Controlling Beauty Ideals: Caribbean Women, Thick Bodies, and White Supremacist Discourse[1]

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Abstract: This article explores the ways in which anti-black-woman body politics manifest themselves in the lives of Caribbean women living in the United States. Specifically, using the personal narratives of black Caribbean immigrant women, I examine these women's encounters with ideologies that marginalize them based on their bodies and preserve contemporary anti-black-woman ideologies in "post-racial" United States. This study addresses two areas that are typically understudied in body image research of black women: a critical understanding of how anti-black-woman sentiments manifest themselves in the everyday lives of black women and black women's own voices and reflections on their embodied social realities. **Keywords**: black women, body politics, white supremacy, Caribbean, immigrant

During the European colonial period, travel writers in Africa drew on and contributed to a European discourse of black womanhood that ascribed a big body to all black women and used it as a signifier of otherness, their inferior phenotype, and lesser culture and intelligence. The depiction of colonized black women in these writings represented them as having monstrous, "unwomanly" bodies that were not beautiful and admired as were the delicate bodies of their white counterparts. Perhaps the most iconic figure in this regard is that of Saartjie Baartman, the so-called "Hottentot Venus." Baartman, a South African slave, was brought to Europe in 1810 for the purposes of displaying her enlarged—by colonial standards—genitals and buttocks. Her body was exhibited across Europe as an example and model of all black women's bodies. The image of the voluptuous Hottentot Venus was harnessed to represent the hypersexuality and inferior intelligence of black women and justified their exploitation at the hands

of Europeans (Alexander 2014). This construction of the black female body as voluptuous and unwomanly—and thus built for functionality and labor—was employed to affirm the use of black women as slave labor in Europe (Morgan 1997). It helped to create what I refer to as the ideology of the "thick black woman," the notion that black women are naturally curvy and voluptuous (Gentles-Peart 2016).

On the other hand, many societies, such as those of the Afro-Caribbean, uphold the voluptuous body as a marker of desirable black femininity. In an effort to reject colonial (white) ontologies and cultivate notions of black empowerment (Bogues 2002; Meeks 2000), many independence movements in the Anglophone Caribbean idealized the image of the voluptuous black female body with ample derriere, hips, and thighs (the thick black woman idea). More than just a beauty ideal in black Caribbean societies, the idea of the curvy or thick woman has become a symbol of black identity and signifies resistance to whiteness, colonialism, and Eurocentric aesthetics. For example, Jenny Sharpe (2002) highlights how the only female in the pantheon of Jamaica's national heroes, Nanny of the Maroons, was credited with using her ample buttocks to catch bullets from the British in order to save her community, mythologizing her voluptuous body. Likewise, Bibi Bakare-Yusuf demonstrated how contemporary working-class and poor black women of the Caribbean celebrated "an unruly voluptuosity—the joy of being fat" to challenge the European upper-class morals that operated among black Caribbean elites (2006, 470).

The significance of the voluptuous black female body in Afro-Caribbean societies is also underscored by its prominence in Afro-Caribbean popular culture, particular that of the working class and poor (Cooper 2004; Bakare-Yusuf 2006; Hobson 2003). As Carolyn Cooper observes:

> The gender politics of the dancehall . . . can be read . . . as a glorious celebration of full-bodied female sexuality, particularly the substantial structure of the Black working-class woman whose body image is rarely validated in the middle-class Jamaican media, where eurocentric norms of delicate female face and figure are privileged. The recurring references in the DJs' lyrics to fleshy female body parts and oscillatory functions . . . signal the reclamation of active, adult female sexuality from the entrapping passivity of sexless Victorian virtue. (2004, 86)[2]

Celebrating the thick black female body in black communities does not automatically displace or erase white colonialist views of the volup-

tuous body and the dominance of white beauty standards. In spite of this reframing, the less favorable, anti-black-woman narrative surrounding the thick black woman persists in both black and white communities. The voluptuous black female body is still perceived as unattractive, ugly, and grotesque—the opposite of beautiful—when seen through the prism of white supremacy.[3] Largely driven by the proliferation of Eurocentric ideals of thinness in the postcolonial era, thick black bodies continue to be used in support of anti-black-woman agendas and to marginalize black women in general, not only in regard to beauty and femininity but also in relation to their participation in the global economy.

