

THE MYTH OF THE BLACK MALE BEAST IN POSTCLASSICAL  
AMERICAN CINEMA: 'FORGING' STEREOYTPES AND  
DISCOVERING BLACK MASCULINITIES

BY

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**Abstract :**

The thesis examines how postclassical American film invents Black male characters. It uses Levi-Strauss and Barthes' methods of analyzing myth and critiques hegemonic authorship through Jung's work on archetypes in the collective unconscious and the 'shadow'.

Using Othello as a prototype character, I examine how he became an archetype that manifests two perceptions of Black characters in the collective unconscious. I define one as Othellophobia; a threat to the White supremacist Ego that imagines re/en enslavement by Islamic/Blacks and enslavement by African/Americans. I define the other as Othellophilia; whereby the Black character is inscribed through a humanist perception of Othello and the racial equality of Black men whose racial heritage and religion is respected.

Four films *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* 1971, *A Soldier's Story*, 1984, *Brother to Brother*, 2004 and *Collateral* 2004, are studied and critiqued to contests the myth of the Savage Mind, 'Savage Body', the 'Object of Desire', and the 'Clash of Wills'.

Through the additional application of Black sexual politics and Black cultural theory I consider how Black progressive masculinities, Black gay identity politics and Afrocentric 'ways of being' are currently determining multifarious Black masculinities and reclaiming the Black mind and body in postclassical film.

## Dedication

As a boy, without the words and wisdom from  
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I might have been brainwashed  
by white America. Dr. King has been my life long  
inspiration

This is dedicated to Daisy Brown  
the most loving Lady in my life

D.W. Leach, for the love I thought I'd never know: 1974-1994

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The myth of the Black male beast in post-classical American Cinema:  
'Forging stereotypes and Discovering Black masculinities'

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Dedication

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## Introduction

In this thesis, I intend to apply Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of diachronic and synchronic themes in narratives that he maps out in *Structural Anthropology*.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, in my textual analysis of film I will use Barthes's discourse in *Mythologies*<sup>2</sup> relating meaning to myth through signifier, signified, sign and its denotation and connotation. Lévi-Strauss in *Myth and Meaning*<sup>3</sup> uses a number of analogies to explain how structuralism functions as a methodology for reading myth across a range of separate oral tales and narratives. He demonstrates that the crucial factor is recognising the *invariant* element, where the narrative content may differ but the structure remains the same in the separate tales told by different clans, tribes or cultures. The structure of the mythic tale often signals a recurring event and these stories develop mythemes which refer to religion, race, gender or social customs.

Wiseman and Groves state "contrary to the traditional approaches to the study of myths (psychological or symbolic), Lévi-Strauss does not believe them to have determinate content which it is the analyst's job to recover. Myths are not 'reservoirs' of encoded meaning. Myths are structures that realise themselves through the listener..."<sup>4</sup> or in the case of film, the audience. "...Understanding what a myth is, is intimately related to understanding a process essentially of transformation. Lévi-Strauss' basic hypothesis is that myth comes into being by a process of transformation of one myth into another. Myths do not have any meaning in themselves but only in relation to each other".<sup>5</sup> This is a premise that underlines my methodology. My aim in this thesis is to show how synchronic and

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<sup>1</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude, (1963), *Structural Anthropology*, Basic Books Inc, USA, pp214-215

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, Roland, (1972/2000), *Mythologies*, Vintage Classics, UK, p110

<sup>3</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude, (1978), *Myth and Meaning*, Routledge, UK, pp33-34

<sup>4</sup> Wiseman, Boris & Groves, Judy, (2000), *Introducing Lévi-Strauss and Structural Anthropology*, Icon Books, UK, p140

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p140

diachronic readings of myths inform the pervasive archetype that is frequently used in the construction of Black male characters as obtuse, pathological, beast-like men in Hollywood and independent American film.

In *Structural Anthropology*, Lévi-Strauss mapped out constituent units called mythemes, achieved through the study of the many versions of a myth that can be found and then extracting from those versions a general pattern or sequence. Using one specific text, *Oedipus Rex*, Lévi-Strauss identified aspects in the narrative that connote specific themes or characteristics of the story and plot, and he showed how themes can be read through a dual system of horizontal and vertical structures. Lévi-Strauss demonstrated the process as shown below:

Now for a concrete example of the method we propose. We shall use the Oedipus myth, which is well known to everyone. [...] The myth will be treated as an orchestra score would be if it were unwittingly considered as a unilinear series, our task is to reestablish the correct arrangement. Say, for instance, we were confronted with a sequence of the type: 1,2,4,7,8,2,3,4,6,8,1,4,5,7,8,1, 2,5,7,3,4,5,6,8 . . . , the assignment being to put all the 1's together, all the 2's, the 3's, etc.; the result is a chart:

1	2		4			7	8
	2	3	4		6		8
1			4	5		7	8
1	2			5		7	
		3	4	5	6		8

We thus find ourselves confronted with ...vertical columns, each of which includes several relations belonging to the same bundle. Were we to *tell* the myth, we would disregard the columns and read the rows from left to right and from top to bottom. But if we want to *understand* the myth, then we will have to disregard one half of the diachronic dimension (top to bottom) and read from left to right, column after column, each one being considered as a unit.<sup>6</sup>

Each number can be translated into a given theme, and its invariant, the same number, becomes a mytheme. Consider my diagram on *Othello*.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p214

Here is an example of diachronic myths that define Othello's subjectivity.

Savage Body	Savage Mind	Object of Desire	Clash of Wills
Othello's 'black' body is read as savage <i>Other</i>  →	Othello's psychological deterioration stems from his loss of faith in White virtue  →	Othello loves Desdemona as a 'White female goddess'  →	Othello's quest for self-defined Black masculinity is defeated through Iago's abuse of White hegemonic power

Each of these header diachronic titles also contains **mythemes\***. Below we have a synchronic history of myth and a diachronic history of racist narratives – in books, plays, and centrally in classical and post-classical cinema – which contain mythemes that perpetuate myths about Black men as beasts. In my textual analysis, I will employ the diachronic and synchronic myth structures and apply them to selected films. I will also demonstrate how these **mythemes\*** can be read beyond *Othello* if the same myths about Blacks are 'naturalised' into perceived racial characteristics that are considered as a threat to hegemonic patriarchal mastery. Below is a map of the synchronic structures that exemplify diachronic titles as **mythemes\***.

Savage Body*	Savage Mind *	Object of Desire*	Clash of Wills*
Dirty black ↓	Pathological rapist ↓	'The White female goddess' ↓	Black beast figure battles with White 'heroic' male figure that tames or dominates the beast. ↓
Beast-like man ↓	Unintelligent ↓	White 'heroic' male figure ↓	Corporeal beast defeated by intellectual man ↓
'Abnormal' sexual anatomy ↓	Pathological criminal ↓	To be White ↓	Civilisation vs. Savagery ↓
Prodigious sexual appetite	Amoral	Black person possessing White sophistication	Black manhood vs. White masculinity

Lévi-Strauss used *Oedipus Rex* to explain his structural system; I will use Shakespeare's *Othello* and my four chosen films and investigate the mythemes as mapped out below. The aim is to study how White hegemonic authorship draws on a range of myths pertaining to Black men of African heritage as beasts. First, I will explain these myths in relation to the representation of Black manhood performed in *Othello* and consider whether Othello is a prototype character whose strength and state-appointed power threaten hegemonic White masculinity. Second, by considering how an archetype functions in various films that exemplify synchronic mythemes in diachronic narrative fiction, (re-telling similar stories), I will address the legacy of Othello as a prototype character and examine whether Hollywood has naturalised the myth of Black people's inferiority. I will therefore suggest the construction of the myth of the Black male beast is divided into four principal synchronic mythemes: the 'savage body, 'savage mind' 'object of desire' and the 'clash of wills'.

Savage Body*	Savage Mind*	Object of Desire*	Clash of Wills*
Othello's 'black' body is read as savage <i>Other</i> and so are countless other Black characters in narrative fiction	The superior/inferior binary myth concerning White vs. Black intellectual perspicacity	Othello loves Desdemona as a 'White female goddess' and many authors reiterate this racist fantasy in narrative fiction	Othello's quest for a Black self-defined masculinity is defeated by White hegemonic power and so are countless other Black characters aims

Reading the above **mythemes\*** diachronically can explain the representation of Black manhood that is performed in *Othello*. I say 'performed' because White men in blackface played the role of Othello for nearly three hundred years. Studying the play synchronically, however, can lead to some debate about Othello as an archetypal Black male character discernible in countless other narratives. My examination looks at the scripting of Black characters based on *Othello* as a prototype and its legacy in post-classical cinema.

In each synchronic mytheme, numerous myths can be traced to a vast range of diachronic narratives where Black male characters embody certain stereotypes. It can be traced to the first narrative film and its production in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) where 'blacks'<sup>7</sup> are shown to have savage bodies, savage minds, and the object of desire of a 'black' is a White female goddess. This desire arguably threatens the supremacy of White America and therefore results in a clash of wills. In *The Emperor Jones* (1933), Brutus Jones, the central character in Eugene O'Neill's drama, is defined by the myth of the savage mind. Brutus Jones is a pathological criminal, who fails to transform into a complete human being, and is consequently destroyed. The central point in the narrative trajectory is not that Jones is hunted and brought down by Black natives but that through Eugene O'Neill's collective unconscious, the drama was scripted to control all the Black male characters, and the narrative is structured into a resolution where White hegemonic masculinity triumphs.

I will also examine the representation of Black manhood in film by using Roland Barthes's theories in 'Myth Today'. My objective is to deploy semiotics and employ the subtleties of denotation and connotation in my textual analysis because in *Mythologies*,<sup>8</sup> Roland Barthes explains, through the example in Figure 1 of a Negro soldier in full uniform saluting the French flag, how myth can also function in visual language as well as speech.

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<sup>7</sup> I differentiate 'blacks' as figures lacking characterisation from **Blacks** as humanised characters that demonstrate an intellectual and cultural perception.

<sup>8</sup> Op cit, Barthes, Roland, (1972/2000), *Mythologies*, p117

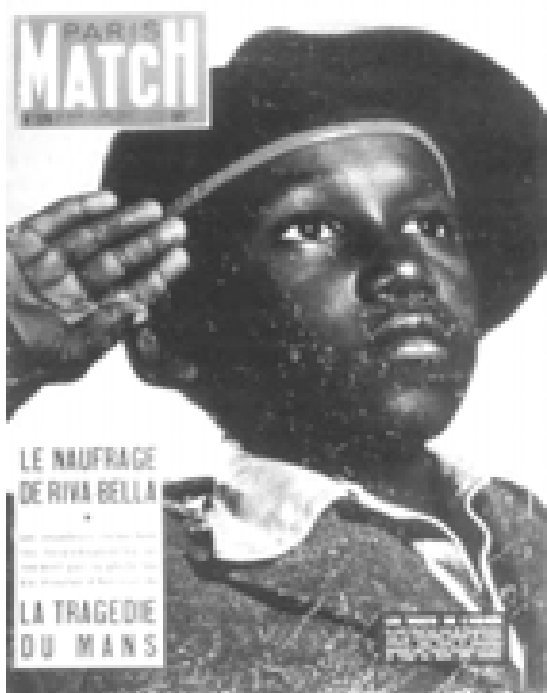


Fig.1

Roland Barthes argues that neutralising the history of the Black male, namely his enslavement, into a colonial subject under the social control of France suggests that Black men have discarded their grievance against the former colonial ruler for his enslavement of them.<sup>9</sup> The Black soldier has been successfully transformed into what France wants to see: an African who has been 'civilised' and who now salutes the social and political power structure that has transformed him.<sup>10</sup> Barthes also argued that the myth of his subjectivity lies in the signification of the three elements working in the photograph. First, there is the Black face as signifier; second, the French military uniform and the salute as signified, and the conflation of these two functions as the third element, the sign.<sup>11</sup> The soldier's performance also carries denotations and connotations for the viewer. What this image denotes has further meanings because each individual brings associative readings to what they see depending on their cultural and psychological background.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p116

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p117

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p117

An image is not fixed as the thing itself. For example, when we see an apple it might be a signifier: fruit. The connotation of the apple in the mind of a specific reader, however, can be signified as a symbol of original sin and therefore a sign of humankind's fall from grace.<sup>12</sup> The signifier can therefore have a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic unchanging signification. This applied method will be a crucial aspect of my textual analysis of myth and a narrative system that controls the lives of Black characters.

Barthes argued that the young Black face could work to wipe away the historical and political conflict that marked the colonial relationship between the people of Africa and France throughout the slave era,<sup>13</sup> positioned in myths of 'primitive' savage chaos.<sup>14</sup> The photograph erases the history of this conflict through the way the boy is dressed and through his actions. It also neutralises the past and transforms it into an idealised 'natural' image of patriotism and pride. Through the conflation of signifier and signified, we psychologically have the sign; it is this signification that is the myth itself.<sup>15</sup>

Through close textual analysis, I will examine the cause and effect, time and space, motivation, story and plot in key sequences. The central issues of style and meaning in film language and grammar are important to film scholars. Moreover, I am employing Lévi-Strauss's structuralist mappings of myth and Barthes's theories of language as myth, as I believe structuralist film theory will effectively explain the iconography of myth. Because film has an intertextual relationship with drama, literature, and television, however, post-classical narrative films offer polysemic

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p115

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p118

<sup>14</sup> Hall, Stuart and Evans, Jessica, eds, (1999), *Visual Culture: the Reader*, Sage, UK, p55

<sup>15</sup> Op cit, Barthes, Roland, (1972/2000), *Mythologies*, p121

readings of 'blacks' as beasts through ideological reception; therefore, audience and critical responses will also be considered.

Shakespeare's *Othello* and the central character will be examined in terms of four key factors: first, Othello as a prototype Black character, second, myths concerning the inferiority of Black men, third, the legacy of *Othello* as an archetype in the narrative structure of dominant film, and fourth, the fear and fascination of the Black corporeal hero. My intention throughout the thesis is to consider if the prototype character Othello can be defined as an archetypal Black male replayed and re-inscribed in classical and post-classical cinema as a Black male beast. The aim is to establish my definition of Othellophobia as an unconscious White male fear of being re-enslaved by Islamic or Black men. Consequently, a paradigm in narrative film in the USA can be identified where Black male characters are written as inferior men unable to dominate or overthrow White male power.

In addition, through consideration of many films, I believe myths about Black men's corporeal identities can be traced to the mythemes in *Othello*. In Shakespeare's play, a diachronic and synchronic reading of myths related to the subjectivity of Black men can show how the Black male as a beast has been translated into popular cinema through a narrative pattern I call Othellophobia. I will also discuss the synchronic and diachronic mapping of the mythemes in *Othello* by using Virginia Manson Vaughan's research on Shakespeare's *Othello*<sup>16</sup> because I intend to show how Black manhood is contained in a narrative structure and how that recreates myths.

