

Caryl phillips cambridge

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



In Caryl Phillips Cambridge, Phillips begins by introducing Emily, a young upper-class white woman, who is sent to the West Indies for three months to inspect her father's sugar plantation. By constructing the novel into several distinctive voices, he exposes to his readers multiple points of view surrounding the novel's fictional world. The first section of the novel is in the form of a journal, narrated by Emily herself, and gives readers a sense of Emily's identity through her depictions of her surroundings. Phillips takes a gendered narrative approach to explore eurocentric influence in the depictions of black womanhood during the African Diaspora and how it has affected the conceptualization of race in the past and present.

Emily often finds the need to express her disgust of the appearances of black women. Setting forth towards her father's estate, Emily is accompanied by a white gentleman, a negro driver, and a negro woman. Observing the woman, Emily states, " Her toothless gums were visible through her thick and open lips, and her church hat failed to mask her sad, unfeminine baldness" (21). Emily justifies her revulsion of the woman's appearance based on her skewed perception of femininity.

Because she does not meet eurocentric beauty ideals, her appearance is not seen on her own terms but rather criticized by someone who does not share her culture nor values. Emily uses the terms " toothless" and " bald" to highlight the black woman's unappealing features and therefore, she reinforces the idea that Black women are less feminine than other women. Such depictions take an immeasurable toll on Black women, who have to constantly challenge the notion that they are less feminine, that their blackness is something curious, or difficult to handle to white standards.

Despite the fact that what is considered to be "feminine" and "beautiful" is constantly changing, it does so in a way that continues to revolve around a Eurocentric standards. Emily's faulty depictions preserve the idea that white people are superior in many ways to black people, and therefore, they have the right to assert their dominance over other races.

In the past, science was used to justify "white supremacy," where attributes of European culture were used to create a rationale for European authority. European slave traders used "scientific racism" to justify their preconceived notions that Blacks were not people but property, therefore they lacked basic fundamental rights. Upon arriving at the luncheon, Emily sets eyes on Christiana; unhappy with her presence, she orders the "coal-black, ape-woman" to leave.

Emily suggests that Christiana's features and mannerisms are similar to those of an ape and that her race is not only inferior but scientifically less evolved. This passage goes above and beyond; it showcases how whites distanced race from the core values of both feminism and humanism, proving that both were based on the systematic ideology of slaveholders and their allies. Phillips shows readers that the idea that all human beings are born with basic human rights was not prevalent to Blacks during this period.

European slave traders used their preconceived notions to justify that Africans served no other purpose but to work as slaves. This was a view of humanity that made life grueling for Black slaves in the Americas. Equating animals to blacks was a malicious and effective instrument of

dehumanisation, which historically manifested a powerful weapon that Europeans used to justify the institution of slavery.

Black physical features, especially black women's bodies and hair, have been devalued for centuries. The idea that blackness exists outside the realm of beauty was imposed by whites who constructed a hierarchy that privileged those with lighter skin, and straighter hair where Blacks could not meet this ideal of femininity. Emily, stopping to observe the black men and women washing clothes with their bare hands, can't help but comment on the appearance of the women.

" The appearance of the females was truly disgusting to me... one woman, her hair matted with filth, and, I imagine, her flesh host to countless forms of infestation, stood in a condition of total nudity in the centre of the stream.." The standards of white beauty created a barrier for Black women to attain it because it did not apply to most Black women thus, American femininity has existed behind the image of a white women.

When Emily inadequately associates " natural hair" with the her own terms, she sets standards for physical characteristics that represent her race, failing to include anyone that doesn't meet her skewed notions what constitutes a feminine woman. As a result, for years, Black women have taken part in many practices that attempt to mask their physical features in accordance with socially accepted conventions influenced by Whiteness.

Emily's negative depictions of Black women stems from conditions of her privilege. Through Emily, Phillips shows readers how White's responded to

black womanhood in the nineteenth century. What constituted a Black woman was directly related to the control that Whites had over them.

Racism was at work, reinforcing the conception of whiteness while at the same time, deconstructing blackness.