In this article, I explore the ways in which anti-black-woman body politics manifest themselves in the lives of Caribbean women living in the United States. Specifically, using the personal narratives of black Caribbean women, I examine these women's encounters with ideologies that marginalize them in the United States based on their bodies and that preserve contemporary anti-black-woman ideologies in a "post-racial" United States. This study addresses two areas that are typically understudied in body image research of black women: a critical understanding of how anti-black-woman sentiments manifest themselves in the everyday lives of black women and black women's own voices and reflections on their embodied social realities.

Color-Blind Racism and Social Stratification

According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006), systems of racial domination are not static, but shift based on internal and external societal pressures. Racialized systems within U.S. society experienced such a shift around the 1960s and 1970s when the civil rights movement challenged Jim Crow and the "racial apartheid" that existed for black people (Bonilla-Silva 2003, 272). This did not result in an end to racial stratification, however, as new strategies emerged to replace previous oppressions. Bonilla-Silva asserts that Jim Crow was replaced by a "'new racism'—a specific set of social arrangements and practices that produced and reproduced racial order" (272). Rather than based on discourses of overt biological inferiority, this new racism is based on more subtle, "softer" forms of racialized practices. The main ideological foundation of this new racial-stratification system is color blindness, which projects the idea that decisions and practices in society are not based on racial difference; therefore, inequality is

not explained as a function or product of racism, but rather as the result of cultural and individual phenomena. This new hegemonic discourse better suits the post–civil rights era where overt racial insults and physical attacks are condemned. However, the results are the same: the new racism functions to maintain the contemporary racial structure and helps underscore white privilege without incriminating white people (Bonilla-Silva 2006).

Drawing on discourses of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1995), there is a gendered component to this new racism as well. Variations exist between color-blind strategies applied to black men and black women. Using the logic of Bonilla-Silva, all black people, regardless of their multiple positionalities (shaped, for example, by gender, sexuality, and class), are subordinated within the racial structure of the United States and are susceptible to any strategy employed to marginalize them. However, seen through the prism of intersectionality, gendered elements are evident. For example, the perception among whites that black people are welfare dependent is projected unto all black people, but is particularly applied to black women who have historically been deemed "welfare queens" (Lubiano 1992). Similarly, attributing superior athleticism to black people, a culturally racist means to undermine their intellectual and creative capabilities, has been specifically aimed at black men (Hoberman 1997). In addition, the notion that black people naturally make better domestic workers is specifically associated with black women, as exemplified by the mammy figure that I will discuss below. Therefore, color-blind strategies are mobilized differently against black men and black women.

Controlling Body Image and the New Racism

Historically, racialized gendered strategies targeting black women have predominantly focused on the body. That is, gendered racial inequalities have been upheld by constructing and normalizing ideologies about black women's bodies (Morgan 1997). The use of discourses of black women's bodies to promote and maintain gendered racial inequality has a long history in the United States. For example, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) writes about "controlling images" that have been mobilized throughout U.S. history. These are socially constructed conceptions of black women designed by white supremacists to justify the policing, controlling, and containment of black women. These images and tropes are designed to "make

racism, sexism, and poverty appear to be natural, normal . . ." and disguise or mask social relations (Hill Collins 2000, 69).

Controlling images are used by white supremacist culture to construct and normalize expectations of black women's attitudes, temperament, sexuality, and bodies. In other words, these discourses are attached to and envisioned as being performed by certain body types; therefore, body size and shape are important to the conceptualization of these tropes. The most common embodied characteristic of these images is the big or voluptuous body. In this way, the most persistent controlling image and perennial strategy of the new (gendered) racism continues to be the ideology of the thick black woman. An infamous long-standing image is that of the mammy figure. This epitome of the faithful, obedient domestic servant was created to justify black women's exploitation as house slaves and restrict them to domestic service. The mammy's fat body significantly contributes to this construction of black femininity as her large body, dark skin, and round facial features create an image that poses no sexual threat to white women (Hill Collins 2000). Her body was used to mark her as docile and asexual. Another controlling image is that of the Jezebel, the sexually aggressive black woman that was (and still is) used to position all black women as sexually deviant and available, provide ideological justification for sexual assaults on their bodies, and feed discourses of high fertility. Unlike the mammy, the Jezebel is often presented as having a voluptuous body to signify the "wanton, libidinous black woman whose easy ways excused white men's abuse of their slaves as sexual 'partners' and bearers of mulatto offspring" (Austin 1995, 432).