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<sup>16</sup> Manson Vaughan, Virginia, (1994), *Othello A contextual history*, Cambridge University Press, USA and Manson Vaughan, Virginia, (2005), *Performing Blackness on English Stages 1500-1800*, Cambridge University Press, USA



I will show that Othellophobia is a narrative structure that constrains Black male characters in order to naturalise the myth of hegemonic phallogentric normality. In film, it achieves this through highly seductive elements of mise-en-scène and narrative that propel a world audience into a capitalist heterosexist ideology. Crucial to my mapping, shown on page 4, is the fact that Black men did not establish these myths. The myth titles and mythemes previously stated have a legacy that can be traced to the White imago after the Islamic Black Moors were conquered by White Christian expansionists who economically exploited the Black body.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the mythemes can function independently, interdependently or intertextually. This will be demonstrated through close study of the representation of Black male characters, strategies in narrative film structure, mise-en-scène, as well as the signification of denotation and connotation.

Conversely, Othellophilia allows the White male to masquerade as a 'black' male in blackface. These inversions arguably permit White men to enact their unconscious fears and fascination regarding the corporeal Black male and ultimately conquer what Carl Jung calls their "shadow". What I want to explore is whether a rational acknowledgement of Black men's humanity can be found in post-classical American cinema. The thesis will show how the formation of Hollywood film production dramatised the White male masquerade of 'blacks' in the first classical narrative silent film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and the first classical narrative sound film, *The Jazz Singer* (1927).

I also distinguish Othellophilia as admiration of the flawed Black humane hero Othello, who is given power owing to his loyalty to the Venetian State, his conversion to Christianity and his capacity for love. In classical and post-classical American film, this is translated into modern American society, where state-appointed guardians such as African-American police officers, lawyers, soldiers and law-

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<sup>17</sup> Hope Franklin, John, (1984), *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, Knopf, Inc. USA pp32-33

abiding Black citizens contest the myth of the beast. In films that exemplify Othellophilia, the author, director and producer reject the myth of the beast and the main and major characters are forged, that is to say, reinvented, to contest the myth of the beast and demonstrate the subtleties and contradictions of racism and bigotry.

Othellophilia requires an acknowledgement of the myth of the Black male as a beast, that is to say the 'forging' of the savage body and the savage mind. The evidence in the history of the myth of the Black male as a beast is examined by Frantz Fanon (1952/1986) in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Winthrop D. Jordan (1968) in *White over Black: Americans' Attitude Toward the Negro 1550-1812* and Peter Fryer (1984) in *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*. Moreover, I will examine the subject matter of the object of desire played against sexist and racist assumptions that affirms both Black and White humanity and thereby establishes a conflict with the hegemonic status quo.

My objective in all of the chapters is also to examine the paradox of an archetypal Black male character, because he is arguably a manifestation of the White male psyche in the collective unconscious that occupies the dual role of hero and villain. An audience might be fascinated by his exoticism and passion while at the same time feel threatened by his strength and power that undermine hegemonic Christian mastery.

Consequently, throughout this thesis, I will use a broad range of film texts to examine Othellophobia and Othellophilia in relation to film production, Black critical theory, and the objectives of the struggles of the post-Panther, Afrocentric and Black activist movement to reclaim Black masculinity from hegemonic phallocentric capitalism.

My reading of race and racially-biased archetypes in post-classical film found that Carl Jung and Joel Kovel offer two very useful psychoanalytical approaches. First, Jung's explanation of archetypes in *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968), as well as his examination of the collective unconscious, will be employed. Second, I will also use Joel Kovel's *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (1984), which specifically addresses the motives and impulses that offer a very useful theoretical analysis of White American masculinity. It also elaborates on Stuart Hall's 'The spectacle of the 'Other' in (1997) *Representation* where the Black body appears strange to White supremacists who compare it with the 'normal' White body. This practice of making the Black subject 'Other' and strange also supports my theory of Othellophobia. My intention is not to psychoanalyse the fictional characters but to apply Jung and Kovel's psychoanalytic exposition concerning unconscious and conscious motivation in my critique of the construction of Black characters by scriptwriters and the narrative structure and visual style of filmmakers.

Jung's concept of archetypes will help us to examine myths such as the bestial body and savage mind of Black men:

Archetype is an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic. For our purposes this term is apposite and helpful, because it tells us that so far as the collective unconscious contents are concerned we are dealing with archaic or I would say primordial types, that is, with universal images that have existed since the remotest times. [...] Another well known expression of the archetype is myth and fairytale. But here too we are dealing with forms that have received a specific stamp and have been handed down through long periods of time. [...] The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jung, Carl, G., (1968), second edition, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Routledge, UK pp5-6

Jung's explanation allows me to exemplify how Hollywood has drawn on the States' ideological beliefs about Black men based on America's ownership, control and construction of Black bodies. The construction of the Black body will be evaluated as we consider how White America bought and bred slaves from Africa and how the African body was read and written as 'Other'. Furthermore, the ways in which Hollywood fed back the preferred American image of 'blacks' as inferior, motivated by a pre-Columbian angst at the cultural and religious domination of Iberian society by Black Moors, will be considered. Jung defines the collective unconscious as below:

The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from the personal unconscious by the fact that it does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at one time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been conscious, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. Whereas the personal unconscious consists for the most part of *complexes*, the content of the collective unconscious is made up essentially of *archetypes*.<sup>19</sup>

What is specifically useful to my thesis is Jung's explanation that archetypes exist in universal cultures and societies. He also argues, "there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals".<sup>20</sup> If this is true, can it explain the racial conflicts during the Black liberation era when people fought to change the racial ideology of White America? I aim to show that films from the 1970s to the present era problematise the absolutism of universal myths. They also contest the archetypal Hollywood racist fantasy about Black males as beasts because humanist filmmakers, such as Melvin Van Peoples, Norman Jewison, Rodney Evans and Michael

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p42

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p43

Mann, who fight against racism in American film, are re-writing Black characters as depicted in the four key films that I have chosen to examine in this thesis.

Joel Kovel's *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (1984) also offers critical analysis of how racist fantasy functions. He unpacks the subject by reading against the grain of Freud's Oedipus complex and the formation of identity. In chapter four, 'The Fantasies of Race', he says there are two distinctive types of American racist mind, as demonstrated by the "*dominative racist*" and the "*aversive racist*", that reveal a particular psychological profile. The dominative racist is:

The type who acts out bigoted beliefs. Whether a Night Rider in the South or a member of a mob protesting open housing in Chicago he represents the open flame of race hatred. The true White bigot expresses definitive ambition through all his activity: he openly seeks to keep the black man down, and he is willing to use force to further his ends; let us call him the *dominative racist*.<sup>21</sup>

Kovel then makes a clear distinction between this and the *aversive racist*:

The type who believes in White superiority and is more or less aware of it, but does nothing overt about it. An intrapsychic battle goes on between these sentiments and a conscience which seeks to repudiate them, or at least to prevent the person from acting wrongly upon them. This often means not to act at all, and such inaction serves as the only resolution of the inner conflict. Because of this, the person tends to behave in ways that avoid the issue: he tries to ignore the existence of black people, tries to avoid contact with them, and at most to be polite, correct and cold in whatever dealings are necessary between the races. We call this complex type the *aversive racist*.<sup>22</sup>

Kovel further explains that splits occur in the aversive racist whereby polar opposites can be discerned. On one side there are those who become threatened if and when Black people get too close, and then they lapse into dominative racism. On the other side there are people who tap into their social conscience as liberals

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<sup>21</sup> Joel Kovel (1984), *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, Free Association Books, UK, p54

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p54

and negotiate racial issues and policy at committee level but they retain a distinct aversion to Black people, even if they deny it.<sup>23</sup>

Kovel identifies a third type and he explains it thus: the range of aversion racism reveals it to be a transitional type between dominative and our third type.<sup>24</sup>

[The third type]... does not reveal racist tendencies at all- except as the unconscious persistence of what may be considered mass fantasies. He belongs to the advancing edge of history and is considerably less defined than the first two.<sup>25</sup>

Kovel states that all three types of racism represent diverse formal organisations and different modes of expression but they all feed off the same fantasies about race. They might take different combinations, intensities and realisations but central to the three types is the belief in White superiority and Black inferiority, which actualises specific Eurocentric responses to African-Americans. First, violent aggressive retaliation if White mastery is threatened or compromised. Second, abjection is projected onto the Black body whereby the notion of 'Other' is constructed, as argued in Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall's research and current critical theory, where people of colour, as well as lesbians and gays, are perceived as less than human, possibly abnormal or even degenerate on many levels.

Kovel states that men who embrace the ideology of bigotry, prejudice and racism are primarily men who psychologically believe they lack power and feel threatened by any kind of power that destabilises their sense of mastery. This neurosis works at an unconscious level for men in the higher social stratum and manifests itself in conscious anxieties for men at lower social positions in American society. Kovel also argues that many White men share an obsession about Black men: first, a fixation on Black male

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p55

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p55

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p55

corporeality and, second, the myth of the intellectual inferiority of Black men. Many White men also share an obsession about 'black' sexual desires, even a phobia, in the White imago concerning Black men's imagined lust for White women. A crude perception of the basic nature of 'blacks' that supremacists read as damned, based on the myth of the 'Curse of Ham', also prevails.<sup>26</sup>

Kovel's application of Freudian psychoanalysis in relation to the formation of the id, ego and superego, infant drives and the Oedipus complex reveals the irrational nature of racism and the many ways in which it destabilises the White American supremacist male. First, I will demonstrate whether this serves hegemonic masculinity and destroys racial equality. Second, I will suggest that racism is a psychosis that is not contained within the supremacist's mind but is instead translated through aesthetic culture. Third, I have chosen Shakespeare's *Othello* as a primary text to explain how modern European-American dramatic narrative fiction creates Black characters. I will explore whether authors and filmmakers have unconsciously internalised the play *Othello* and the character Othello as a prototype Black male character.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p63

I have chosen four particular films – *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), *A Soldier's Story* (1984), *Brother to Brother* (2004) and *Collateral* (2004) – because they exemplify fractures that can undermine synchronic and diachronic myths. Furthermore, the films demonstrate what I term Othellophobia and Othellophilia. The four films also exemplify the narrative and thematic representation of Black manhood in post-classical American cinema and they contest the narratology and iconography that limit Black masculinity. I will demonstrate that because post-classical cinema structures its films on a paradigm that determines the life and fate of Black characters and caricatures it reiterates invariant mythemes about them and consequently reproduces vast quantities of the same product. The four films I have selected intentionally oppose the boundaries that overdetermine race in the frame.

I selected *Sweetback's/Song* to challenge the synchronic savage body myth. Since it is the first independently produced Black film in the post-classical era, it is essential to examine the film because it overturns hegemonic authorship of Black male characters as beasts. Melvin Van Peebles's authorship of Black male characters questions deeply ingrained racist fantasies in narrative film structure. The film was a response to Hollywood's history of defamatory representations of Black characters. Central to the narration in *Sweetback's/Song* is the corporeal body as Black, macrophallic, prodigious and violent. As author/auteur and character, Van Peebles manipulated various myths concerning the Black male as a beast and problematised stereotypes of Blackness. No other Black filmmaker before him had raised questions about the liberation of Black manhood to a self-determined Black masculinity and that is why I have selected *Sweetback's/Song* as a landmark text in post-classical cinema.

I have selected *A Soldier's Story* in order to examine the savage mind myth. It is based on the Charles Fuller play, *A Soldier's Play*. Fuller is an African-American



dramatist and his work demonstrates a critique of racial myths including the savage body, the savage mind, the object of desire and specific examples of the clash of wills. Furthermore, in the play and the screenplay, Fuller explores the internalised myth of the mental inferiority of Blacks and the characters exemplify the inconsistency and psychosis of the savage mind myth. Very few films examine inculcated racism in such detail as *A Soldier's Story* and that is why I have chosen it from the thousands of films about Black characters. This element of the story is a key theme in *Othello* when he internalises the myth that whites are superior to him and succumbs to the act of murder in defence of his ego.

*A Soldier's Story* centres on how the racial caste system affects Black men who carry specific myths of civilised and savage identities. This film provides an examination of Black male performance that is validated as Black masculinity by socially conscious Blackmen. The author and his creation of Black male characters in the play and the film enunciate this clearly. Set in 1944, the story positions the dominant racial ideology of its era to contest the savage myth of the Black body; thereby, Fuller provides the audience with an insight into internalised racism and how it mentally destroys certain African-Americans. This insight is compounded by the fact that the film was released in 1984 when President Reagan's reversal of civil rights laws threatened affirmative action initiatives for Black people and their struggles for equality, along with their historical fight for Black liberation.

I intend to use Jung's theories of the collective unconscious and his idea of the Shadow to examine the savage mind myth. I will also include African-American psychological studies of Black identity politics in my textual analysis. Moreover, the film *A Soldier's Story* allows me to demonstrate how the synchronic mapping draws upon the myth of the 'savage body' as primitive and the 'object of desire' as being not just to

possess a White female goddess or hero, but to be White if internalised myths about the inferiority of Black people destabilise their ego.

I have chosen *Brother to Brother* to examine the 'object of desire' myths, and to consider the ways in which the author and filmmaker Rodney Evans overturns the myth that Black manhood is exclusively heterosexual. The story parallels two periods: the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and Harlem in the twenty-first century Hip Hop era. The story concerns the struggles for Black gay equality and the fight for self-determined Black masculinity. My objective is to establish the circularity of interracial desire in classical and independent film, that is, both Black America's desire for White power and beauty and White America's fascination with Black expressivity. *Brother to Brother* focuses on Black gay characters that do not strive to be ideal heterosexual Black men. This focus is important not only in the way it challenges heterosexism but also because there are so few narrative feature films that foreground Black sexual politics as a formation of Black gay subjectivity. I have chosen the film because of this distinction. Additionally, because the filmmaker is a Black gay man he rejects the defamatory representation of emasculated gays as passive, weak 'perverts' as well as powerless Black male caricatures.

*Brother to Brother* also defines the current agenda of a Black independent film made over the course of two years with funding from a State grant, and outreach support from Black gay organisations, independent film festival circuits, and gay and lesbian film festivals in international terms. The film also opens up a space to problematise the object of desire myth first by consideration of the filmmaker's Black gay psyche and his inscription of a 'heroic' White male as a love object, and second by analysis of the fascination of the White imago with the Black sexual mystique. No other

narrative feature deals so specifically with gay interracial desire and disavowal as effectively as *Brother to Brother* and that determined its inclusion.

I have chosen Michael Mann's *Collateral* (2004) because it has the distinction of being one of the very few films in which the Black male as a supporting character triumphs. In postclassical American film, White racist fantasy frequently imagines 'blacks' as corporeal psychopaths with rapist instincts and violent impulses. *Collateral* overturns many of those myths and archetypes in that Max, the Black character, defeats Vincent, the White male antihero who is leading him to destruction. Thus, the director and the stars have contested the legacy of the Black male beast by giving the character Max agency, and subsequently the naturalised narratology and iconography of the inferiority of Blacks challenge hegemonic collective consciousness in popular American films. Max destroys Vincent and therefore is able to rescue the woman in peril, thereby fulfilling masculine mastery, classical narrative heroism and a romantic humanity that transcends the confinement of Black men as erotic spectacle.

This is a counter-narrative structure to *Othello* and it serves my argument concerning the term 'Clash of Wills'. In thousands of European-American films the Black male struggles for self-determination and heroic mastery and the paradigm often demonstrates the superiority of hegemonic White masculinity and the inferiority of Black manhood. I will examine the writing style and why the mytheme has been naturalised in narrative film. These four films will exemplify the archetype of Othellophobia and the paradoxes of Othellophilia, whereby Othellophobia is the fear a White male character has of being re-enslaved by a Black man, and Othellophilia is the fascination or fetish regarding a heroic Black man and his fantasised sexual prowess.

