same fantasies that male colonizers have long held about women of color in general. Lyrics such as these perpetuate a specific sexual myth in which women of color are inherently naughty and thus must be redeemed by the honor of white men. Through time, this distorted, uneven pairing can appear normal. In Summer's case, the racial weight of her music's paternalistic influence is felt even in her own self-directed recordings. "Dim All the Lights," the first song actually written by Summer herself, asks a lover to "turn my brown body white." Besides being one of her most risqué lyrics, the racialized subtext of this sexual wish remains glaringly clear.

In *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance*, law professor Rachel F. Moran examines the strictures against interracial relationships in the United States and the impact of the 1967 *Loving v. Virginia* ruling, which struck down antimiscegenation laws, on popular attitudes toward interracial marriage. Analyzing legal cases and delving into social histories and cultural mores, Moran describes numerous ways in which the regulation of intimacies between people of different ethnic communities has helped define racial identity, reinforce racial inequality, and uphold moral notions of white supremacy. At the same time, Moran discovers that the degree to which interracial relationships

are still regarded negatively or are more readily accepted varies largely depending on the historically racialized images of sexuality of different ethnic groups. For example, she notes the significant difference between the “marry-out” rates for black women and those for Asian American women, both of whom come from ethnic groups that have been heavily stigmatized by racial stereotypes. While factors such as achieving higher levels of education and employment as well as outnumbering marriageable black men in the population should encourage greater outmarriage rates for black women, they continue to experience a relatively low incidence of interracial marriage, especially in comparison to black men. Moran credits this discrepancy to many of the reasons mentioned earlier in this chapter. Perceived as either hypersexual or asexual because of past legacies of slavery or considered too independent and self-sufficient in contemporary times, black women are frequently “caught in a double bind.”

In contrast, Asian Americans across various ethnic groups, including Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean, have had steady outmarriage rates during the forty years since *Loving*. Specifically, Moran found that Asian American women had a much higher marry-out rate than their male counterparts. Because this disparity is not due to an imbalance in gender ratios or socioeconomics (the numbers of marriageable men and women are relatively equal), and both genders share a similar class spectrum, Moran suggests that racialized images of Asian and Asian American sexuality may offer a more plausible answer. Like Native American and black women, Asian American women have been subject to a sexual paradox. In their case, it involves being imagined as either hyperfeminine and sensual or wildly exotic and dangerous. In their relationships with white men, these contradictory assumptions, coupled with an American paternalism that emphasizes the role of white men as protectors and diminishes the significance of Asian masculinity, may account for part of the mutual attraction.

In the foreword to *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire*, sociologist Karin Aguilar-San Juan underscores the significance that the West’s colonial interactions with Asian countries have had in

shaping how Asian Americans are subsequently viewed. Similarly, as historian Gary Y. Okihiro notes, these interactions stretch as far back as the 5th century BC with Grecian representations of Asia. In fact, Europeans began trading, traveling, and living within various Asian countries long before Asians ever arrived in the Americas. However, as many of these encounters gave way to imperialist actions, Europeans, and later Americans, also became embroiled in extensive histories of conflict with Asia, many of which have led to multiple military occupations and negative propaganda justifying Western domination. In the aftermath of this violence, Asian women have often surfaced as an assumed part of the cache that comes with Western victories. Considered “spoils of war,” Asian women have been typically portrayed as innocent, docile, and eager to be saved by Western armed forces (for example, remember Vietnamese freedom fighter Co Bao’s dying scene with Rambo in the film *First Blood*, in which the gift of her necklace becomes his justification for launching a killing spree?). Their fragility as women, often resulting in racist monikers such as “lotus blossom” and “china doll,” is also frequently emphasized. In particular, Asian women have been cast opposite to Western women, who are alternatively represented as strong and aggressive. Yet rather than realistic depictions, these characterizations more accurately reflect a gendered extension of Orientalism.