There have been initiatives led by groups and individuals in black communities in the United States to create new, more positive narratives of black women's bodies, particularly those that are curvy, and these narratives have challenged the notion of the mammy and the Jezebel. They attempt to radically ascribe value to the ample black female physique, associating it with strength and power or the strong black woman (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003). In fact, the "large" black female body is now commonly accepted in African American communities as the ideal. As Cheryl Townsend Gilkes states,

> In spite of the high premium placed on culturally exalted images of
> white female beauty and the comedic exploitation that surrounds the
> large black woman, many African-American women know that the most

respected physical image of black women, within and outside of the
community, is that of the large woman. (2001, 183)

Nevertheless, the image of the thick black woman continues to inform
the racialized gendered marginalization of black women in the United
States. Even as some in black communities work to counter or complicate
the idea of black women as mammies or Jezebels, the parallel negative
narrative of the voluptuous black female body still circulates and shapes
black women's lives. In this sense then, the thick ideal for black women,
upheld in both white and black spaces, can have deleterious effects for
black women, as argued by Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant. In her reading
of body image and black feminist literature, Beauboeuf-Lafontant found
that while images of strength and deviance have historically been used to
encourage black women to maintain larger bodies, their larger bodies have
been used to mask black women's struggle with eating disorders and so-
cial problems and deny them protection from their communities and the
state. Beauboeuf-Lafontant concludes that it is therefore "both disingen-
uous and premature to extol the strengths and freedom of black women
with regard to their bodies," and in doing so, she says we are complicit in
expecting black women to represent what racist discourses deem deviant
womanhood (2003, 119). Moreover, promoting the ideology of the cur-
vaceous black woman allows white supremacists to maintain and deepen
gendered racial dichotomies while absolving themselves of racism. With
this in mind, I explore Afro-Caribbean women's experiences with and re-
sponses to the ways their voluptuous bodies are mobilized for the agenda
of white supremacy in a post-racial U.S. society.

   The analysis that follows is based on information gathered from focus
groups and interviews conducted between 2006 and 2014 with thirty-sev-
en first- and second-generation English-speaking Caribbean women in
the United States (twenty-three of the first generation and fourteen of the
second generation). The participants are based in New York City, which
houses one of the largest black Caribbean diasporic communities in the
world. Both first- and second-generation participants are working- and
middle-class women between the ages of nineteen and fifty-five. Many of
them migrated from or have heritage in Jamaica (which is not surprising,
since Jamaicans comprise the largest group of black Caribbeans in New
York City [United States Census Bureau 2010]), but there are also women
from other islands, including Antigua, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Vincent,

and Barbados. All have completed high school, and some have completed or are pursuing college degrees and technical or professional training. All the participants are culturally situated (because of skin tone, hair texture, etc.) and self-identify as black women.

The narratives from the participants are contextualized by my own experiences within the English-speaking Caribbean community in New York City. As an immigrant black woman from Jamaica, I spent over fifteen continuous years in a major black Caribbean enclave where I interacted with and observed black Caribbean family members, friends, and colleagues at social gatherings, hair salons, restaurants, and in classrooms. While being of black Caribbean heritage and living within the community does not automatically make me an authority on this group, my cultural position provides knowledge of and experience with the community and facilitates the opportunity for long-term informal observations of and interactions with cultural traditions and texts.

The Things White Women Say

Black women's size and skin color are often used to physically remove and distinguish them from the ideals of true (white) womanhood (Townsend Gilkes 2001; Shaw 2005; Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003). One of the ways in which this anti-black-woman discourse manifests itself in the lives of the participants is through interactions with white women who position them as exceptional because of their curvy bodies. One respondent said,

> I had a conversation with a girl in school. She was a white girl and if there were two girls standing side by side, both were size twelve, one white, one black, she wouldn't see the black woman as overweight, but she would see the white woman as overweight. She said, "I don't really see any women of color that is overweight to me." Because in her eyes, she just sees that as the norm, but when she sees a white woman that's a little bigger she says, "Wow! She looks sloppy." And I thought that was so interesting because you can have two women that are the exact same size and just their color [is different] . . . and this was coming from a white girl.

Similarly, another participant said,

> I have a friend of mine that her and I are pretty much the same size, and we were working out together, jogging, and I am like, "I have to lose my

thighs and my butt," and she is like, "You don't need to lose weight; you are perfect the way you are. I don't even know why you are working out with me." One day, I finally said to her, "We have the same body type; we wear the same size!"