Throughout my study of the films, I will take an approach that will link all of the chapters by implementing Black cultural criticism and Black sexual politics. I want to

consider the idea of the Black male as erotic spectacle and the ways the characters are unfulfilled because they lack a love god/ness to complete their psychological and emotional narrative agency. Instead, they appear to fulfil the scriptwriter's overdetermined control of the identity of the character/s and the circumstances the writer allows for heroic romanticism. One of the legacies of Shakespeare's *Othello* is the mytheme of a Black man's attraction and desire for that which I term the 'White female goddess'.

Underpinning my term Othellophobia is not only the fear the White character has of re-enslavement, as marked by the conquest by the Islamic Moor, but also the European/American anxiety concerning the lust of Black men for White women. Frantz Fanon offered a postcolonial reading of the desires of Black men for White women and he introduced important explanations.<sup>27</sup> He omits, however, a homosocial reading of White male rivalry with Black men, which Paul Hoch explains in terms of the acquisition by White men of Black women and their domination of Black men.<sup>28</sup>

David Friedman's<sup>29</sup> reading of the phallic rivalry White men feel towards 'blacks' and their anxieties concerning sexual prowess will unite my examination of myth, desire, fantasy and expressivity. Thus, using a range of Black film theory and cultural criticism, I will test my theory on Othellophobia and Othellophilia.

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<sup>27</sup> Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin White Masks*, Pluto Press, UK, p45

<sup>28</sup> Hoch, Paul, (1979), *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity*, Pluto Press, UK, pp46-47

<sup>29</sup> Friedman, David, M., (2002), *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, Robert Hale, London, p93

## CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 1.1: Cultural criticism and film theory

Gladstone L. Yearwood's (2000) *Black Film Theory as a Signifying Practice* critiques dominant film theory in relation to Black film production, authorship and spectatorship. Yearwood argues that the representation of Black people in mainstream cinema has been ideologically dominated by White American supremacist objectives through the iconography of film and its ideological narratology.<sup>30</sup> Throughout his examination of film criticism, film production, characterisation, and audience identification, he discerns that America's historical treatment of Black people has resulted in the formation of a Black persona that denies the multifarious humanities of African-American identities.<sup>31</sup>

Yearwood builds his critique on a wide range of Black cultural theorists and film critics to explain the disparities between dominant American film and its audience pleasures, and Black film and the cultural needs of its audience. As a result, he provides for this research an indispensable evaluation of narrative myths and film practices focused on the multifarious ways in which myth is employed to represent the Black male in American cinema.

Three seminal texts on Black cinema from the 1970s are also useful. The first is the current (2001) edition of Donald Bogle's book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Black in American Films* (1973). His major concern was to identify how Hollywood established Black racial stereotypes, as indicated by the book title.<sup>32</sup> He explains how the repetition of these iconic types from 1915 to the 1990s has limited the representation of Black characters across genres. In addition, the conventions of stereotype facilitate the expectations of the

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<sup>30</sup> Yearwood, Gladstone L. (2000), *Black Film Theory as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration, and the African American Aesthetic Tradition*, AWP, USA, p181

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p2

<sup>32</sup> Op cit, Bogle, Donald, (1973/2003), *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Black in American Films*, pp3-9

audience, particularly in relation to mise-en-scène. Moreover, the audience's expectations of stereotypes established many of the pleasures in the performances that made Black stars.<sup>33</sup>

Bogle's mapping of racial representation and audience expectations established an important critical reading. Since the 1970s, his film criticism has offered useful mise-en-scène analysis of the shifting concerns in contemporary African-American culture, particularly how the everyday struggles and experiences of African-Americans are constructed and portrayed in Hollywood cinema. His critique provides a continuum for my research because I aim to show how the White imago in narrative drama drew on limited social perceptions of Black people and constructed an imaginary 'black' simulacrum rather than culturally specific identities.

Jim Pines's (1975) *Blacks in Films* examines how cinema established images of 'black' figures in the frame without agency; consequently, these figures often lack a humanity with which Black folks can identify. Pines also explains how recording action shifted to filming stories, leading up to D.W. Griffith's formation of classical film narrative story/plot and visual style established in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Pines suggests that the visual language of film, coupled with the plantation myth, arguably inaugurates the narratology of White supremacy. "The importance of the plantation myth in early American cinema cannot be overstressed. It embodies the essential ingredients of American racial-cultural ideology. It is the cradle of race mythology, and it determined the form and content of all plasticized black images".<sup>34</sup> Pines makes important links between subjugated 'black' identities in nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy to explain how myth was perpetuated in

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p59

<sup>34</sup> Pines, Jim, (1975), *Blacks in Films*, Studio Vista UK, p7

silent cinema and continued in the sound era owing to the naturalised omnipresent iconography of 'black' inferiority and servitude.

Thus, Pines's study employs textual analysis to unpack narrative film and he applies social, political and cultural criticism to theorise the narrative implications of myth and Black liberation consciousness in the 1970s. Pines's theories enable the study of the objectives of Black and White filmmakers who have overturned Hollywood's narratology and iconography of masculine mastery.

In *Slow Fade to Black* (1977), Thomas Cripps's study of Hollywood as an industry of production, distribution and exhibition during the studio era confirms issues discussed by Bogle and Pines regarding the stereotyped presence of 'blacks' in film. Cripps traces how the image of 'blacks' degenerated into a savage body and mind after *The Birth of a Nation* and *The Nigger* (Edward Sheldon, 1915). With the coming of sound, Cripps points to some of the ways Hollywood maintained its image of 'blacks' in the 1930s with costume dramas set on plantations in the Deep South. Cripps's central study examines the circumstance that governed the representation of Blacks in Hollywood films. Cripps posits that from 1900 to 1942, Hollywood studio heads and the New York bankers who financed the Fordian compartmentalised dream factor were largely socialised and ingrained with the myth of the inferiority of 'blacks'.<sup>35</sup>

Cripps's evaluation of Hollywood in the chapter entitled 'The Great Depression' suggests the American public did not want to see Blacks as stars because White Americans wanted their heroes and heroines to be iconic images of people who were like themselves: White, 'civilised', sophisticated and beautiful. During the 1900 to 1942 period Blackmen and women were disqualified from being

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<sup>35</sup> Cripps, Thomas, (1977), *Slow Fade To Black*, Oxford University Press, USA, p263

heroic in the minds of a dominant White audience based on the myth of Blacks' sexual depravity and pathologically violent tendencies. America preferred to see Blacks in roles that affirmed their actual social position across the segregated USA. This inculcated historical perception frequently worked to determine the role of 'blacks' in motion pictures and it distorted their humanity.<sup>36</sup> Examining these social constructs in the thesis facilitates discussion of archetypal myths of Blacks as perceived threatening evil figures in the Jungian collective unconscious. These ideas of a Shadow figure are translated in popular fiction to demonise Blacks, especially in post-classical narrative film, and this unconscious projection of the Jungian shadow is vital to my hypothesis.

Manthia Diawara's (1993) *Black American Cinema* contains a collection of essays that examine important subjects in Black film studies that will be invaluable throughout my thesis as regards narrative structure and character causality. Diawara's essay 'Black American Cinema: The New Realism' argues that new independent Black film is developing an aesthetic in film production that works outside the dominant codes and conventions employed by mainstream Hollywood cinema. The collection of essays theorises how new Black cinema works as resistance and opposition to the dominant mode of production. This is central to my research because I will demonstrate through the arguments raised that oppositional strategies of character and narrative are the ways in which a number of post-classical filmmakers are challenging dominant film production, as exemplified in all of my four films.

Ed Guerrero's *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (1993) draws on the Black film criticism discussed by Diawara, hooks, Jane Gaines, Michele Wallace, Bogle and Cripps. Guerrero contextualises their arguments and posits theories on Hollywood industry trends, shifting audience reception, and

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p290



ongoing critical debates concerning African-American identity politics in the 1980s and 1990s. Additionally, Guerrero posits that, in the 1980s, the inclusion of a Black character in the 'protective custody' of a White hegemonic patriarchal male<sup>37</sup> in the interracial 'buddy movie' reassured a White audience that the Black sexual and criminal compulsions historically inscribed on the filmic Black persona could be contained to avoid causing social chaos in White America. His chapters 'The Rise and Fall of Blaxploitation' and 'Recuperation, Representation and Resistance: Black Cinema though the 1980s'<sup>38</sup> are central to my research because they provide a detailed critical context with which to compare and contrast Black masculinity and the Black body in the cultural framework of 1970s action heroes.

These debates will aid my examination of whether Hollywood kowtowed to its dominant mass audience by propagandising Black subjectivity from the 1970s to 1990s. I will then be able to consider how Black masculine self-determination threatens the status quo in America because Guerrero includes Afrocentric ideas put forward by Molefi Asante that called for Black history and intellectual culture to be moved from the margin to the centre of popular American discourse,<sup>39</sup> thereby compelling Blacks to re-evaluate their African ancestral contribution to civilisation. This is most important, as it demonstrates how Black cultural criticism concerning gender, race and history strives to reclaim a discourse concerning the experiences of Blacks.

Debates on Black essentialism are questioned in Mark A. Reid's *Redefining Black Film* (1993), James Snead's *White Screens Black Images: Hollywood From The Dark Side* (1994), Valerie Smith's *Representing Blackness Issues in Film and Video* (1997), and S. Graig Watkins's *Representing: hip hop culture and the*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p130

<sup>38</sup> Guerrero, Ed (1993), *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, Temple University Press, USA, p113

<sup>39</sup> Asante, Molefi, K.. (1988), *Afrocentricity*, AWP, USA, p49

*production of Black Cinema* (1998). I intend to add to these debates by employing my definition of Othellophobia and Othellophilia to question the legacy of Black characters in film, and suggesting how the Jungian Ego persona and shadow function as a projection of our deepest fears and rejection of our imperfect Selves.

## 1.2: Black sexual politics- debates and experiences

Black sexual politics across racial divides functions as a struggle for liberation and equality beyond the limits of Judaeo-Christian moral notions of virtuous conduct. Ronald L. Jackson's *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: identity, discourse, and racial politics in popular media* (2006) is one of the main texts concerning Black sexual politics from the 1980s to the present. Jackson questions the many ways in which the Black body is read in American print, advertising, sport, music, television, and the narrative film industry. In his chapter 'Origins of Black Body Politics', Jackson argues that enslavement and the institution of slavery are the significant factor that historically projected European/American definitions of savagery onto the Black body.<sup>40</sup> He links philosophies of sacred, intellectual humanity defined by the White subject as 'normal' and suggests that the Black 'Other' that is perceived as corporeal exists as something abject.<sup>41</sup> He suggests that historically the American government and institutions compounded their ideology of the inferiority of Black people by putting them up for sale on auction blocks half-naked. Through advertisements in print and newspapers, America then widely distributed propaganda that affected society. It displayed slaves as a commodity, which further embedded narrative myths about the inferiority of 'blacks' because they were bought and sold.

In his chapters 'The Origins of Black Body Politics' and 'Black Masculine Scripts', Jackson questions White America's inscription of the Black body as a site of sexual excess and violent depravity. Jackson examines this issue in two ways: first, he discusses how the Black male was used by slaveholders for economic labour and reproduction profit; he then evaluates how the historic exploitation of African-American

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<sup>40</sup> Jackson II, Ronald, L. (2006), *Scripting the Black masculine body: identity, discourse, and racial politics in popular media*, Sunny, USA, p2

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p24

human resources was enforced in America. Jackson then explains how these historical inscriptions have become 'naturalised' through the deployment of the ideological state apparatus.

Jackson's hypothesis asserts that the physical and sexual control of the Black body by slave masters documents the dehumanisation of Africans by White America and evidences its profound denial of culpability. All of Jackson's theories are built on the polemic critical discourse of bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Sexual Politics* (2004), a number of essays by African-American cultural critics in Devon W. Carbado's edited collection, and Michele Wallace in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1979/1990). What Jackson adds to the debate is a reading that extends sexual politics beyond gender theory to include film criticism and textual analysis. By mapping the racial subject as a body of labour and a historical site of racist inscription ranging from eugenics to Sambo stereotype, he asks questions about the body as a site of Black collective consciousness among a Black audience. I will follow his approach to gender discourse but I will explore the rivalry between Black and White masculinity in narrative drama because I believe that grows out of hegemonic authorship as an aspect of Othellophobia.

David M. Friedman's *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis* (2002) examines historical and cultural readings of the penis. Friedman begins by discussing theology before he moves on to scientific anatomical studies that move away from medieval superstition about human anatomy to a psychological and emotional reading of male performance and desire.<sup>42</sup> His chapter, 'The Measuring Stick' maps shifting approaches in reading the sexual anatomy of Black men. He considers the inscription of pre-Christian civilisation that proclaimed the penis as a symbol of power in Graeco-

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<sup>42</sup> Friedman, David, M., (2002), *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, Hale, London, p46

Roman culture.<sup>43</sup> He then discusses the dichotomy of original sin, the 'Curse of Ham', and myths regarding the penis as a symbol of satanic lust and depravity.<sup>44</sup> This myth will underpin my research as an archetypal myth in the collective unconscious, projected onto the Black male as a beast figure that feeds into Othellophobia. Scott Polson-Bryant's *Hung: A meditation on the measure of Black men in America* (2005) and Shawn Taylor's argument in *Big Black Penis: Misadventures in Race and Masculinity* (2008) also study Black male sexual anatomy but Taylor examines the consciousness Black men have of their sexual anatomy and Black sexual politics.

Friedman and Fanon consider the subject of invidia – men's envy of male capitalist, political and sexual power – and I want to question the racial motives that underpin anatomical rivalry, lynching and castration by White males. Physical and sexual violence against Black men in American cinema is so pervasive it demands some consideration. Historically, the theme of lynching and castration also underlines a key subject in Black sexual politics and popular narrative fiction exemplified in the work of James Baldwin in *Going to Meet the Man* (1965), Calvin C. Herton in *Sex and Racism*, (1970), and Eldridge Cleaver in *Soul On Ice* (1968). The idea of invidia as an unconscious motive that challenges the conscious construction of the White male ego can be very useful in unpacking key concerns in Black sexual politics. Friedman's study also opens up a space for consideration of the transformation of the Black male beast into the Black male as erotic spectacle. Kobena Mercer's *Welcome to the Jungle* (1994) critiques the definition of 'heteronormative' masculinity and indicates how Black men can critique Black performances of manliness to reconstruct masculinities.<sup>45</sup> I want to take Mercer's discourse a stage further by considering what Mercer overlooks,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp83-84

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p88

<sup>45</sup> Mercer, Kobena, (1994), *Welcome to the Jungle*, Routledge, UK, p141

and that is the ways in which Black men proactively use power to serve their sexual identities.