Orientalism, as postcolonial scholar Edward Said defines it, is an understanding of the Orient (a vague geographical term assigned to nation-states east of Europe, which initially meant the Middle East and later included places such as Asia as Europeans ventured farther east) as a monolithic group of people, experiences, and customs that are fundamentally contrary to those of the West. In particular, whereas Western Europe projected itself as rational, orderly, and sexually prudent, Westerners imagined the Orient as primitive, savage, and lustful. Although Orientalism is based on a series of constructed images, it has had a very material impact on how the East is treated by the West. In particular, it has propped up the idea that Western nations are inherently superior. As Okihiro writes in *Margins and Mainstreams*:

Asians in American History and Culture, “Whether because of race or culture, of biology or behavior, of physical appearance or social construct, Asians appeared immutable, engendered, and inferior. These differences . . . helped to define the European identity as a negation of its Other.”

Thus, Asian women, and subsequently Asian American women, have had to battle both the marginalizing effects of Orientalism and the widespread gender discrimination that exists throughout both Asia and the West. In the process, their sexuality has served as the mediating ground. For example, in instances where Western control of Asian countries has been secured, such as after the end of World War II or the Korean War, Asian women have been imagined as devoted companions to American GIs stationed in their homelands. In turn, images of soldiers being pampered by Asian women—whether they are geishas, bar girls, or shy villagers—have filtered back to the United States in the form of commercial media. Films depicting Asian women as vulnerable and sexually accessible have encouraged many American men to subconsciously interpret their own sexual desires as a chivalrous act of liberation. However, left out of most wide-screen lenses are the countless women who were violated by soldiers from both their own countries and the United States. Similarly, the reality of circumstances that likely forced some women to serve as concubines or prostitutes (for instance, extreme poverty, political upheaval, the destruction of their communities) is similarly avoided in Western representations of Asian female sexuality. Even the offspring produced by the forced sexual encounters between soldiers and Asian women are conveniently erased from the exoticized landscapes of the East. Instead, Americans are repeatedly fed pornographic scenes such as the one with the Da Nang hooker in *Full Metal Jacket* who assures her potential soldier customers, “Me so horny. Me love you long time.”

While the lotus blossom figure inspires mostly lust, her implicit sexuality opens the door for the creation of her darker sister: the sinister dragon lady. According to journalist Sonia Shah, the American use of the term “dragon lady” takes historical root in various reports that



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Asian women have typically been portrayed as devoted companions to American GIs, but these depictions leave out the poverty and destruction that have often forced women into prostitution. Shown here is a Saigon bar where U.S. troops could find prostitutes and heroin during the war in Vietnam, 1971.

the *New York Times* published in the late 19th century about China's last and longest-reigning female ruler, the Dowager Empress Tzu-Hsi. The reports called her "an awful old harridan" and "the wicked witch of the East, a reptilian dragon lady," and the pejorative term stuck as a way of characterizing Asian women as evil and degenerate. More specifically, it served as a means of naming the misogynist distrust and xenophobia that Americans felt in equal amounts with their attraction for Asian women.

Asian women's entry into the United States has often varied from that of their male counterparts. For example, whereas during the 19th century most Asian men came as laborers set on returning home once they gained the necessary financial means, Asian women came for different reasons (though many participated in the same backbreaking

Korean Camptown Women

Like several other Asian countries during World War II, Korea saw its women violated and forced into sexual slavery as a result of Japan's military occupation. Throughout the war, tens of thousands of Asian women from places such as China, Burma, and the Philippines were recruited, kidnapped, and coerced into providing sexual services to Japanese soldiers. In Korea, these "comfort women" have become integral to the country's history. In particular, the guilt surrounding their abuse has led to their veneration as victims of war, and the country has made many efforts to compensate them for their harrowing experiences. The decades following these events, however, proved less kind to a different set of Korean women who faced a similar situation when the U.S. military arrived in 1945 to occupy the country.

