

Black sexual politics essay



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Black Sexual Politics The book *Black Sexual Politics* by Patricia Hill Collins is a work of critical theory that discusses the way that race, class and gender intersect to affect the lives of African American men and women in many different ways, but with similar results. The book explores the way that new forms of racism can work to oppress black people, while filling them with messages of liberation. The book also examines the way sexual politics are based on American ideas and the ideals of masculinity, femininity and the appropriate expression of sexuality that works to repress gay and straight, male and female. Collins work also proposes a liberatory politics for black Americans, centered around honest dialogue about the way stereotypical imagery and limiting racist and sexist ideology have harmed African Americans in the past, and how African Americans might progress beyond these ideas and their manifestations to become active change agents in their own communities.

In Part I, “ African Americans and the New Racism,” introduces the conceptual framework for analyzing black sexual politics in the United States, recognizing the crucial link between black political economy and gender relations. The new racism reveals the “ past-in-present” aspect of racial formation whereby traditional and colonial ideas of racial domination persist today with real material effects such as the widespread violence of unemployment, incarceration, and environmental pollution. In chapter one, Collins argues that black bodies are everywhere in the mass media and are very sexualized. African American men and women are seen as being more sexually deviant and participate in “ bad” sexual acts. Thus being said it makes it harder for African American woman and man to obtain an individual

sexual power especially since the individual is so closely linked to the collective group.

In chapter two, Collins alludes to the idea that African Americans born after the 1950s and 1960s should have had a better life. However, the past is ever the present the old form of racism may have been fading away; but the new form was moving in. Although slavery had ended segregation sanctions still applied and even though the slaves were free farm owners still needed workers and they easily took advantage of the uneducated African Americans. Then in chapter three, Collins suggests that the metaphor of the “prison” and the “closet” might illustrate how oppressions of race and sexuality are interwoven.

The prison may be likened to racism and the closet to sexual oppression. Both systems use state-sanctioned mechanisms of social control such as segregation to maintain racial and sexual hierarchies and to subjugate black people. “Coming out” of the closet or attaining freedom from the prison reflect resistance to racism and heterosexism. The three chapters in Part II, “Rethinking Black Gender Ideology,” examine how the mass media globalizes class-specific images of black women. These images of black women make us look at them as “bitches” and “bad mothers” and someone that takes advantage of such policies as welfare programs and food stamps. Collins states in chapter four that after Missy Elliot’s song “Get your freak on” came out African American women were then seen even more like wild animals in the bedroom.

The term “freak” was then initially applied to promiscuous sexual behavior. These images of black women “help to justify and shape the new racism of a desegregated, color-blind America”. In chapter five, the “booty call” was introduced. The booty call was known to be a call someone would make to another person for the sole purpose of “hooking up”. The booty then had two more specific meanings that gave a closer idea to the fascination with the booty. The first definition of the booty was the ideas and masculinity.

The second meaning was how the booty reflects sexuality and race. Moving on to chapter six, one particularly striking image Collins describes is the “new” image of the middle-class “Educated Black Bitch,” which, she suggests, illustrates how black women’s financial success is devalued, pathologized, and perceived as a problem for black social and economic progress. The black male was always supposed to be the one bringing in the money and being the more dominant one however when the black women started bringing in some cash the tables were then turned. This left the black male to feel ashamed, embarrassed, and took away from his “masculinity” which caused a big problem in the black social structure. Part III, “Toward a Progressive Black Sexual Politics,” broadens the definition of state-sanctioned violence as a form of political and social control of black men and black women’s bodies.

In chapter seven Collins does an excellent job of describing what life was really like for an African American in those times. The unproven accusations of rape which would result in the lynching or castration of a black male. Not only did the men suffer but the women as well. The women slaves were often raped not only that but the offspring of a rape was more likely to be raped

because the plantation owners like lighter skin women or girls and they only like the virgins in fear that they might catch some disease.

The poor lives that the slaves had to endure in these times are unimaginable. In chapter eight Collins talks about how much gender and race matter in a romantic relationship. Even in today's society interracial marriages are still looked down on. Even though our society has come a long way from slavery the thought of mixed couples still bother a lot of people. Then when it comes to gays and lesbians they are not even allowed to marry one another in most states. In contrast to most people's beliefs I think that you cannot change who you are or who you love so why not let everyone have a chance at happiness.

Now, moving on to the last chapter of the book chapter nine one of the most striking statements made was when Collins's boldly acknowledge that "Black people may be bombarded with gender-specific images that deem black bodies as less desirable if not downright ugly". Collins calls for a new body politics that promotes the "honest body," or rather an "ethic of honesty and personal accountability within all relationships that involve sexual contact". This approach to gender and sexuality within the African American community breaks the silence surrounding intra-community sexual violence as well as the spread of HIV/AIDS. The very real possibility of disease, physical suffering, and death underlies the urgency of non-oppressive forms of sexual practices. This book really taught me a lot about the African American culture. I grew up in a small racist town.

In my high school there were maybe ten or fifteen black students so I never really got to learn a lot about their culture or their personal struggles. Every time I heard some black person talking about slavery it just really upset me because I knew he or she was not a slave so why keep bringing it up. I thought it was just a ploy to try to get something for free or just to use that as an excuse to act the way that they were acting. However, after reading this book I now realize that African Americans do have a reason to complain. They have to face the everyday struggles that I go through but they already have a disadvantage because of their skin color. Life is hard enough as it is to have an unfair disadvantage just because of your skin color cannot be easy.

I now have a more understanding of where they are coming from when they complain about being prejudged and watched ‘ like a hawk” while doing things just to make sure that they are not committing a crime or attacking someone. After reading this book I now know that I am going to try and be more compassionate toward people of other ethnicities.