In bell hooks's *We Real Cool: Black Masculinity* (2004), she develops issues that she touched on in *Black Looks: Race and Representations* (1992). Her polemic examines Black heterosexual alienation. She defines it in the following way:

Black male phallocentrism constructs a portrait of woman as immoral simultaneously suggesting that she is irrational and incapable of reason. Therefore, there is no need for black men to listen to women or to assume that women have knowledge to share.<sup>46</sup>

hooks argues that phallocentrism disables Black male achievements owing to the historical ownership of the Black body for plantation labour and reproductive plantation development. She also explains how Black men were robbed of their masculinity.<sup>47</sup> First, Black men did not own their bodies. Second, Black men did not have exclusive 'ownership' of Black women, who belonged to the slave master. Third, Black men could not earn a living. Fourth, they were robbed of their children, who belonged to the slave master and could be sold off the plantation, and finally, they did not own property.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, Black men failed to fulfil the narrow ideals of manhood defined by hegemonic rule and phallic policy. hooks studies how these social regulations affected the Black male psyche. I want to build on these debates and suggest some of the ways Black gay men redefine their masculine in opposition to heterosexist regulations.

Martin Summers's *Manliness and its Discontents* (2004) reflectively evaluates the 1900 to 1930 period to demonstrate how education and self-employment along with fraternal mentoring and stable family support developed an affirmative Black male

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<sup>46</sup> hooks, bell, (1992), *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, South End Press, USA, p103

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p90

<sup>48</sup> hooks, bell, (2004), *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, Routledge, USA, pp5-6

ego. He discerns that the need for tenderness, emotional commitment, intellectual development and creative expression was accepted among Black men. All of these issues and debates feed into the central concerns of Black sexual politics and, more specifically, they underline each of my four selected films and practically all the films I shall refer to in the thesis. Summers posits a scholarly humanist critical assessment in his historical reading of Blackness, and his chapter 'Flaming Youth'<sup>49</sup> examines the joy of Black gay identities during the Harlem Renaissance and the social and cultural pride it instilled in particular Black men in New York. Summers focuses on a subculture of homosexual solidarity shared by Langston Hughes and Richard Bruce Nugent, whose lives through a literary circle extended to rent parties and social gatherings. His study of these men explains how intellectual, social and sexual desire formed the foundation of Black sexual politics during the Harlem Renaissance and worked towards what I call the pleasure of living in a Black body. His research and theorisation will be important for my textual analysis on *Brother to Brother* that is set in the Harlem Renaissance and the twenty-first century because it provides an explanation of cultural legacy and experience.

Polemical debates on racist fantasy and myth are astutely discussed in Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Sexual Politics* (2004), Richard Majors and Janet Mancini's *The Cool Pose* (1993), Richard Majors and Jacob Gordon's *The American Black Male* (1994), and Joseph L. White and James H. Cones's *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America* (1999). These critics and theorists investigate essential questions, namely, what does it mean to be an African-American striving to define the self, and what are the historical

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<sup>49</sup> Summers, Martin (2004), *Martiness and its Discontents, The Black Middle Class & the Transformation of Masculinity 1900-1930*, University of North Carolina Press, USA, pp157-158

aspects of Black identity that serve to build a Black sexual consciousness? Black sexual politics from the seventies to the millennial era orbit these concerns. Robert Staples's *Black Masculinity: The Role of the Black Man in American Society* (1982) attempted to do this with social science research. His study indicated that poor education, health, housing and equal employment opportunities continued to disempower Black men at the start of the 1980s,<sup>50</sup> but Staples overlooked a critique of Christian capitalist patriarchy and the ways it has historically failed to affirm Black masculinity. Moreover, Staples failed to challenge heterosexism and homophobia, and his conclusions now seem myopic and dated.

Don Belton's *Speak My Name: Black Men on Masculinity and the American Dream* (1995), Marcellus Blout and George P. Cunningham's *Representing Black Men* (1996), and the collection of essays, poems and articles in Herb Boyd and Robert L. Allen's *Brotherman: The Odyssey of Black Men in America, An Anthology* (1995) all point toward more inclusive ideas in reclaiming a humanity. Paul Hoch's *White Hero Black Beast* (1979) succeeds where Staples failed because Hoch's Marxist critique exposes heterosexist normality as class-driven economic control of masculinity. Additionally, two recent texts, Athena D. Mutua's *Progressive Black Masculinities* (2006) and Keith Boykin's *Beyond the Down Low* (2005), also build on the work of Cornel West's humanist philosophical approach to Black identity politics. Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien's essay 'Race, Sexual Politics and Black Masculinity: A Dossier' in Chapman and Rutherford's (1988) essay collection *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* will prove useful because all the essays critique heterosexist regulations. I intend to use the critical debates in these texts to test if Black and White men are redefining Black masculinity in film through Othellophilia.

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<sup>50</sup> Staples, Robert, (1982), *Black Masculinity: The Role of the Black Man in American Society*, Black Scholar Press, USA, pp141-142



### 1.3 Historical Reading of Blackness

Winthrop D. Jordan's *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro 1550-1812* (1969) is one of the most widely quoted texts on the historical reading of race and consequently must be included. He provides a detailed assessment of the attitude, ideas and treatment of Black people during the stated historical period. Jordan's analysis opens up a space for understanding entrenched and institutionalised myths about race in the antebellum age and extends them to the period of Reconstruction and the post-1896 segregation era of Jim Crow laws that discriminated against 'blacks' on the grounds of White supremacy.

In Jordan's chapter 'The Bodies of Men: The Negro's Physical Nature', Jordan explains how the 'Chain of Being' was used to inscribe the myth that 'blacks' were associated with apes.<sup>51</sup> His chapter 'First Impressions: Initial English confrontation with Africans' documents how the skin colour of Africans led the English to draw irrational conclusions about the humanity of the Africans, namely, what caused their Black skin, as well as the belief that Africans mated with apes. Ideas of this kind are central to my examination because I will show that they have occupied what Jung defines as the personal unconscious. Moreover, White supremacist mythology about the evolution of Blacks from apes to subhumans underlines the subject of my thesis on the myth of the Black male beast. The psychiatrist Joseph White and psychologist James Cones examine this supremacist mythology,<sup>52</sup> which further underpins my understanding of racist fantasy and it provides evidence of White supremacist fears which allows me to conflate

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<sup>51</sup> Jordan, Winthrop D., (1969), *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro 1550-1812*, Pelican Books, UK, p229

<sup>52</sup> White, Joseph, L and Cones, James, H. (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, Routledge, USA, p37 and pp37-41

supremacists myth about 'evil blacks' with the Jungian 'shadow', the opposite of the Ego persona.

Jordan's humanist investigation not only historically cites the formation of these notions; his detailed analysis also explains how ignorance and fear formed the ideology of racial hierarchy and racist fantasy. This argument also contributes to my research on the ways myth and stereotypes were naturalised in American society and why Hollywood employed the narratology and iconography of the 'primitive' black rather than developing a realist approach to characters, as seen in the films of Oscar Micheaux,<sup>53</sup> such as *Body and Soul* (Oscar Micheaux, 1924).<sup>54</sup>

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1953/1986) uses his psychiatric observations and subjective experience to explain the interiority of racial consciousness and exteriority of racial anxiety demonstrated in the behaviour and attitudes of his patients. In his chapter 'The Fact of Blackness', he explains that despite the perspicacity and intelligence of particular Black men, they can still be perceived by the majority of Whites as a 'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'.<sup>55</sup> Fanon's argument contextualises the historical aspects of racial discrimination and the legacy it has left in the collective consciousness of Blacks with regard to inculcated racism and self-hatred.

In 'The Negro and Psychopathology', Fanon explains the consequences of colonial enslavement for Black people and the paradoxes of perpetuating the myth of the intellectual inferiority and sexual power of 'blacks' that distorted the White imago. In these chapters, and throughout, he combines historical reinterpretation, a critique of socialisation, and a psychoanalytic reading of behaviour and attitude in the White

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<sup>53</sup> <http://shorrock.com/arts/micheaux/papers/keen.html> accessed 30.12.2008

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.naacp.org/about/history/micheaux/> accessed 30.12.2008

<sup>55</sup> Fanon, Frantz (1986) *Black Skin, White Masks*, Pluto Press, UK, p109

imago as repressed guilt and sexual speculation that compounds the imagined performative potential of the Black body as bestial and savage. The entire chapter provides a reading of the White imago that overtly and covertly points toward the destructive aspects of racial fetishism. I will argue that racial fetishism tends to overshadow the representation of race in the frame of post-classical film. I will show that the character, the story and the mise-en-scène as denotive and connotative systems overdetermine the Blacks whereby they frequently become caricatures.

As regards historical reading of Blackness and Black identity politics, Cornel West's *Race Matters* (1993/2001) examines the subject most rigorously. He explains race from an African-American perspective adopting a discursive humanist inclusive approach to Black subjectivity. In his chapter 'Nihilism in Black America', he considers the psychological consequences of inculcated racism and its destructive effects on Black collective consciousness. West sees two positions taken by social and cultural critics in their explanation of Black America: first, a sociological reading of racial underdevelopment concerning unemployment, housing, education and health care. Second, the position taken by critics "who stress the behavioural impediments on black upward mobility".<sup>56</sup> West suggests that these polarised arguments overlook the real issue affecting Black America, which he states is "[...] the profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness and social despair so widespread in black America".<sup>57</sup>

In his chapter 'The Pitfalls of Racial Reasoning', West discusses the need to think beyond Black essentialism towards prophetic moral reasoning that takes into consideration gender, race and class and uplifts the spirit and identity of African-

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<sup>56</sup> West, Cornel, (1993/2001 edition), *Race Matters*, Vintage, USA, pp17-18

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p20

Americans. This position rejects patriarchal heterosexism and the dehumanisation of lesbian and gay men experiences on humanist grounds. Furthermore, West argues in the chapter 'Black Sexuality: The Taboo Subject' that demythologising Black sexuality is crucial, since the pathological inscription of Blacks by White America has historically undermined self-esteem and self-love of Black people because White supremacist ideology is built on degrading the Black body and controlling 'blacks'.

West distinguishes his discussion of Black sexuality through his understanding of African-American resistance to European American racist fantasy. He discusses the necessity for self-love and affirmation, which he attributes to the Black social networks and institutions in historically reading Blackness. West cites the Black family, churches, universities, and social spaces that were established in the segregation era and the ways they promoted Black humanity, unmediated by White America because of Jim Crow segregation. His chapter also pinpoints one of the most important issues, namely that:

[...] Black sexuality is a taboo subject in America principally because it is a form of black power over which whites have little control- yet its visible manifestations evoke the most visceral of White responses, be it one of seductive obsessions or downright disgust.<sup>58</sup>

This dichotomy of white desire and disavowal is frequently neglected by social theorists such as Robert Staples, film critics such as Peter Biskind in his *Easy Riders, Raging Bulls* (1999), and gender critics like Judith Butler, whose excellent *Gender Trouble* (1990) overlooks the sexual politics of Black women. It is here that West's concerns intersect with those expressed in Yvonne Tasker's *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (1993), Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark's

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p125

*Screening the Male Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (1993), Michele Aaron's *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader* (2004), and *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* edited by Henry Abelove and colleagues (1993). I have distinguished these texts because they contest the legitimacy of heteronormative representation. In my textual analysis and theorisation, I intend to critique the mastery of hegemonic power and argue in favour of multifarious masculinities, in order to challenge heterogeneity. Cornel West's theories on race in addition to Ahmed Shawki's *Black Liberation and Socialism* (2006) and Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown's *Racism* (1989/2003) problematise essentialist and reductive readings of Black history. Additionally, these social and cultural theorists indirectly stress the empirical aspects of the African-American experience and address the self-respect, pride and pleasure of a film audience. I intend to show how empathy serves the Black collective consciousness in relation to spectatorship.

Cornel West's pro-gay and pro-feminist critique of Black culture also calls for solidarity to support Black humanity and development. His critique of Black cultural theory and White supremacist ideology asks the reader for self-reflexive analysis and points toward a historical reinvestment in civil rights liberation. West reads across the Black liberation era and the Afrocentric discourse discussed in Haki R. Madhubuti's *Black Men Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? African American Family in Transition* (1990). Madhubuti posits a manifesto on the way forward for the Black family.<sup>59</sup> He discusses economic, social, historical and federal policy between the 1960s and 1990 and the way it has disenfranchised Black America and promoted racial discrimination.<sup>60</sup> I intend to consider if Madhubuti's stated concerns are apparent in the

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<sup>59</sup> Madhubuti, Haki R. (1990) *Black Men Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The African American Family in Transition*, Third World Press, USA, pp159-168

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p31

work of post-classical filmmakers and in what ways, if any, it challenges the representation of Black characters in twenty-first-century film. I intend to show that a racial coalition and Black self-love contests the myth of the Black savagery and that Cornel West and Haki R. Madhubuti respectively argue in favour of those aims of racial insurgence.

The edited collection of essays in Stuart Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (1997), offer a valuable source of cultural criticism, particularly Hall's essay 'The Spectacle of the 'Other''. Hall questions the construction and meaning of race by examining how Blackness is theorised as 'Other'. His critique on the era of empire to the present, as well as 'stereotyping as a signifying practice' and 'contesting a racialized regime of representation', offer very useful ways of reading connotations in film narrative.. My examination of the iconography of Blackness will include theatre, photography and films; therefore, considering 'race as a floating signifier'<sup>61</sup> enables me to evaluate strategies that have constructed the myth of the Black male as a beast in film.

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<sup>61</sup> <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-8471383580282907865>

### 1.3: Constructing Othello

I intend to cite Shakespeare's *Othello* as the primary text that gave birth to the most significant archetypal Black male character in European drama. I aim to discuss the ways in which the character Othello has been read as the symbolic 'noble savage', a Jungian shadow figure contrasted against the 'heroic' White male figure; also as a humane flawed Black hero, and the Black male as erotic spectacle. Two approaches are important in following this line of argument. First, I will use literary criticism and drama theory to examine his subjectivity. Honigmann's *Shakespeare Othello* (1997/2004) and Stanley Wells and Michael Neill's *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello* (2006) study the complete play and present a historical and social context as well as the changes in performance and staging from 1604 to the present time. The books also offer sound textual analyses of the play and they provide very useful character studies of the principal roles. I will use both texts to explain why Othello is an important character and how *Othello* has influenced the construction of Black men in European and American narrative film.

I will also employ diachronic and synchronic strategies in reading the 'Savage Body', 'Savage Mind', 'Object of Desire' and 'Clash of Wills' to position the various myths of Othello as a character and his legacy to other Black male characters. I will question what Othello's identity signified to Europe at the time, and what he represented as an Islamic Moor who converted to Christianity. The collection of essays in Ivan Van Sertima's *Golden Age of the Moor* (1992) provides me with evidence about the culture, customs and identity of African Moors, especially his essays 'The Moor in Africa and Europe: Origins and Definitions' and 'The Moor in Europe: Influences and Contributions', which explain their civilisation rather than their assumed savagery. Because Black Islamic Moors conquered parts

of Europe, I will ask whether it had psychological consequences that shaped White Christian masculinity. This is imperative because of my hypothesis on Othellophobia and Othellophilia, that is to say, the fear and fascination of Othello as an archetype in two significant ways. On the one hand, Othello as the former Islamic enemy that enslaved White men and, on the other hand, Othello as a model of Black masculinity in modern narrative.

The correlation between African Moors and African-Americans in the European-American psyche is arguably paralleled and contrasted in the characterisation of Othello as a human being and the caricature of 'blacks' as inferiors in Hollywood film history. The subject of bigotry is therefore vital to my research because Iago can be seen as the "*dominative racist*". His hatred towards a Black man is not archaic: it is contemporary. I want to suggest that Shakespeare offered a critique of racist assumptions about Black men specifically, and Moors in general, in his compassionate portrait of Othello.