After World War II, U.S. troops were stationed in Korea as peacekeepers and offered protection against the rising communist threat in North Korea during the Korean War (1950–1953). However, their long-standing presence in the country had several negative and deteriorating effects. Initially, clearing the land to create the U.S. military bases resulted in the widespread displacement of rural village life. Businesses popped up that catered specifically to American soldiers. The areas surrounding the military bases soon became centers of criminal activity that included drugs, black markets, and a thriving sex trade. At the same time, devastated by consecutive wars, Korea soon found itself dependent on American dollars. For the next three decades, the country looked almost entirely to the U.S. military bases stationed around the country to support its economy. At one point, notes *JoongAng Daily* reporter Soo-Mee Park, "Camptown prostitution and related businesses on the Korean Peninsula contributed to nearly 25 percent of the Korean GNP."

Gijich'on, as Koreans called American "camptowns," or brothel districts, were central to the country's financial arrangement with the United States. As Park explains, camptowns were primarily set up to offer U.S. soldiers easy access to sexual services "in a controllable, confined area." Young women from displaced villages and those seeking reprieve from the country's crushing poverty were easily lured to work in the camptowns. Some went willingly, believing they would earn money to help themselves and their families. Others arrived with hopes of marrying American soldiers who

could provide them with better, more comfortable lives. Still others, however, were deceived into becoming “*yangbuin*,” a term coined specifically to describe Korean bar girls and sex workers. They did not realize that working at an American camptown almost invariably entailed being a prostitute to U.S. soldiers. Once at the camptowns, women found it financially difficult to leave as most became indebted to the bar and club owners. In fact, none of these women had any financial means, most were uneducated, and many were alone in the world. Although much of the country still considers their decision to engage in prostitution a personal choice, others argue that their limited circumstances left camptown workers with few other options.

Another significant charge sympathizers wage in favor of camptown women is that Korea willingly supported the American brothels. As one former sex worker Park interviewed told him, “I remember how the government authorities hopped around from one club to another and taught us how to deal with G.I.s. They called us patriots and civil diplomats at the time, because we were helping to earn foreign currency and improve the U.S.-Korea alliance.” Historian Ji-Yeon Yuh also notes the Korean government’s active participation in funding brothels such as “American Town,” which was built in 1969 by a South Korean general and landowner. Every day, buses filled with soldiers from military bases around the country filed in and out of the camptown, which operated approximately “twenty clubs, a dozen stores, and a government-run health clinic where the women receive[d] mandatory testing for sexually transmitted diseases.” Eventually, American Town became so prosperous that the owners turned it into a corporation and sold shares to investors.

Despite the number of examples illustrating Korea’s involvement in maintaining the camptowns, there is still a strong prejudice against the women who worked in them. Some critics argue that the former sex workers are an all-too-vivid reminder of the country’s shameful past. Their experiences also detract from the image of sexual modesty still culturally imposed on Korean women. Unlike the World War II comfort women Yuh cites as “innocent victims of Japanese colonial aggression,” camptown women are “dismissed” as anomalies who remain outsiders to Korean society. Yet many of the former camptown women, now in their sixties and seventies, refuse to be erased from the country’s consciousness and have launched campaigns against the Korean government requesting housing and pension benefits. They argue that, like comfort women, they, too, are war victims.

work). Some women immigrated because they were joining fiancés or husbands. So-called “picture brides” married men they had never met. Other female immigrants came to escape poverty and the gender subjugation they experienced in countries where women faced even more restrictions than in the United States. For instance, several women chose immigration over having to remain widows or entering into arranged marriages against their will. Some hoped for the opportunity to gain a shot at education and greater personal freedom. Still others intentionally deserted abusive husbands.