As black women from the Caribbean, they ascribe to and desire voluptuous bodies, even in the context of the United States (Gentles-Peart 2016). On the surface, the comments and feedback they received from white women with regard to their bodies seem to validate their differential body ideals. However, the statements also reveal the implicit othering of black women; they position black women's bodies as different from those of white women. More precisely, their bodies are opposites: what is unacceptable for white women (bigness or "sloppiness") is the norm for black women. The white women referenced here clearly suggest that it is not only acceptable, but expected that black women do not pay as much attention to their bodies as white women because their bodies do not have to be thin—which signifies beauty in mainstream U.S. society. The white women's judgements of the participants' bodies as outside of thinness reinforce the idea that black women are less delicate, less fragile, less dainty, and therefore more masculine than white women. In this sense then, the white women's comments help to maintain structures of gendered racism without explicitly using skin color.

The comments by white women also trivialize and ignore the weight and body image issues that black women may face, overtly discouraging body care that the participants pursue (as when the white woman said her black friend did not need to workout). This dismissal and denial of the participants' struggles with weight promotes the strong black woman ideology that is prolific both in- and outside of black communities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003). It is a modern-day example of the attribution of strength based on the women's body size, implying that, because their desired bodies are not thin (and delicate), black women have overcome struggles with body image. It also reinforces the notion that concerns with the body and beauty are domains of middle-class white women of the Global North, suggesting that black women, particularly those in the Global South, should not have the body anxieties of their white counterparts. This reflects and upholds the exotic nature of "third world" black women who are perceived as unnatural and existing outside of the bounds of normalcy, meaning whiteness and thinness.

The participants themselves do not accept to this idea. They are aware of the implications of these white women's statements, but they recall these remarks with some humor, incredulity, and cynicism. During the sessions when these statements came up, the women generally chuckled and exhibited expressions that indicate their rejection of the implied message, such as rolling their eyes and sucking their teeth. This is not to say that the women do not believe their preferred body type is different from that of their white counterparts—because they do; rather, they resist the implications about their womanhood embedded in the comments. In addition to their immediate reactions to the comments, the women register their resistance by engaging in many body modification projects to get and maintain a voluptuous body. They share their strategies to improve stomachs, arms, and thighs that are deemed unacceptable, their frustrations with working to be not too big and not too skinny, and the dietary supplements that help create a bigger buttocks, such as the "chicken pill," a growth hormone allegedly given to chickens that can make humans plump.

These body sculpting practices indicate that the voluptuous ideal produces as much anxiety and questionable habits as the thin one. These women embraced the thick body type, but in spite of its endorsement of larger, seemingly healthier aesthetics, it is still a patriarchal normalizing mechanism that can engender self-contempt and undermine their body image. Furthermore, their focus on their bodies demonstrates that they themselves have not evaded the dominant norms of female behavior; they place emphasis on their bodies, thus reinforcing, rather than disrupting, the body's significance in Western conceptions of femininity. On the other hand, by taking the time to sculpt their bodies, especially to fit an aesthetic that is not thin, the women demonstrate defiance of the white supremacist construction of womanhood. They do not necessarily challenge the association between femininity and the body, but certainly question the prominence of the thin body as the only representation of femininity.

No Clothes for the Thick

Anti-black-woman ideologies also manifest themselves in the participants' lives through clothing. One woman said, "It's hard to find clothes that fit. Now I feel like I have to lose weight, because I want to fit in. I had two friends, one was a size zero, the other a size two. When we went shopping

together they had an easy time finding deals and I couldn't find anything. It was hard then."

This limit on available sizes is felt most acutely by women who work in corporate culture who have difficulty finding business clothing for their bodies. A woman shared her frustration:

> I try to get rid of my butt because I don't fit into clothes. I work in corporate America and I buy clothes that all the white people make—Calvin Klein, Tahari—and I don't fit into [their pants] for anything. I always buy two sizes up and get the [waist] tailored. It's so annoying, so I tried to get rid of my butt. . . . When I go to work, I don't want to look all hoochie and [my clothes] too tight. . . . So where I am it's a bunch of white guys and they don't pay attention to me anyhow, but when I leave the office and I am walking down Wall Street . . . I get very self-conscious. There are no designers that cater to curvy women. . . . Clothes don't fit my body type; my body doesn't fit the clothes. So I am just trying to assimilate to be able to fit into my clothes.