For over four hundred years the play, and Othello in particular have become an archetype of Black male passion and flawed heroism owing to Othello's obsessive idealisation of his object of desire, namely Desdemona the White female goddess. I intend to show that Othello is a prototype character, and I will consider how he manifests Black caricatures in popular fiction because the mythemes in the play *Othello* have been duplicated in countless films. In each of my selected films, the myth of the Black male as a beast can be traced back to the myths that construct *Othello*. I therefore want to explore the idea that the character Othello can exist as a Shadow in the Jungian personal unconscious. Therefore, Virginia Mason Vaughn's (2005) *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800*, Vaughan and Cartwright's (1991) *Othello: New Perspectives* discursively evaluate literary



criticism and Vaughan's *Othello: A Contextual History* (1996) also offer significant material regarding the stature of the play on the subject of race and gender.

What I want to add to Vaughn's research is the consideration that Shakespeare possibly provided actors of his era with the opportunity to embody Blackness as a route towards analysing their perception of Black male humanity. I shall use Winthrop Jordan's research study on America's treatment of Blacks based on English first contact to stress that "[i]n Shakespeare's day the Moors, including Othello, were commonly portrayed as pitchy black and the terms Moor and Negro used interchangeably".<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, Europe and America would enslave sub-Saharan Africans but not African Moors,<sup>63</sup> and I want to consider if this is because White society knew even, if they did not acknowledge the fact, that the Moors' cultural contribution helped to advance Western civilisation.

I believe Othello represents a conflation of two civilisations: first, by enabling Blacks to convert from Islam to the Christian faith within White society; second, through Western society's realisation of the worth of Blacks' religious conversion and Black men's loyalty, physical strength and intellectual masculinity that enabled the European State to expand into Arab and African regions.

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<sup>62</sup> Op cit, Jordan, Winthrop D. (1968) *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro*, p5

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp5-6

## CHAPTER TWO: OTHELLOPHOBIA AND OTHELLOPHILIA

In this chapter, the meaning of 'The myth of the Black male beast' will be introduced through the study of Shakespeare's *Othello* because the legacy of the play is the most significant Black male character in European drama. I want to consider the ways that Othello's character (i.e. a Moor and symbol of ancient Black African masculinity) has been translated in post-classical American film's representations of African-American manhood. In this examination, the terms Othellophobia and Othellophilia will be clearly defined.

First, I will define the meaning of both terms by linking the Moor Othello with traits found in the representation of African-American caricatures in film. Second, I will explain how synchronic and diachronic myths create Black male archetypes. Third, I will suggest how mythemes of the Black male beast function in narrative drama. Fourth, I will also refer to the 2004 *South Bank Show* documentary on the legacy of Othello in drama history and the shifting cultural debates about Othello as the most famous Black character in drama. Jonathan Bate, the Shakespearean scholar, Professor David Dabydeen, art historian and writer, Jonathan Miller, theatre and opera director, and Amri Baraka, playwright and Black cultural critic, discuss the subject. I am also using this documentary because it provides an astute analysis of Black identity in drama for the audience and the actors playing the leading characters of Othello, Iago and Desdemona in the twentieth century. The analysis is discussed in the documentary by Paul Robeson, Sello Maake Ka-Ncube, Sir Anthony Sher, and Lisa Dillon in the 2004 production. The context of race and racism in different historical eras makes this documentary invaluable, as realised by the psychiatrist Susie Orbach and the poet and broadcaster Jackie Kay, who discuss it in some depth. Finally, I will

consider how Othello as an a prototype represents a romantic hero and victim in drama on whom scriptwriters repeatedly draw.

Central to my definition is a consideration of the Jungian collective unconscious and modern scriptwriters' identification with Iago in the formation of Othellophobia and Othellophilia. I will not examine the short story source material *Un Capitano Moro* (by Cinthio in 1565) in the context of *Othello* because Shakespeare's play has been critically discussed and debated more widely and it offers a far more profound study of interracial fears and broader anxieties of Blackness regarding the phallic body and intellectual Christian mind. These concerns will be discussed by way of cultural criticism and textual analysis to test if they are translated and exemplified in American cinema. I will also refer to a variety of film and television productions of *Othello* to contrast how different productions in the twentieth century examine the subject of race, gender and myth.

## 2.1: What is Othellophobia?

I posit that it is a White male character's fear of being re-enslaved by Islamic Moors or Blacks. The knowledge of Islamic Moors' enslavement of Whites from 711-1492 AD threatened White hegemonic mastery. The collection of essays in Ivan Van Serima's (1992) *Golden Age of the Moor* provides a rigorous study of the history and culture of the Moors. First, he differentiates the Moors from African Black Berber radicalisation and European discourses concerning their skin colour and then moves on to the identity of the Moors in North Africa and their history.<sup>64</sup> Second, he evidences how paintings and sculptures from the medieval era help to define the Moors as Black during the Renaissance and the association of black with evil.<sup>65</sup>

Van Serima then discusses the 'Influence and Contribution'<sup>66</sup> of the Moors in the cultural transformation of the Iberian Peninsula and evidences the scholarly influence that was translated from the Arabic "(the medieval language of science)" into Latin, the classical European language. By the tenth century, there were institutions of translation all over Christian Europe and they provided links between Spain, Portugal, France, Italy and England.<sup>67</sup> I believe the dissemination of Islamic Moor ideology is a crucial factor in the anxiety many Europeans had about being re-enslaved after the conquest of the Moors in 1492. Furthermore, according to Van Serima's research and the study of other scholars included in *The Golden Age of the Moor*, for approximately one hundred and fifty years during the twelfth century "several of the Moorish works in mathematics, astronomy and medicine had become standard texts [...] at European universities".<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Van Serima, Ivan, ed, (1992), *Golden Age of the Moor*, Transaction Publishers, UK, pp4-5

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p7

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp9-28

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p10

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p10

Van Sertima further explains that the education of Muslim women in Africa and Spain along with the freedoms given to them in relation to their intellectual enlightenment<sup>69</sup> was exceptional for its time. Even the tradition of the “purdah [wearing the veil] was almost entirely ignored in Moorish Spain”.<sup>70</sup> All of the essays by a range of scholars in *The Golden Age of the Moor* offer a wealth of evidence concerning the contribution of the Moors to European civilisation.

Muslim scholars absorbed, synthesized and expanded on the knowledge of the Ethiopians and the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Chinese and the Indians. A new and momentous leap forward in the theoretical and applied sciences evidenced itself in Moorish mathematics, medicine, astronomy, navigation and new concepts of world geography and philosophy...The popularity of Moorish scholarship was such that for centuries Arabic was commonly accepted as the language of scholars from Europe, Asia, and Africa...<sup>71</sup>

In reference to the above, I consider Othello as a symbol and representation of Black Intellectual idealism. He was a loyal state-appointed warrior of military leadership and valour, and he also embodied erotic passion and romantic heroism. He depicts the conquering force of the Moors in the Jacobean age and represents a threat to the characters in *Othello*. First, Othello won the love of a Venetian noble White female and she chose him over her own kinsmen. Second, he gained the admiration and trust of the Venetian state. This threatened the assumed White male privilege of Iago and other bigoted ‘noblemen’. Third, as a former Islamic Black male Othello is perceived by his enemies as a Godless heathen that elicits mistrust among the White Christian elite because they imagine he uses his illicit power to gain favour and privilege in the Christian state.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p11

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p11

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p14

Othellophobia can also be read in a broader historical context if we consider the transatlantic slave trade. After the subjugation of Africa, white supremacy was enforced but the retaliation against whites in slave revolts such as Saint-Domingue with its social revolution in 1791 and Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, as well as further slave rebellions in the Caribbean, such as the Paul Bogale Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865 in Jamaica intensified supremacist anxieties about imperial and colonial dominance. This resonated with audiences in the nineteenth and twentieth century who loaded sexual depravity and murder onto Othello and Blacks like him.<sup>72</sup>

These concerns can be found in a fear of Black male characters in drama that are heroic, intelligent, romantic, and honour-bound to the state. Othello is unreasonably hated and envied by irrational and weak men who are overwhelmed by their phantasmic and racist fantasy.<sup>73</sup> Iago's character illustrates this, as he dismantles Othello's masculinity and his sanity, and destroys Othello's life. Shakespeare invested Othello with virtues Iago lacks. Professionally, Iago is a subordinate, personally, his cruelty towards Emilia in a loveless marriage is repellent, and spiritually he lacks faith in human beings and Christianity. Consequently Iago can be read as irrational and we can trace European-American playwrights' template of Black male characters' subjectivity through identification with Iago rather than Shakespeare's humanist construction of Othello. Virginia Mason Vaughan<sup>74</sup> concurs with Van Sertima on Shakespeare's study of the Moors' civilisation.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Op cit, Wells, Stanley and Neill, Michael, ed, (2006), *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello*, Oxford University press, UK, pp10-11

<sup>73</sup> Op cit, Kovel, (1988), *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, pp18-19

<sup>74</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, (1994), *Othello: A contextual History*, p51 in chapter 3 'Racial Discourse: Black and White', pp51-70

<sup>75</sup> Op cit, Van Sertima, ed, (1992), *Golden Age of the Moor*, p15

In Hollywood classical cinema, Black characters were usually represented as savage, obtuse or lascivious, as seen in the depiction of the indigenous population in *King Kong* (Marion Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933) (Figure 2).



Fig.2

Blacks were frequently portrayed as primitives from the African continent, bereft of civilised culture. The Hollywood studios as an institution within America's hegemonic ideological culture chose to describe Black people in this manner. They viewed Africans as a conquered people and preferred to ignore and negate African civilisation. Here we can discern a major difference between Shakespeare's research on African culture<sup>76</sup> because he allows Othello an intellectual humanity and Hollywood denied Black people that. Furthermore, central to my definition of Othellophobia are the historical facts concerning the Moors' culture and civilisation. Wane Chandler's essay 'The Moor: Light of Europe's Dark Age' cites the Moors' civic development, architecture, street lighting, public baths, and indoor plumbing.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Honigmann, E.A.J. ed, (1997), *Othello*, The Arden Shakespeare, Thomson, UK, pp3-4

<sup>77</sup> Op cit, Van Sertima, ed, (1992), *Golden Age of the Moor*, p166

The recent research and re-evaluation of the historical era following the end of the Roman Empire and Christian vs. Muslim conflict is examined in the BBC documentary (2008) *After Rome: Holy War and Conquest*.<sup>78</sup> In the documentary, the argument that the Moors are the equals of and culturally more advanced than Europeans is contextualised as Boris Johnson talks to various professors and scholars from Islamic institutions. They highlight the complex nuances that influence the acceptance of Moorish culture in the Iberian Peninsula and the religious inequality between Jewish, Muslim and Christian subjects.<sup>79</sup> Although certain scholars acknowledged the cultural superiority of the Moors,<sup>80</sup> a number of Spanish citizens refused to accept that the Moors made a considerable cultural impact in Andalusia. James Cleugh's research noted that contemporary cultural discourse reiterates racial and cultural prejudice from the 1600s to the 1900s in terms of Spanish attitudes towards the Moors.<sup>81</sup> I believe Shakespeare faced this racial intersection in the 1600s when he chose to contrast the humanity and civilisation of Othello with the savage and bestial myth of Black people that Jordan also identifies in *White over Black*.<sup>82</sup>

The fact is, however, that Africa, its people and its civilisation were not inferior at all. The history of Africa's civilisation and achievement has been well documented in the literature, including Basil Davison's (1966/1991) *Africa in History*, Cheikh Anta Diop's (1974) *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, and Dr Ivan Van Sertima's (1984) *Blacks in Science: Ancient and Modern (Journal of African Civilizations)*. Additionally, Frank M. Snowden's (1983) *Before Colour Prejudice: The*

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<sup>78</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00g222s#broadcasts> Accessed 12.12. 2008

<sup>79</sup> <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=LLGkXGBT4RU&feature=related> Accessed 12.12. 2008

<sup>80</sup> <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=IyJbvLGHC0c&feature=related> Accessed 12.12. 2008

<sup>81</sup> Cleugh, James, (1952), *Spain in the Modern World*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, UK, pp31-32 and p41

<sup>82</sup> Op cit, Jordan, Winthrop D. (1968) *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro*, pp7-8



*Ancient View of Blacks*, Chancellor Williams' (1992) *Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500BC to 2000AD*, Kadiatu Kanneh's (1998) *African Identities*, as well as J.D.Fage and William Tordoff's (2002) *A History of Africa* verifies the evolution of Africa's civilisation. Nevertheless, Hollywood chose to repudiate Africa's civilisation in films such as the *Tarzan* series, *The African Queen* (1951), *Mogambo* (1953), and *Out of Africa* (1985). Films like these indicate how cinema as an institution of popular culture manipulates modern audiences through half-truths, and Kino Eye film practices as shown in Dziga Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929). It demonstrates how 'real life' in documentary films is not necessarily fact or truth. The new medium of film took advantage of the illusion of reality when it depicted Africa and its people as savage, as seen in *Sanders of the River* (1935).<sup>83</sup>

In seventeenth-century Italy, knowledge of the Moors' advanced civilisation, coupled with the fear of Blackness and Islamic theology, contributed to the hatred of Othello and others like him who could re-enslave White Christian men, seduce White women into polygamous relationships and through miscegenation thereby transform Venice and Italy. In defining Othellophobia one must stress that it combines disdain towards Black savagery with fear of Islamic domination. Not only were Blacks perceived to be savage, as Peter Fryer's research demonstrates in the chapter 'Rise of English Racism', where he refers to the diachronic racist literature of Edward Long and Philip Thicknesse on the subject of Blacks' inferior nature and character,<sup>84</sup> even though Molefi Asante in *Afrocentricity* (1989) evidences Africa's highly developed culture and neglected civilisation. The central anxiety of the Venetians fighting the Turks in the play underlines their fear of an advanced civilisation and foreign ideology that once

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<sup>83</sup> <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/438878/>

<sup>84</sup> Op cit, Fryer, Peter, (1984), *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, pp162-163

ruled Southern Europe. Consequently, the domination of the Venetians' Christian hegemony can be read as a primal fear of imagined re-enslavement. The fear of Islamic domination in Europe is discussed in the BBC 4 documentary *After Rome: The Holy War and Conquest*. Professor Eduardo Manzona Morena of CSIC Madrid says Islamic religion and social power was a profound worry to European men and their personal ambitions and expansionist aims.

This Islamophobia is translated into Iago's illogical hatred of Othello because he feels cheated of the promotion that was given to Cassio. Additionally he suspects that Othello has seduced his wife Emilia. Both fears strike at the male ego and the audience recoils at the rage engendered in Iago. This effect is achieved principally through Iago's soliloquies that invite racist collusion. I am therefore suggesting that scriptwriters in film history (notably after 1915 when *The Birth of a Nation* established a grammar for narrative feature film) and up to the present time have built on the a priori of Othello. By this I mean working from something that is already known to arrive at a conclusion, namely the myth that Blackmen are savage beasts who are intellectually inferior to White men. Through identification with Iago it is possible to disdaim Othello's human dignity and imagine him, as Iago does, as a 'black'; someone without a humanity. As a result of this preferred reading, authors and screenwriters can displace *their* hegemonic fears of enslavement by 'blacks' onto a corporeal black figure. This is exemplified in *Drum*, (1976), *The Planet of the Apes* (1968-1973) series, *Colors*, (1988), *Training Day* (2001), and the television series *The Shield* (2002-2008). I therefore posit that an imagined retribution is one of Federal White America's deepest fears of Black liberation.