Many fewer women than men made the journey to the United States. Between 1899 and 1924, Korean women made up only one-fifth of the approximately eight thousand Koreans who immigrated to Hawaii and the mainland. From 1920 to 1929, less than 1 percent of the nearly seventy-four thousand Filipino residents in Hawaii were women. According to the 1900 U.S. Census, only 410 of 24,326 Japanese were women. For the few Chinese women who arrived in the United States, primarily in San Francisco, besides being greatly outnumbered, the likelihood of sexual exploitation left them even further isolated. According to historian Judy Yung, in 1860 more than 80 percent of the Chinese female population in San Francisco was engaged in prostitution. The majority of these women were kidnapped or tricked by Chinese men who pimped them out to other men or exhibited them as freaks for their bound feet. In response, Americans, particularly white female missionaries, launched crusades against this treatment; however, their efforts often resulted in mistaking *all* Chinese women as prostitutes, casting an indiscriminate shadow of doubt over the virtue of any Asian woman (Chinese women alone were blamed for transmitting venereal disease and leading white men into lives of sin, despite the comparable number of white prostitutes). Their efforts also spread an overall prejudice against people of Asian descent as being morally depraved and out to corrupt the American way of life. It was also through the bodies of these victims of sexual exploitation that the caricature of the dragon lady breathed new life. As economic downturn and heightened xenophobia fueled anger toward Chinese male laborers,

Chinese women became the other half of an imagined evil pair. Fears of yellow peril encouraged Americans to see Chinese men as diabolical schemers set on dominating the world and Chinese women as their malicious, dragon lady accomplices.

Through time, repeated accusations of treachery and actualized cases of violence (for example, lynchings, beatings, and the infamous Japanese internment during World War II), and the general exclusion they experienced from mainstream American life, led many Asian Americans of different ethnic communities to avoid speaking out against their mistreatment. This is not to say that Asian Americans did not pursue social justice or were complacent in their marginalization. However, there was a degree of silencing, self-imposed and publicly sanctioned, that distinguished them from other ethnic groups in the United States and frequently caused them to be wrongly classified as a homogenous group of individuals who presumably had no reason to complain. As many white Americans erroneously assumed that their perseverance, strong work ethic, and the general determination to succeed were extensions of their supposedly quiet natures, rather than common characteristics among most immigrants, Asian Americans came to be viewed as “model minorities.”

Beyond encouraging hostility with other ethnic groups, the model minority myth obscures the fact that Asian Americans experience many of the same struggles as other groups. Asian American women, as Mitsuye Yamada describes it, become dually “invisible” through their gender and race. The relative lack of attention to domestic violence among Asian Americans offers a good example. As the study *(Un)heard Voices: Domestic Violence in the Asian American Community* notes, “Asian American women have to deal with the constraints of their own cultures as well as those of an indifferent mainstream culture that denies that domestic violence occurs amongst Asian Americans. As a result, most battered Asian women gain very little assistance from systems that are supposed to help them find a measure of safety.” Even when domestic violence is acknowledged, mainstream U.S. society can often misinterpret it as part of some cultural tradition that prevents Asians

and Asian Americans from realizing that violence against women is wrong. This mentality was certainly present in the 1989 *New York v. Dong Lu Chen* court decision in which Chen's murder of his wife, Jian Wan, resulted in only a five-year probation. After learning that his wife had been having an affair, Chen assaulted her with a hammer, hitting her eight times and killing her. The judge hearing the case believed Chen's violence resulted from the Chinese culture's intolerance of female adultery. Chen's actions, in turn, were seen as a kind of defense of culture and family values. Ultimately, Asian American women such as Jian Wan not only lack protection within the U.S. legal system, but they are also denied justice after their victimization, leaving them dually invisible to the American eye.