Another woman similarly said,

> When I go to buy my clothes, with my suits, whenever I go to the register, I pray to God they don't look at the sizes . . . [because] I switch [them]. I have to get a size two blazer and like a size six pants. I am always at the register saying, "Dear God, please don't let them look at the tags so they see the different sizes." I am sorry, but I have to do that. When I buy dresses it's really difficult; I wear a size six dress, but then the top is really big for me so then I have to pin it up or take it in.

Both statements exemplify the women's frustration with and negotiations of mainstream business attire that seem to systematically exclude their bodies. Their challenges with clothing are not only related to fashion but also have to do with the larger implications for job opportunities and social mobility that come with not being able to find professional-style clothing. Women's bodies are generally policed and disciplined at white-collar workplaces with regard to dress, appearance, comportment, and image. This is particularly true for black women since notions of professionalism for women is closely related to middle-class status, thinness, and whiteness; and thus is inextricably connected to particular types of embodied and performative femininity. Specifically, the most successful and desired body for women in the corporate workplace is that of a "fit"

(meaning slender), white body that signifies self-control and discipline (Trethewey 1999). In other words, business settings have historically excluded black women, particularly those who do not have thin bodies.

The participants' implied that they experience this anti-black-woman sentiment in corporate spaces through their clothing choices or the lack thereof. Black women who prefer voluptuous bodies are already systematically marginalized in corporate spaces (because of their race and their body size), but clothing helps to deepen (and justify) this marginalization by promoting anti-black-woman practices. In the larger social context, black women are expected to be curvy or thick, but the mainstream clothing industry does not provide them much choice in regard to dressing that body for corporate spaces. The lack of professional clothing serves to embarrass and marginalize voluptuous black women in these spaces, as one participant highlighted in her comment. When thick black women have to make do with the clothing choices they have, the result may be ill-fitting, tight clothes that make them self-conscious and discourage them from participating in these spaces. More importantly, restricting the availability of business clothing for thick bodies becomes a passive-aggressive way to further constrain black women's participation in professional spaces. Without access to clothes that is acceptable within dominant corporate culture, voluptuous black women can be excluded from these spheres on the grounds that their comportment does not fit corporate environments.

These and other statements by the women also indicate that, while they are aware of the limitations placed on their bodies in corporate spaces, they also actively negotiate these limitations. For example, they defy the fashion industry (and the sales policies of clothing stores) by size switching, as indicated in one of the statements above. By mixing the sizes of available clothing, putting bigger bottoms with smaller tops, these women are able to create outfits that better suit their voluptuous bodies. In this way, the women challenge established ideas about what the ideal body should look like, as dictated by the way sets are put together in stores and how clothing is sized by mainstream designers and manufacturers. Furthermore, by manipulating the fashion industry to create their own professional clothing and dress themselves in ways that are acceptable to the business world, black women are able to negotiate their marginalization and defy anti-black-woman oppressions.

The women's attempts to fit into mainstream business clothing include "mimicry" of racist discourses of body politics. According to Homi K.

Bhabha (1994), this mimicry is ambivalent. It resembles the colonizer's culture, and thus at least partially reinscribes it, but when enacted by "inappropriate," othered bodies, it also creates a mocking and threatening presence—a "menace"—that disrupts the authority of the imperial power. By seeking to mimic the dominant dress code of U.S. corporate culture, the women reinscribe Western and white supremacist notions of professionalism, but they also engage in self-directed meaning making; they undermine the place of their oppression and marginalization. Their bodies become sites of intervention that challenge, though do not dismantle, axes of legitimacy.

The Butt Revolution

Anti-black-woman ideologies also manifest themselves in the interviewees' lives through current mainstream white discourses around the buttocks. As one woman said, "Here comes J.Lo and Kim Kardashian with their big butts [and they are considered 'hot'] and women way out of Africa had some [big butts] . . . and then they would call you fat. . . . They call Mrs. Obama fat because she has a big backside." This woman and others in the study recognized that the current popularization of the voluptuous body, specifically the butt, by women who do not identify as black is not a celebration of the voluptuous black female body; rather, it is an appropriation of a body image that black women have long embraced.