This is arguably rooted in the unconscious Jungian shadow, man's repressed and rejected truth about his own evil being, projected onto his shadow figure, a dark/black evil male phantom.<sup>85</sup> Othello becomes a pivotal archetype in the collective unconscious because he is a symbol of African civilisation and imagined savagery. In European/American culture and society Othello is the most famous Black male character in drama and represents flawed human heroism as Shakespeare defined him and he is a hegemonic and sexual threat to White male power as Iago perceives him.

Consequently, an anxious hegemonic White male might imagine 'blacks' will enslave whites as retribution for their treatment of people of African heritage. Therefore scriptwriters who believe in White hegemonic ideology can contain their anxieties about an imagined retribution by 'blacks' through narrative drama because it provides a space for racist fantasy. It allows the writer to invent and determine characters' lives particularly if writers harbour profound fears of Blacks or Islamic re-enslavement in their personal unconscious. Thus, I think Othellophobia exemplifies the fear of re/enslavement motivated by a primordial archetype.

[With] the success of Robeson's Othello, Ivor Brown [English critic Observer newspaper May 25<sup>th</sup> 1930] implies, results from those stereotypical aspects of his black 'nature' (childishness, a warrior temperament, and innate barbarism) that is shared with Shakespeare's character." Ivor Brown demonstrates that he cannot see Robeson as an individual; Robeson exists in Ivor Brown's psyche as an innate black primitive and primordial archetype.<sup>86</sup>

In Wells and Neill's (2006) *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello* they address the history of literary criticism and take issue with the criticism concerning the 'unnatural' union between the noble White female Desdemona and a Black man like beast Othello. Wells and Neill astutely link the history of racist literary criticism

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<sup>85</sup> Jung, Carl, "Aion", in Campbell, Joseph, ed., (1971), *The Portable Jung*, Penguin Books, USA, p142

<sup>86</sup> Op cit, Wells, Stanley and Neill, Michael, ed, (2006), *Othello*, p55

with British involvement in the slave trade at the end of the seventeenth century and expansionism and slave trading during the colonial age of the British Empire. They also note how racist literary criticisms over-determine Othello, drawing on ideological nineteenth-century racism in ways that align itself with Iago's racist rationale.<sup>87</sup>

My definition of Othellophobia underpins this view concerning characters' racism, racially prejudiced literary criticism, and xenophobic spectatorship. Virginia Mason Vaughan also cites the evolution of racial bigotry from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in fixing evil onto blackness.<sup>88</sup> Othellophobia exemplifies myths projected onto Othello by European-Americans who speak of their fear of miscegenation, sexual rivalry, Islamic theology, and re/enslavement by their conquered enemy. As a result, Othello can be read as a paradoxical character that symbolises the advanced civilisation of the Moors yet represents the myth of the Black male as a beast because of White supremacist fears of being subjugated.

I am linking the name Othello to phobia because of the status the character holds as the most important central Black character in English drama.<sup>89</sup> Othello was invented from myths about the Black 'savage' body, 'savage' mind, and the belief that all Black men's object of desire is a White female. In post-classical cinema, these mythemes recur because they adhere to White supremacist perceptions of Black men and they are still used by scriptwriters to invent 'blacks'. Manthia Diawara points out, however, that many Black spectators actively resist Hollywood's construction of Blackness based on Hollywood's long history of misrepresentation of African-American humanity and intelligence.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p41

<sup>88</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, (2005), *Performing Blackness on English Stages 1500-1800*, pp34-35

<sup>89</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, (1993), *Othello: A Contextual History*, p112

<sup>90</sup> Op cit, Diawara, Manthia, (1993), *Black African Cinema*, pp211-212 in chapter 13 'Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance'

This is exemplified in *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989) with the character Hoke Colburn, played by Morgan Freeman, who the audience are asked to believe is so ignorant he does not know who Dr King is, even though Hoke is supposed to be a churchgoing Baptist in the 1960s. This kind of White hegemonic authorship asks the audience to suspend their intelligence, not merely their disbelief. The new Black filmmakers of the 1980s challenged dominant film's stereotypes, as Robert Townsend ironically depicted in *Hollywood Shuffle* (1987). Townsend overturned the myth of the beast so that Black characters were allowed to demonstrate their perspicacity as casual agents in all of the film's vignettes of Black actors trying to get good acting roles in the film industry. Townsend dramatises incidents where Black characters are expected to perform stereotypical portrayals of Uncle Tom, coons, bucks, pimps, ghetto thugs, lazy fools and criminals. Whereas *Hollywood Shuffle* is far removed from *Othello*, the mytheme of the 'savage body', 'savage mind' and the 'clash of wills' are invariant in Townsend's critique of Hollywood's representative 'black' caricature. Consequently, many of the sequences, such as Hollywood's Black Acting School which teaches Black stereotype characterisations, are funny to a Black audience because they recognise the irony of the film's plot and the satire concerning a principled Black man tempted to debase himself to get into the film industry in a leading role.

Centrally, *Hollywood Shuffle* demonstrates that White supremacist regulation of 'blacks' works to restrict and prevent Blacks from dominating White characters, in addition to Black people in the film industry enslaving Whites and taking over the industry. Again, this may appear to have no links or parallels to *Othello* but, in relation to the construction of the myth of Black male as a beast, the 'Savage Body', Savage Mind, and 'Clash of Wills' synchronic indicate some of the ways Hollywood denotes those characteristics and naturalises brutal behaviour and pathological conduct by restricting Blacks to those roles.

Forcing Black actors to play such characters implies Black characters should not be given power over White characters because Blacks will dominate and possibly enslave the White characters. Anxieties of that kind suggest archetypal fears in the collective consciousness. First, that Black people in America have contributed a great deal to its cultural civilisation since 1619 because they are cognisant, intelligent and humane. Second, in the personal unconscious there is the knowledge that former Black Islamic conquerors were not a savage but actually a highly intelligent and civilised people who threatened the self-proclaimed superiority of White people.<sup>91</sup> Knowing that Whites were conquered by the Moors arouses a comparable phobia that is evident in our twenty-first century global hip-hop Age where negative stereotypes of 'blacks' with 'savage minds' is still evident, as depicted by Denzel Washington in *Training Day* (2001), where he plays a cruel, hyper-masculine, corrupt police officer.

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<sup>91</sup> Op cit, Van Sertima, ed, (1992), *Golden Age of the Moor*, p10

## 2.2 What is Othellophilia?

This demonstrates a love of or affection for Othello as an archetype. I am not using the term *philia*<sup>92</sup> to refer to Aristotle's exposition on the ethics of friendship.<sup>93</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan traces the history of black mask and blackface from the medieval mystery plays that represented blacks as damned souls to the masks that were used by *commedia dell'arte* and up to *Othello's* premier in 1601 as a landmark in theatre because unlike the Moorish characters before him, Othello's humanity sets him apart from black evil caricatures.<sup>94</sup> Othellophilia can also be read in the White imago as a masquerade where the use of a black simulacrum such as blackface, mask or body costume takes on the appearance of Black heroic manhood.<sup>95</sup> This allows the imago a self-construction of the persona of the former Islamic/Moor Black conqueror. Additionally, the masquerade can re-enact the power the Black Islamic master exerted over Whites, and when the angst or thrill is played out by the masked White male he can destroy his doppelganger or 'shadow' at his own will if necessary.

Furthermore, the simulacrum of Blackness can be read as a repository for fantasy, and an unconscious struggle with the received myth of Black savagery where repressed desires are acted out. The masquerade in blackface or through the employment of Ebonics and Black male impersonation can be seen in James Toback's 1999 film, *Black and White*, which enables White American teenage characters to act-out their fascination with Blackness through sexual and social liaisons,<sup>96</sup> whereby the White characters mime and burlesque Blackness in whiteface.<sup>97</sup> This is

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.iep.utm.edu/l/love.htm#H2>, accessed 14.12.2008

<sup>93</sup> Bostock, David, (2000), *Aristotle's Ethics*, Oxford University Press, UK, p172

<sup>94</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, (2005), *Performing Blackness on English Stages 1500-1800*, p16 and pp1-17

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p98

<sup>96</sup> Strausbaugh, John, (2006), *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, USA, p306

<sup>97</sup> This is demonstrated by whites who masqueraded as Blacks in the Hip Hop era, as seen in *Be Cool*, (2005) with Vince Vaughn as a wigger that practises Allophilia. <http://www.answers.com/topic/allophilia>

exemplified in *The Blues Brothers* (1980), when Jake and Elmore adopt the persona of R&B Black performers.

Othellophilia can also demonstrate an exploration and renunciation of the myth of the Black male as beast where the White male can reconstitute Blackness according to his historical reading of race. This can be inspired by someone's admiration of Moorish civilisation and cultural enlightenment because the exoticism of the Moors and their contribution to music and culture fascinated Europeans. Jan Carew's essay 'Moorish Culture-Bringers: Bears of Enlightenment' confirms this when he cites Cervantes' aesthetic<sup>98</sup> as influenced by the Moors, and clearly Shakespeare was fascinated by them in 1600, long after they were conquered in 1492.

Moreover, White men are able to fetishise the Black body according to their repressed fears and racial fantasy of what they imagine Black men to be. This can manifest a grotesque doppelganger, or the masquerade can liberate repressed White male admiration of the Black subject, as Lawrence Olivier's acclaimed performance in the John Dexter's 1964 National Theatre production illustrated.<sup>99</sup> Alternatively, there are films where actors play whiteskin Black characters, such as *Lost Boundaries* (1949), *Shadows* (1959), *The Jerk* (1979) and *The Human Stain* (2004). All of these performances open up a space to disavow theatrical minstrelsy and Hollywood's portrayal of 'blacks' as toms, coons, mulattoes, mammies and bucks: this is examined in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* (2000), and Mark Daniels's *Classified X* (1997, France/USA), a documentary on Black representation in Hollywood films. I therefore identify Othellophobia and Othellophilia as a dichotomy feeding off a black phantom archetype in the collective unconscious. The two definitions differ from Frantz Fanon's Negrophobia definition: "This phobia is to be found on an instinctual,

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<sup>98</sup> Op cit, Van Sertima, ed, p273 and pp248-277

<sup>99</sup> Op cit, Wells, Stanley and Neill, Michael, ed, (2006), *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello*, p58



biological level,”<sup>100</sup> primarily because my definition refers to writers, filmmakers and actors who base their characters on fiction rather than actual contact and experience with people of African heritage throughout the diaspora.

Othellophilia can also manifest an erotic charge that is assumed of the sexually unrestrained ‘Negro’ according to fifteenth-century travellers’ tales by Francis Bacon and Andrew Battell, who comment on the sexual nature of ‘blacks’ and the sexual anatomy of Black people. Analysing their reports, Peter Fryer says “Perhaps most piquant of all- though it can’t have done much to allay Englishmen’s sexual anxieties- were reports that male Africans were all equipped with enormous sex organs”.<sup>101</sup> This subject has left a defamatory legacy and derogatory myth for all Black men of African heritage, as Charles Johnson argues in ‘The Phenomenology of the Black Body’. He says that Black males are perceived “as a Negro beast - violent, sex-obsessed, irresponsible, and stupid - still has great currency and acceptance in our culture”.<sup>102</sup>

Consequently, the invariant reiteration of Black men’s sexual anatomy has resulted in the synchronic myth of the ‘savage body’ as a site of phallocentric bestial power. That is to say, the stories about ‘black’ character may vary depending on religion, intelligence, or the work ethic, but the belief that all Black men have monstrous genitals has persisted. Frantz Fanon discussed the subject in relation to sexual repression in 1952,<sup>103</sup> and Shawn Taylor examines White America’s continued fears of and fascination with Black sexuality in terms of the threat it poses to White supremacist power in 2008.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1952/1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, p160

<sup>101</sup> Op cit, Fryer, Peter, (1984), *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, p140

<sup>102</sup> Goldstein, Laurence, ed, (1994), *The Male Body*, University of Michigan Press, USA, p134

<sup>103</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1952/1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, p159

<sup>104</sup> Taylor, Shawn, (2008), *Big Black Penis: Misadventures in Race and Masculinity*, Lawrence Hill Books, USA, p149 and pp149-151

Furthermore, Othellophilia can demonstrate both the anxieties and pleasures of being White and acting Black that is projected onto the Jungian shadow. In narrative film's racist fantasy, the phobia of the Othello archetype is triumphantly conquered in the synchronic 'dash of wills' mytheme: that is, the recurring theme that is identifiable in stories about Blacks' conflict with Whites is the struggle for self-determination, the freedom from Whites' control of Blacks' minds and bodies. In *Othello*, the White male, Iago, subordinates and destroys the perceived 'uncivilised black', Othello.

Othellophilia on the other hand manifests admiration of Othello as an archetype, characterised by his susceptibility, courage, and romantic love, as well as his free and easy trusting nature. These qualities have been extended to other Black characters when authors, directors and actors want to dispel the myth of the Black male as a beast in narrative film. In the synchronic structure of myth-making, the conflict between Black and White men for control and liberation is frequently reversed so that the Black character/s gain their freedom from White supremacist tyranny and overturn the idea of Blacks' inferiority.

Othellophilia in relation to 'Clash of Wills' explores the possibilities of equality between Blacks and Whites, as dramatised in the film *Independence Day* (1996), in which an army Captain played by Will Smith, a scientist played by Jeff Goldblum, and the President of the USA played by Bill Pullman represent Black American Jewish and WASP males respectively. In their struggle for survival against a destructive alien enemy, all three men, and countless others, demonstrate their humanity and equality regardless of race and religious differences. Will Smith as Captain Steven Hiller is unlike Othello in many ways, but what he shares is Othello's capacity to serve his country, lead his men to victory against a common

enemy and show romantic love for his bride-to-be. Othellophilia can also dramatise a White male's rejection of the myth of Blacks as beasts in his psychological and social exploration of racial prejudice where the 'Clash of Wills' synchronic can resolve his desire to explore Black subjectivity as exemplified in *Black Like Me* by John Griffin.<sup>105</sup>

Othellophobia relates to hegemonic White male characters in drama who dread re-enslavement by Islamic/Moors or enslavement by any heathen or 'black'. Moreover, the legacy of Othello as an archetype whose object of desire is a White female is translated in film in Sidney Poitier's characters in *A Patch of Blue* (1965), and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967). White hegemonic authors invent characters that strive to dominate Black males and this often establishes binary opposites: specifically Christian v. Islamic, civilised v. savage, as well as patriarchal v. phallic rivalry.

Alternatively, if a White actor plays a non-white romantic hero and is passing as Black it can demonstrate a social liberation and a psychological catharsis for White men who do not believe that skin colour ought to affect anyone's life. This enables the White male to empathise with diaspora humanity beyond racial divisions, as seen in *Lost Boundaries* (1949), which is a true story about light-skinned Black Americans 'passing' that offers a White character and the actor the opportunity to celebrate racial equalities and human rights. Thus, Othellophilia allows for masquerade, where actors such as Robert Duvall in *A Family Thing* (1996) and Anthony Hopkins in *The Human Stain* (2005) can play Black characters in whiteface and overturn racial stereotypes which dramatise the myth of the 'Savage body' and 'Savage Mind' through the actors' humanity and the humane qualities of the character.