"So Many Gay All Over the World"

In her stand-up concert *I'm the One That I Want*, Asian American and bisexual comedienne Margaret Cho describes her mother's response to the fact she might be gay. In broken English, Cho mimics her mother leaving a message on her answering machine asking Cho why she has not discussed the matter with her. "You have a cool mommy. Mommy is so cool and Mommy know all about the gay," Cho's mother assures her. "There are so many gay. So many gay, you know, all over, all over the world . . . so many gay, so many gay all over the world, but *not Korea, not Korea!*"

Funny as it is, Cho's joke could easily be refashioned for almost any ethnic community. Within many U.S. communities of color, sexualities other than heterosexuality are still largely viewed as external to the culture. Being queer, whether that means gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, is often assumed to be another uneasy by-product of American assimilation. While there are multiple roots of this denial, two interlocking reasons are the general lack of complex representations of people of color in mainstream society and the crushing force of compulsory heterosexuality. "Compulsory heterosexuality," a term coined by poet and essayist Adrienne Rich, addresses the belief that emotional and sexual bonds between men and women are primary

and inherent, thus encouraging the notion that heterosexuality is a universal norm. Rich challenged this assumption by using the term to emphasize how a heterosexual norm goes unexamined in our society, leaving those who do not conform to be punished for it. Arguing that the institutionalization of heterosexuality (e.g., through religion, legal practices, family customs, popular culture) is what drives people to form heterosexual relationships, she suggests that heterosexuality is more often a result of social conditioning. Consequently, queer individuals become erased from public consciousness. For queer communities of color, which are also marked by racial and often class difference and affected by internalized modes of misogyny and sexual violence, the erasure can seem absolute. Yet in fact, queer communities of color offer perhaps some of the best examples of resistance to the heterosexual norm.

In “Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community,” Carla Trujillo argues how the very nature of their sexuality places Chicana lesbians in a position contrary to the cultural expectations for women. While the dominant practice of Catholicism in the Chicana/o culture generally discourages women from attaining sexual knowledge and the culture’s patriarchal structure keeps them locked in a subordinate position, Chicana lesbians rebuke both restrictions when they “bring [their] sexuality into consciousness.” Lesbianism initiates a space to reclaim a positive female sexuality and allows Chicanas to become unfettered from the social devices used to enforce sexual submission, such as motherhood and religion.

While compulsory heterosexuality and the cultural focus on family teach Chicanas that they should seek a male partner in order to fulfill their maternal role, Chicana lesbians who become mothers do so without remaining tied to this formula. Consequently, they are able to reject the material and emotional trappings that can come with requiring men to be central to the family structure. Similarly, Chicana lesbians who practice Catholicism must confront the indoctrination of heterosexuality and female submission that the religion upholds. While their resolve can involve either making deliberate compromises

Josefa Loaiza

Josefa Loaiza was a young Mexican woman who lived in Downieville, California, a thriving mining town near Sacramento, during the Gold Rush (1848–1855) era. She is also the only known woman ever to have been hanged in the state of California. Josefa was hanged by a mob because she killed an Anglo man who she claimed assaulted her. Although little more is known about her, Josefa has become a significant figure in Gold Rush lore. Throughout newspapers, magazines, personal diaries, and scholarly texts, she is discussed in terms that frequently draw assumptions about her appearance, sexual behavior, ethnic background, and class. Specifically, many cast her innocence—or guilt—in light of what they imagine it meant to be a poor woman of color living in an area surrounded by gold-thirsty, lovelorn men.

Josefa's execution occurred during the first year of California's admission into the union. Late into the evening of Downieville's inaugural Fourth of July celebration, a miner named Fredrick Cannon and his friends were walking along the town's Main Street. The men were intoxicated and as they stumbled along, they came across the home where Josefa and her husband, José, lived. Cannon knocked their door off its leather hinges and entered. Josefa was there alone. A short while later, Cannon emerged and the men continued on their way. But Cannon returned the following day. He needed hangover medication, and his doctor lived near the couple. When Cannon passed their doorway, José came out and began insisting that Cannon pay for the broken door. Cannon refused, and the two argued in Spanish, with Josefa soon joining the debate. The argument grew more heated as Cannon began calling Josefa a whore. In the ensuing exchange, Josefa dared Cannon to repeat his insults to her inside her home. She then retreated and he followed. When Cannon entered, she stabbed him in the heart, and he stumbled out, dying soon after. José and Josefa were taken

into custody and a tribunal was hastily set up. John Rose, a local rancher, dubbed “Judge Lynch” by reporters at the scene, presided over the case. During the trial, a few residents tried to intervene on Josefa’s behalf, but an angry mob soon turned on them as well. A few hours later, Josefa was sentenced to death, and José was run out of town. Josefa accepted her fate and was escorted down a long pathway to a makeshift platform on a bridge, where she was hanged. Her last words as she placed the noose over her own head were said to be, “I would do the same again if I was so provoked.”