The participants responded to this development in the United States with some despondency, but also anger. They are very proprietary of the butt, as it gives black women (and Latinas) a body image that is theirs and allows them to exist outside the confines of white beauty ideals. By now including it in mainstream white beauty discourses, U.S. white beauty systems co-opt and neutralize the resistive potential of the derriere for black women. In addition, given the prerequisite of whiteness to participate in this celebration of bigger buttocks, this recent obsession with bigger butts actually reinforces the marginalization of thick black women. Since black women can never be white, their bigger bodies are perennially excluded from these positive readings and acceptance of the voluptuous body. On the other hand, the women also use this appropriation of the butt—and other body parts deemed "black," such as thick lips—as evidence of the importance of black women's bodies in white beauty discourses. Seeing women with their bodies, even if they are white women, validates their

own buttocks and encourages them to celebrate their "deviant" body parts. For them the question becomes, if black women's bodies are so repulsive, why do white women and white culture continue to imitate and embody them or parts of them?

Conclusion

The voluptuous black female body is a way to speak back to Eurocentrism and challenge the normalcy of thinness. In this way, "a particular brand of whiteness is disrupted" as both "ideal beauty and sexual desirability are mapped onto the curvaceous, ethnically marked female body" (Durham 2012, 37). However, there are real, material consequences to pursuing this ideal. Durham says that black women who style their hair in ways associated with the working class willfully put themselves in harm's way. Similarly, black women who embody voluptuousness run the risk of further marginalization because of how they are perceived in dominant white spaces. Therefore, it is worth recognizing and interrogating the ways in which the thick black woman ideology is mobilized in white-supremacist societies to justify the devaluation of black women in modern spaces.[4] Given the continued use of voluptuous bodies to promote anti-black-woman ideologies and practices, our work should be to not only create an alternative to thinness but also to encourage the *queering* of body politics. According to Kimberly Springer, "Queerness . . . is not an identity, but a position. We can use 'queer' as a verb instead of a noun. Queer is not someone or something to be treated. Queer is something that we can *do*" (2012; emphasis in original).

   The queering of body politics means recognizing that body politics is a sociopolitical system that cannot be dismantled solely through personal affirmations and individual empowerment; it requires a collective ontological shift. The queering of body politics also means realizing that beauty ideals and constructions can be modern means of racial stratification. Body image and beauty discourses are subtle ways of maintaining the racial structures that foster the marginalization of black women in economic, social, and political spaces. Therefore, we cannot challenge old and new racism without simultaneously confronting the role of beauty politics in these systems. In other words, normative body aesthetics of black women can help to prop up white supremacy and need to become a more significant part of the work of black feminisms. Finally, to queer black women's

body politics is to resist creating and perpetuating a singular idea of beauty. We have to collectively move toward thinking about black women's bodies on a continuum rather than in exclusive categories; we must dismantle all forms of normative body standards and promote inclusion of and equity for all body types.

Notes

1. Adapted from *Romance with Voluptuousness: Caribbean Women and Thick Bodies in the United States* by Kamille Gentles-Peart by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright 2016 by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska.

2. It is important to recognize that not all voluptuous black female bodies are celebrated in the Caribbean. For example, black women of low socioeconomic status with voluptuous bodies—such as the higglers in Kingston, Jamaica (Brown-Glaude 2011), the dancehall queens (Cooper 2004), or the big women who revel in Trinidad's carnival (Barnes 2000)—are viewed negatively in middle-class black Caribbean societies. In addition, fat and dark-skinned black women continue to be marginalized (Shaw 2005; Charles 2010; Hope 2011).

3. I use variations of the terms "white supremacy" and "anti-black-woman" to focus attention on a particular ideology and its practices—rather than specific locations and groups—which can exist and manifest in any community. This helps to avoid the perception of a singular black and a singular white community.

4. While not directly engaged in this paper, we should also note that this ideology and its corollaries are not only racist but also heterosexist as they racialize black women and assume their heterosexuality.

Kamille Gentles-Peart is an interdisciplinary cultural scholar whose scholarship engages and contributes to critical discourses of race, gender, and the African diaspora. Her work interrogates the manifold ways in which power manifests itself in the lived realities of black women and how black women make meaning in the context of race and gender hegemonies. Her research specifically focuses on black Caribbean immigrant women in the United States and their negotiations of various systems of power. She can be reached at kgentles-peart@rwu.edu.

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