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<sup>105</sup> <http://www.answers.com/John%20Howard%20Griffin> John Howard Griffin (06.16.1920- 09.09.1980) was a White journalist and author who wrote largely in favour of racial equality. He is best known for darkening his skin and journeying through Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia to experience segregation in the Deep South in 1959. He wrote about the experience in his critically acclaimed *Black Like Me*. Accessed 14.12.09.

### 2.3: The synchronic and diachronic myth

In order to test the aforementioned hypotheses, it is useful to employ Lévi-Strauss's theory of diachronic and synchronic mythemes because it demonstrates how countless variations of the same story manifest recurring themes. I am focusing on scriptwriters because I agree with Barthes that myth *is* language that derives from spoken and written word/s as well as dreams that translate into language. The producer, director and production staff constructed the realistic mise-en-scène out of what is scripted through their collective and personal unconscious perception of archetypes. The script acts as the foundation for the mise-en-scène, however, which is why my research is not focused on the director as image maker or auteur, or solely on the actors' portrayals, because they are frequently negotiating the myth of the Black male beast in their discursive reading of the character or archetype they are playing.

Let us begin by considering the assumptions, speculations, theories and erroneous 'facts' that built the core ideas and mythemes about the Black savage body. This deliberation will also enable us to understand what Othello inherited as a character and how he existed in the minds of a seventeenth-century audience.

<b>Savage Body</b>	<b>Savage Mind</b>	<b>Object of Desire</b>	<b>Clash of Wills</b>
Othello's as "an old black ram" (1.1.L88)	Othello's breakdown stems from his loss of faith in White virtue	Othello places his life up on the White female Goddess's virtue	Othello's quest for self-defined Black masculinity is defeated through Iago's abuse of White hegemonic power

The 1990 television version of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Othello*, follows Honingmann's *Othello* (1997/2004) and Wells and Neill's *Othello* (2006), with almost no abridged dialogue. Most of the main and major characters of the drama are introduced in Act One. The three men, Iago, Roderigo, Desdemona's rejected suitor, and Brabantino, her father, all display an awareness of the racial

differences between Othello the Moor and themselves as white, noble and class-conscious Venetians. The exception is Michael Cassio, Othello's lieutenant, who is a Florentine of rank and breeding. Iago, Roderigo and Brabantino all speak against Othello. Iago speaks of him as an animal, "an old Black ram"<sup>106</sup> and at line 111 in A1.S1(I.I), he also calls Othello "a Barbary horse", which suggests Othello is more like a stud than a man, who has taken Desdemona and is sexually using her. When her father, Brabantino, realises that Desdemona is gone, he assumes that she has been abducted by Othello. This leads him to claim that Othello must have used spells/charms to bewitch her.

Roderigo has no words of praise for Othello, either; his speech under the balcony of Brabantino's house (I.I.I.125) expresses his thoughts and mind clearly: Desdemona is in "...the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor-".<sup>107</sup> All three men are familiar with myths about Moors, which they project onto Othello. In *Racism*, Miles and Brown examine the subject of Islam as a threat to European Christianity and they discern:

Europeans created a discourse of an imagined Other at the edge of European civilisation, but they created a discourse of a real Other represented as a result of conflicting material and political interests with a population which came to mark the boundary of Europe, spatially and in consciousness.<sup>108</sup>

Miles and Brown further state that Islam and Muhammad as an Antichrist threatened Christianity: the Islamic world was seen as anti-Europe. "The 'enemy' of Christendom was represented not only as Muslim, 'heretic' or 'infidel' but also as 'Arab', 'Moor', 'Turk', 'Saracen' and 'foreigner'".<sup>109</sup> In *Othello*, Brabantino ignores

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<sup>106</sup> Op cit, Neill, Michael, (2006), *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello*, p203, A1.S1.line.88

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p205

<sup>108</sup> Miles, Robert, and Brown, Malcolm, (2003), Second Edition, *Racism*, Routledge, UK, p27

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p29

Othello's conversion to Christianity and speaks about him as someone unchanged from his original state of existence, namely a Black Islamic male who cannot transcend into an honourable White man civilised through Christian conversion. Iago, Roderigo and Brabantino prefer to consider Othello as monolithic, that is to say, uniform with all 'blacks' and slow to change. Roderigo and Brabantino do not see Othello's humanity; their idea of inferior Blacks and the Islamic enemy dominate them because that is what Othello represents to them. Miles and Brown define this perception according to its historical time.

The European image of Islam and Muslims achieved a significant degree of coherence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although a number of key themes which recur through the centuries were evident much earlier. (Daniel 1960, 275 1975: 31-9). The Muslim Other was portrayed as barbaric, degenerate, and tyrannical, characteristics that were thought to be rooted in the character of Islam as a supposedly false and heretical theology. [...] Thus Islam was portrayed as founded on aggression and war, as spreading itself by the same means, and permitting and encouraging polygamy, sodomy and general sexual laxity.<sup>110</sup>

Many of these views continued into the seventeenth century according to Virginia Mason Vaughan's rigorous contextual study of English and Venetian culture,<sup>111</sup> and this concurs with Michael Neill's overview of prejudiced racial beliefs in Jacobean England. Neill's study of the racist critical reading of the play from the seventeenth to twentieth century links the Black body and mind, as well as the religious ideology of Moors, as thematic discourse on White normality and Black corruption.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, Miles and Brown and Neill's arguments are all confirmed by scholars of Islamic studies on the Holy Crusades of Christian v. Muslim supremacy in *After Rome: Holy War and Conquest*.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, p27

<sup>111</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, Virginia, *Othello: A Contextual Historical*, pp64-65

<sup>112</sup> Op cit, Neill, Michael, (2006), *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello*, p120-121

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00g222s#broadcasts> Accessed 12.12. 2008

The Miles and Brown quotation overleaf on Christian v. Muslim civilisation resonates with Lévi-Strauss when he says: “the true constituent units of myth are not the isolated relations but bundles of such relations, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning”.<sup>114</sup> The retelling of preferred speculation rather than fact compounds myths as facts, and Shakespeare employs this in a dialectical manner, i.e., Iago, Roderigo and Brabantino espouse their racially prejudiced ideas. Desdemona, Cassio, the Duke and Othello’s men-in-arms speak warmly of Othello. Audiences in different historical eras have been free to contrast the racially prejudiced thesis and the humanist antithesis into a synthesis that tests their own beliefs about Islam, Blacks and Moors with factual evidence about Islamic culture and society from the medieval period until today

In all these eras, we can discern religious intolerance and racial bigotry that substitute myth for facts, as Miles and Brown explain in *Racism*. They show that intolerance and persecution were espoused from the highest levels of society, and quote Pope Urban II’s dismay about Muslims in Jerusalem<sup>115</sup> and his call for a Western Christian crusade against Muslims. In *After Rome: Holy War and Conquest*, various scholars stress the importance of what the Crusades have meant to Arabs throughout the ages and up to the present. According to the historian Professor Jonathan Phillips, Crusaders offered lifetime absolution to all White Christian sinners, and the legacy of annihilation they imposed on Muslims, according to Professor Teaf El-Azhari, has affected the Muslim psyche up to the present day.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Op cit, Miles, Robert, and Brown, Malcolm, (2003), Second Edition, *Racism*, p211

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p29 “[...] You should be especially aroused by the fact that the Holy Sepulchre of the Lord our Saviour is in the hands of these unclean people, who shamelessly mistreat and sacrilegiously defile the Holy Places with their filth.” (Cited in Williams 1990:35; added emphasis).

<sup>116</sup> [http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=nmKojp9gtNs&feature=channel\\_page](http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=nmKojp9gtNs&feature=channel_page)

In the 1600s, the former Islamic Moor, Othello, represented a suspicious figure in the minds of irrational European Christian masculinity. Iago, Roderigo and Brabantino refuse to see Othello any other way. I believe racial bigotry profoundly underlines how Othello is read as 'Other' in regard to skin colour, religious suspicion, and his sexual character as a stereotype for racist Western audiences and critics. I therefore posit that the confluence of Western speculation concerning Islamic, African and Black people establishes and circulates spoken and written myth about the 'nature' and character of the racial 'Other'. Thus, racial fantasy culminates in relation to Winthrop Jordan's historical research,<sup>117</sup> Frantz Fanon's psychiatric studies<sup>118</sup> and Carl Jung's psychological exposition on archetypes in the collective and personal unconscious,<sup>119</sup> where universal symbols of evil and forgotten memories of personal trauma form basic ideas.

Outside of Shakespeare's *Othello*, the audience are familiar with racist myths and having them restated in various ways by Iago, Roderigo and Brabantino positions mythemes about the savage body of Blacks who will allegedly defile and corrupt White womanhood and White society. Throughout act one these three men frequently refer to "the Moor" rather than Othello as a man. They speak about him as an animal and his seduction of Desdemona that will produce inhuman offspring. Iago warns Brabantino (I.I.III-II5) that having his daughter covered by a Barbary horse will result in relatives that will neigh at him. Their taunts are rooted in what they believe rather than what they factually know about Othello, North Africans, Arabs or Islam. They do not cite their claims in reference to the Iberian conquests and history, they just speak

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<sup>117</sup> Op cit, Jordan, Winthrop D. (1968) *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro*, p151 and chapter 9 'Fruits of Passion: The dynamic of interracial sex'

<sup>118</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1952/1986), *Black Skin White Masks*, p157, p188 and 'The Negro and Psychopathology' pp141-209

<sup>119</sup> Op cit, Jung, Carl, G., (1968), second edition, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p42



*their* minds. Utterances of this kind build a language of myth about 'blacks' and their corporeality. Barthes' theories of language as myth are demonstrated through the characters use of language, and the audiences' familiarity with myths about 'blacks' alleged dirty bodies.<sup>120</sup> The characters' words have no meaning if the audience are unfamiliar with the connotations of the 'savage' body and mind.

In *White over Black*, Jordan explains Britain's first contact with people from North and West Africa. A good deal of his research concerns the perceptions of the Elizabethans. He examines several important subjects, such as the meaning of Black exteriority and interiority, Blacks' 'defective religion', and the 'savage' perception of Blacks' minds and bodies. As a fictional character, Othello inherits these perceptions. Jordan addresses why the audience are asked to read *Othello* on the basis of their shared ideological and psychological perception of Blacks. Furthermore, Jordan's subjects highlight the way actors from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century played Othello, based on cultural assumptions<sup>121</sup> documented in books of that era, such as *History and Definition of Africa* by Leo Africanus in 1526/1600.<sup>122</sup> According to Jordan:

Long before first English contact with West Africa, the inhabitants of virtually the entire continent stood confirmed in European literature as lustful and venerous. About 1526 Leo Africanus (a Spanish Moroccan Moor converted to Christianity) supplied the most authoritative and influential description of the little-known lands of "Barbary" "Libya," "Numedia," and "Land of Negroes"; and Leo was as explicit as he was imaginative. In the English translation (ca 1600) readers were informed concerning the "Negroes" that there is no Nation under the Heaven more prone to Venery.<sup>123</sup>

Jordan identifies core issues. First, skin colour, about which Europeans always spoke. He says that during Shakespeare's era, Blackness was associated

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<sup>120</sup> Goldenberg, David, M. (2003), *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton University Press, USA, p2

<sup>121</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, (2005), *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800*, p95

<sup>122</sup> Op Cit, Jordan, Winthrop D. (1968), *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro*, p33

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p33

with Africa and “Moors, including Othello, were commonly portrayed as pitch black and the terms of Moor and Negro were used interchangeably”.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, Jordan evidences that many Europeans imagined the skin colour of Africans to be a form of environmentalism (the African sun), the Curse of Ham myth that is told in the Bible (Gen 9:18-25, RSV):

The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled. Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers".<sup>125</sup>

Jordan goes on to explain that religious thought, voyages of discovery, the social ambitions of a new rising class, racial speculation in the 1600s, curiosity as to why Africans were Black, and a shift towards self-conscious restraint characterised the Protestant Reformation in England in the time between Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell.<sup>126</sup> Jordan also studied the writings of the Elizabethan traveller George Best who journeyed with Frobisher in search of the Northwest Passage. When Best investigated the origin of Negroes, he settled on the Hamite Curse and the disobedience of Noah's son Cham, who refused to abstain from sexual intercourse. Best believed that the original man and woman were created White by God but Noah's

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, p5 Jordan cites this from Warner Grenelle Rice's *Turks, Moors, and Persians in English Literature from 1550-1600*. PhD 1926.

<sup>125</sup> Goldenberg, David, M. (2003), *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Princeton University Press, USA, p1

<sup>126</sup> Op cit, Jordan, Winthrop D. (1968), *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro*, p40

curse in the Ark brought forth a black and loathsome race descended from Noah's grandson after the flood.<sup>127</sup>

The relevance of the Hamite curse is directly related to widely held beliefs about race between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, contextualised by Fryer in relation to Britain in *Staying Power* and Jordan in regard to America in *White over Black*. If audiences believed that people with dark or Black skin were the black and loathsome offspring of a sexually deviant, morally questionable son fallen from grace, Othello is damned. He is damned in several ways: by his skin colour, by his alleged savagery, and by being distrusted as a Christian convert and feared as a seducer of White women who will upset the balance of White hegemonic patriarchal power.

At a deeper level of consciousness, Othello's Black sexual mystique proves fascinating and desirable to Desdemona and their procreative relations and the miscegenation underlying their marriage potentially re-positions the former conquest of the Iberian peninsula by the Moors. The Venetians never mention the conquests of the Moors in Spain but their fear of being overrun by the Ottoman Turks demonstrates their anxiety to retain their nations as Christian and White.

Jordan makes the distinction between English Protestants and European Catholics but he makes it clear that Europe was unified in its Christian faith and ideology.

[...] Because Englishmen were Christians, heathenism in Negroes was a fundamental defect, which set them distinctly apart. However much Englishmen disapproved of Popery and Mahometanism, they were unaccustomed to these perversions. Yet they were not accustomed to dealing face to face with people who appeared, so far as many travellers could tell, to have no religion at all.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, p41

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p23

Additionally, the 'savage behaviour' of Africans was widely discussed. Jordan and Peter Fryer cite numerous sources.<sup>129</sup> The difference between English/European and African civilisation was marked by clothing, living conditions, work ethic, modes of agricultural production, warfare, government, community relations, language, and manner and morals. The primary division between the two continents and their traditions is that England and Europe preferred to judge Africa and its people by European standards and they negated the indigenous culture they encountered and disqualified their way of life as illegitimate and inferior to their own.