The will that Josefa showed in her actions has often been cited as a reason for whether or not her killing was justified. In particular, while feelings of racial distrust and discrimination ran high because of greed over gold and land claims, they existed in tandem with the intense sexual frustration that men felt because of the scarcity of women in the area. As a poor Mexican woman, Josefa thus inhabited a precarious position. A subject of both attraction and repulsion, she broke several social codes when she murdered one of Downieville’s own. Defendants of the town’s decision to punish her actions with death have blamed Josefa, as a Mexican woman, for being inherently prone to violence. They have also questioned her character, implying that she was a sexually loose woman who largely provoked the problem because of her bad temperament. Yet others argue that Josefa was likely a victim of sexual assault. They see her actions as inverting the gender dynamic that existed between her and the dominant white male culture that surrounded and desired her. In not only killing her assailant but also publicly admitting that she rightfully defended her honor, Josefa Loaiza emerges as an active participant in redefining her role as a Mexican woman living in the often violent environment of the Gold Rush. In either case, her execution and its subsequent retellings reveal the gendered politics of race and class in early California. Josefa was neither entirely innocent nor a bloodthirsty killer; she was one of the many Mexican women who have been erased from American history.

or leaving the church altogether, they are forced into an act of self-awareness that stands as a model of liberation for all women.

Understanding the destabilizing force of sexually rebellious female figures within the Chicana/o community requires looking back to its Mexican roots. Recognized as a manifestation of the Virgin Mary by the Roman Catholic Church, the Mexican Virgen de Guadalupe nevertheless possesses her own iconography. She is often called the “brown virgin” as her visage is darker than the Virgin Mary’s and the symbols that surround her recall a specifically indigenous background that mirrors her followers’ cultural past. With her bowed head and clasped hands, she is considered a powerful image of hope to Mexicans and Chicana/os, who identify her with struggle. However, for women, she has long held a more complicated meaning. Her subordinate stance and permanent suffering encourage the notion that women are meant to accept pain. Similarly, the implausible nature of being both a mother and a virgin makes her a very difficult role model to emulate. Yet most Mexican and Chicana women grow up being told to follow her example. To avoid this expectation, argues writer Sandra Cisneros, Mexican and Chicana women must either reconfigure her image in their own likeness or else look to actual flesh-and-bone women who have been equally formidable. As she concludes, “My *Virgen de Guadalupe* is not the mother of God. She is God. She is a face for a god without a face, an *indígena* for a god without ethnicity, a female deity for a god who is genderless, but I also understand that for her to approach me, for me to finally open the door and accept her, she had to be a woman like me.”

In contrast to La Virgen, the other woman who looms equally large in the Mexican/Chicana/o cultural imagination is La Malinche, a historical figure who served as translator and lover to the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés in 1519. Originally named Malinal, she was an Aztec woman who was sold into slavery by her mother after her father’s death. Malinal ended up as part of the cache that Cortés and his army accumulated as they made their way through Mexico into the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán (now known as Mexico City).

Although Malinal was one of many women acquired by Cortés's men, she soon distinguished herself through the multiple languages she spoke. Recognizing her usefulness in negotiating with the diverse native communities that populated the Aztec empire, Cortés took her as his own assistant. It is this turn of fate that has made La Malinche a figure of contempt to many Mexicans and a symbol of power to many feminists.

As a translator, Malinal soon gained prominence among both the Spaniards and the indigenous communities they dealt with. Through her translations, she sealed deals for Cortés, prevented his capture, and ultimately aided him in bringing down Montezuma, the last Aztec ruler. Her pivotal role earned her respect from both cultures. As evidence, scholar Cordelia Candelaria cites the different names she was called. The Spanish referred to her as Doña Marina. An honorific title, the surname "Doña" is surprising given the disparaging opinions that most Spanish held toward indigenous people. The fact that she was an indigenous *woman* makes the moniker even more telling. Similarly, Malinal's compatriots soon began calling her Malintzin. As Candelaria explains, the suffix "-tzin" is also an honorific title, indicating that her own people also held her in high regard. Again, given the traditionally patriarchal nature of the Aztec community, this renaming is significant. The name Malinche appears to have been a linguistic evolution of Malintzin, according to Candelaria. However, as critics such as the contemporary writer Octavio Paz found, it could also serve as a means of permanently condemning a woman who braved the violence and upheaval that faced her community by relying on her extraordinary abilities alone.

In 1950, Paz published *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, a collection of essays on Mexican history and culture. The book received international acclaim and established Paz as a key social commentator on his country's affairs. Among the collection was an essay titled "Sons of La Malinche." Like Candelaria, Paz also took up the meaning behind Malinche's name. However, to him, it signaled the reason for contemporary Mexico's own turmoil and angst. Extrapolating on the linguistic origin of La

Malinche's name, he argued that the Mexican cuss word "*Chingada*" found its root in this historical figure's name. Translated crudely as "fucked," *Chingada* with its feminine "a" ending and its passive verb tense referred specifically to a woman, Paz claimed, even though it was used toward both men and women. Unique to the Mexican culture and used solely to express anger and violence, *Chingada*, he asserted, recalled the passive Indian woman who had let Cortés "fuck" not only her, but her entire country. As her unwilling sons, he continued, Mexican men were eternally subjected to the same sort of psychological trauma.

While feminists have long criticized Paz's misogynist interpretation, partly because of his essay, the phrase "La Malinche" has nevertheless become synonymous with being a traitorous whore. During the 1970s Chicano Movement, women who challenged the men's sexism were often accused of being Malinches. In Mexico, the term *malinchismo* is still regularly applied to someone who exploits the country, such as the many corrupt politicians who have historically bankrupted it.

The moralistic opinion regarding female sexuality has similarly remained engrained in the culture's consciousness. The belief that there are good women and there are bad women has allowed victimizations such as the ones taking place along the U.S.–Mexico bordertown of Juárez to continue without serious reprimand. In more than a decade, the overall death toll of women abducted and killed in this area has ranged from four hundred to eight hundred, with several hundred more reported missing. There does not appear to be one source to the violence; rather, drug cartels, gangs, and individual men all seem responsible for inflicting these terrible murders, which often also include sexual violence. The typical profile given for these victims is that they are young, poor women who have moved to the area alone to work in the maquiladora plants. These factors have been used as a pretense by Mexican law enforcement to suggest that these women are somehow responsible for what has happened to them because they are breaking away from traditional roles. However, other women with families, female students, middle-class women, and sex workers

have also been killed. Such victimization of women of color, and the subsequent blaming of them for their own victimization, relies on hundreds of years of patriarchal and colonial domination and the virgin/whore images that arise out of these histories.

The question over choice in representation is a difficult one for women of color. How women of color are viewed is heavily mediated through the stereotypes and assumptions that have historically preceded them. The desire to divide women into acceptable and nonredeemable categories to justify their mistreatment only serves to destroy communities. In addition, the implications of the sexual histories experienced as a result of colonialism, racism, and patriarchy must necessarily be taken into account. Sandra Cisneros suggests that women look to others like themselves for self-reflection. This is what perhaps makes the example of singer Donna Summer most interesting at the close of this discussion. What does her image tell us about other women like her? What does she ultimately represent? Moreover, can she or any other woman of color ever escape sexual stereotyping as long as these questions remain unaddressed?

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