Jordan further discusses some of the notions about apes and Africans and he pinpoints the ways in which the Black body was perceived as not fully human: the basis for this is Edward Topsell's *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* (1607), built on the work of the Swiss naturalist Konrad von Gesner (1516-65). I believe Topsell has worked to establish the myth of the Black male beast in fiction and cultural ideology. Topsell used the physical features of the orang-outang and translated them into an explanation of the facial feature of Africans. Furthermore, he translated the physicality of "apes", including their behaviour, into the body of Black men, employing a speculative and inaccurate classification of the behaviour and nature of Africans. Ideas of this kind have left a dehumanising legacy to the Black male in cultural theory from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Ronald Jackson also observes that the notion of the Black male as someone not fully human is reiterated in varying narrative forms in everyday speech, literature, film and global IT and print media.<sup>130</sup>

The sources cited in Jordan build a diachronic myth concerning the uncivilised 'black' that, according to Jordan, was widely discussed and printed in books such as King

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<sup>129</sup> Op cit, Fryer, Peter, (1984), *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, p136 and chapter 7 'The Rise of English Racism', pp133-190

<sup>130</sup> Op cit, Jackson II, Ronald, L., (2006), *Scripting the Black masculine body : identity, discourse, and racial politics in popular media*, pp14-15

James's *Daemonology* (1597), Edward Topsell's *Historie of Faure-Footed Beasts* (1607), and Richard Jobson's *The Golden Trade* (1623). At the synchronic core of these narratives is the relenting mytheme of the inferiority of Africans, and the bestial nature and sexual instincts of Black men.<sup>131</sup> Because of Topsell's linking of apes, satyrs, the devil and sexual sin, an idea was forged in both senses of the word about Blacks as inhuman. "For hundreds of years White men had written and spoken about how the black man was 'hung like an ape,' about how he fucked like an animal. The big black prick pervaded the white man's nightmare".<sup>132</sup>

These ideas are not abstract: *Othello* presents an audience with a narrative that draws on the diachronic and synchronic myth of the savage body filtered across their acquaintance with myth and their unfamiliarity with truth and facts about Black people and Moors specifically. The idea of the savage body is made all the more cogent when Jordan says:

Far more common and persistent was the notion that there sometimes occurred "a beastly copulation or conjuncture" between apes and Negroes, and especially that apes were inclined wantonly to attack Negro women. The very explicit idea that apes assaulted female human beings was not new; Negroes were merely being asked to demonstrate what Europeans had known for centuries.<sup>133</sup>

Ideas of this kind not only exacerbate the myth of the savage nature of Africans, they also impose a false biological and cultural reading of the humanity of men. Othello is subjected to these irrational and erroneous facts throughout Act One as he is accused by Brabantino (I.3.L62-81 and I.3.L95-107); and Iago (I.3.L342-357).

In Jordan's sub-chapter 'The Libidinous Men', the link between the 'savage' idea of Blacks, the belief that apes and Africans mated, and reading the sexual

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<sup>131</sup> Op cit, Jordan, Winthrop D. (1968), *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro*, p30

<sup>132</sup> Wallace, Michele, (1990), *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Verso, USA, p71

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p31

anatomy of Blacks as bestial fixed Othello as an inhuman being. Moreover, the belief that the corporeal Black body could be understood by its relation to apes also fixed the African as the Other to the White male; the Black male was rendered subhuman in the Elizabethan age, prior to Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. Richard Jobson reported that Mandingo men were "furnisht with such members as are after a sort burthensome unto them."<sup>134</sup> David Friedman's detailed study of the changing historical, religious and ideological response of White men to the subject of the sexual anatomy of 'blacks' unequivocally demonstrates Black sexuality as a constant source of anxiety for White men, and Friedman's research includes biological science, anthropology and behavioural studies.<sup>135</sup> Paul Hoch also concurs that the subject of darker-skinned men and black sexual anatomy was profoundly studied,<sup>136</sup> and Robert Staples considers the myth of Black sexuality as a Christian puritanical judgement.<sup>137</sup>

Let us return to the play *Othello* and the ways in which the myth of the Black male beast is compounded by widely-held beliefs based on the Bible, written documents, common gossip, and socio-political Christian ambitions of European expansionists.

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p34

<sup>135</sup> Op cit, Friedman, David, (2002), *A Mind of its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, p82 and pp80-114

<sup>136</sup> Op cit, Hoch, Paul, (1979), *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity*, p52 and pp43-64

<sup>137</sup> Staples, Robert, (1982), *Black Masculinity*, Black Scholars Press, USA, p75 and pp75-86

Both Jordan and Hoch cite *Othello*<sup>138</sup> as a key text that exemplifies the social and cultural concerns of the seventeenth-century audience regarding race, Othello's self-perception as Other, and Iago's irrational racist fantasy that Othello's unrestrained lust must have made a cuckold of him. Iago is not sure that Othello has had sexual relations with Emilia, but he projects dreadful thoughts onto Othello:

[...] I hate the Moor. And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets He has done my office, I know not if 't be true. But I form ere suspicion in that kind will do as if for surety. He holds me well, The better shall my purpose work on him. Cassio's a proper man: let me see now, to get his place, and to plume up my will in double knavery. How? How? Let's see: After some time to abuse Othello's ear that he is too familiar with his wife. He hath a person and a smooth dispose. To be suspected, frame to make women false. The Moor if of a free and open nature that thinks men honest that but seem to be so, And will as tenderly be led by th' nose as asses are. I have't it is engendered! Hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light. (1.3.L385-403)<sup>139</sup>

Iago's direct address to the audience takes place at the end of Act One and it dispels the idea that Iago's psychological assault against Othello is motiveless or that Iago has no understanding of Othello's humanity. He has heard Othello defend himself against accusations made by Desdemona's father that Othello used 'black magic' to beguile his daughter (1.2.L115-170), and he has worked alongside Othello. In his speech he acknowledges Othello's humanity but irrationally prefers to believe the worst of Othello; Iago represents the profound insecurity of contemporary European masculinity. Iago has been passed over for promotion as lieutenant, but he acknowledges the procedure of service in rank: "Preferment goes by letter and affection and not by the old gradation where each second stood heir to th' first" (1.1.L35-37). Thus, Iago shows us his logical thinking and illogical reasoning.

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<sup>138</sup> Op cit, Hoch, Paul, (1979), *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity*, p48

<sup>139</sup> Op cit, Honingham, E.A.J. (1997/2004), *Shakespeare Othello: The Arden Critical edition*, pp160-161

In the 1990 RSC production of *Othello*, what is positioned seamlessly in the diegesis of Act One is that Othello is the exotic Other at best, or the lascivious Black male incarnate who has taken a White woman from her countrymen for sexual conquest. As such, he is a constant reminder of the widely-held myths concerning the Black male as a beast, whose 'savage body' could destroy European civilisation, first by the ferocity of his strength, and second by his sexual corruption of the White female. Moreover, he might revert to the 'defective religion' he practised before Christian enlightenment redeemed him from heathenism and 'black magic'.

Shakespeare defies the myth of savagery by painting Othello as romantic, brave, loyal to the European Christian state and its rulers, but because Othello is not White, he cannot dispel the myth of the 'savage' in the conscious minds of his contemporaries. Nor can the characters disavow the legacy of the savage from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century when the slave trade served to fix the Negro as inferior and savage. Stuart Hall used Anne McClintock's detailed research in *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*, showing how psychological racism in the colonial era was established through propaganda as an alternative to actual contact with Africans and Indians. The non-White Other was commoditised in the minds of the British public by images of Africans and Indians on everyday household products such as Pears soap and Huntley & Palmer's biscuits, which fixed the idea of Black servitude and domesticity in the minds of the British public.<sup>140</sup> *Othello* came into a world of pre-existing racial speculation in the 1600s which became a racist ideology by the 1800s.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Op cit, Hall, Stuart, (1997), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, pp241-242

<sup>141</sup> Op cit, Neill, Michael, (2006), *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello*, p44



Considering the aforementioned points, we can see that in spite of Othello's valiant character, he cannot escape the spoken and written language that defines a savage myth from the Jacobean to Edwardian era. The assertion of Blacks' inferiority and servitude was translated from the 'Curse of Ham' in the Bible, and in pseudo-scientific texts, such as Edward Long's (1774) *History of Jamaica*.<sup>142</sup> Peter Fryer calls Long "[...] one of the first pseudo-scientific racists – with a defence of Black slavery that comes across a good deal more plausibly than any previous statement of the slave-owner's case".<sup>143</sup> Long also used class stratification to identify White women of a lower order who he asserted were attracted to 'blacks' for sexual gratification, which would lead to a defilement of White English purity.<sup>144</sup> Today, far Right and extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and covert White supremacists constitute what Patricia Hill Collins calls the "new racism" and they still import and reiterate myth about Blacks' inferiority. The difference with new racism is that it takes place institutionally, particularly through government agencies that have overturned civil rights victories of racial equality in education, employment and housing.<sup>145</sup>

This new racism reflects the juxtaposition of old and new, in some cases a continuation of long-standing practices of racial rule and, in other cases, the development of something original. [...] Each racial formation reflects distinctive links among characteristic forms of economic and political exploitation, gender-specific ideologies developed to justify Black exploitation, and African American men's and women's reactions both to the political economy and to one another.<sup>146</sup>

Although the above political concerns may appear to have nothing to do with the play *Othello* they do relate to audiences' attitudes about racial dominance and power in America today. Moreover, the new racism indicates the conscious perception

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<sup>142</sup> Op cit, Fryer, Peter, (1984), *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*, p158-159

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p159

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, p157

<sup>145</sup> Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004), *Black Sexual Politics*, Routledge, USA, p78

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, p79

of Black masculinity, rather than masculinities, interracial sexual relations, inculcated racism across historical time and why the 1995 film poster of Lawrence Fishburne and Irene Jacob in a passionate embrace could still provoke racist condemnation, seen in the words written across Jacob's White face (Figure 3). In the early twentieth century, White supremacists were faceless, cloaked in the Ku Klux Klan garb. Today, they often mask their bigotry in 'respectable' and presentable images of the Ivy League, White power and authority, and exchange the KKK's terrorist iconic presence for a 'respectable' business suit masking the chauvinism that dismantles human rights which concerns Patricia Hill Collins Black sexuality discourse.<sup>147</sup>



Fig.3

Several important historical facts must be linked together to show how the myth of the Black male as a beast was and still is perpetuated. First, we have what Peter Fryer calls 'the demonology of race'<sup>148</sup>. He explains how Africa became a source of monstrous incarnation. Here black subjects (people and *things*) were

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, pp84-85

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p137 and pp133-190

conflated in the English psyche as Godless beast-like men and man-like beasts. Second, we have the enslavement and transportation of people out of Africa.<sup>149</sup> Third, racist ideology rejects intellectual equality between Whites and Black people,<sup>150</sup> which compounds the spoken and written myth that Blacks are inferior in every way to Whites. Fourth, the *Plessy v. Ferguson* 1896 Supreme Court ruling legalised discriminatory laws against African-Americans on the separate but equal principle through the Jim Crow laws. Because of these social transformations, *Othello* was judged by European and American standards of racial ideology from 1601 to 1930,<sup>151</sup> when Paul Robeson as the first Negro in the twentieth century compelled critics to consider how a Black man infused drama with a humanist ideology.

If the aforementioned issues are organised into Lévi-Strauss's diachronic and synchronic mythemes, we can discern how the identity of Othello is informed by the worldview of its time.

Savage Body*	Savage Mind*	Object of Desire*	Clash of Wills*
Othello's 'black' body is read as a "Barbary horse"	Othello's mind is weak and naïve.	Desdemona as "monumental alabaster" (5.2.5) A figure more <b>than</b> woman- a Goddess he worships and destroys	Othello's indignant retribution v. Iago's irrational attack

This shows that we can divide the identity of Othello into four thematic elements that define Black masculinity synchronically\*. The many stories about Black men often include the same narrative structure about Blacks' character and their aims.

<sup>149</sup> Blassingame, John. W. (1979), *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, Oxford University Press, USA, p7 and pp 3-48

<sup>150</sup> Michael Banton's 'The Idiom of Race' p52 and pp51-63 in Black, Les, & Solomos, John, eds. (2000), *Theories of Race and Racism, A Reader*, Routledge, UK

<sup>151</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, Virginia, *Othello: A Contextual Historical*, p70

#### 2.4: How mythemes of the black male beast function in narrative drama

Reading Othello's character with the **headings\*** above demonstrates how the myth Black male beast functions in narrative drama. The 'Curse of Ham' myth that underpins the 'savage body' mytheme also provides an explanation for Black skin and the entrenched history of those ideas translates the myth of the Black body as undesirable, to be feared, and less than human. Othello was presented in a world where the pre-existing myth defined his body as bestial, and some post-classical authors use the myth as caricature.

In Act Three, when Iago has succeeded in psychologically manipulating Othello, it can be argued that he loses his reason because his jealousy overwhelms his good sense. What profoundly marks Othello's breakdown, however, is his loss of faith in White Christian virtue: on the one hand the heroism and loyalty of Cassio and on the other hand the truth and fidelity he idealised in Desdemona. The myth of a savage mind is not only the assertion that people without writing are less sophisticated than are Europeans; it also indicates how little European thinkers valued the culture of Africans and how it validated their history and society.<sup>152</sup> This trait is continually reiterated in modern drama; for example, in *The Emperor Jones*, Eugene O'Neill constructs a story about a man who descends into moral and spiritual destruction, but O'Neill does not examine philosophical and cultural reclamation of racial solidarity by African-Americans; instead, the play fulfils the myth of a Black male beast.

Dramas about Black men do not simply retell the story of *Othello*; the synchronic headings I have established are evident in the formation of feature length films in 1915, and they are reiterated in post-classical cinema. Manthia Diawara argues:

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<sup>152</sup> Op cit, Levi-Strauss, Claude, (1978), *Myth and Meaning*, p13

The release of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915 defined for the first time the side that Hollywood was to take in the war to represent Black people in America. In *The Birth of a Nation*, D.W. Griffith, later a founding member of United Artists, created and fixed an image of Blackness that was necessary for racist America's fight against Black people. *The Birth of a Nation* constitutes the grammar book for Hollywood's representation of Black manhood and womanhood, its obsession with miscegenation and its fixing of Black people within certain spaces such as kitchens, and into certain supporting roles, such as criminals, on the screen.<sup>153</sup>

Diawara makes an important point because numerous film critics read *The Birth of a Nation* as a template that fixes an ideological and iconic portrait of Black subjectivity. James Snead says the film employs gross differences concerning the representation of race mainly through the eighteenth-century vaudevillian theatricality of blackface and mime.<sup>154</sup> Mark Reid summarised the film as depicting "black men as brutal primitives driven by an innate desire for violence and for sex with White women".<sup>155</sup> Stuart Hall<sup>156</sup> and Donald Bogle<sup>157</sup> also discuss how the film over-determines racial identity. More recently, Benshoff and Griffin have argued that the film stereotyped Black people as lazy, obtuse and rapacious, and served to recruit White people into the KKK, chiefly because the new feature film was "[...] perceived by some as documentary truth and not manipulating Hollywood fiction".<sup>158</sup> Furthermore, "[...] it uses Hollywood form and style to whip up audience sympathy- and prejudice".<sup>159</sup>

The feature film opened up a space for the invariant myth of the Black male as a beast through naturalising the image of the inferiority of 'blacks'. My four synchronic headings suggest the ways a writer can 'forge' – that is to say,

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<sup>153</sup> Op cit, Diawara, Manthia, ed, (1993), *Black American Cinema*, p3

<sup>154</sup> Op cit, Snead, James, (1994), *White Screens Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, p45

<sup>155</sup> Op cit, Reid, Mark A. (1993), *Redefining Black Film*, p78

<sup>156</sup> Op cit, Hall, Stuart, (1997), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, p251

<sup>157</sup> Op cit, Bogle, Donald, (1994), *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Black in American Films*, p13

<sup>158</sup> Benshoff, Harry M. and Griffin, Sean, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, (2004), Blackwell, UK, p77

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, p77

invent and falsify – the Black male as someone who is inferior because he is written that way, typecast and then stereotyped through performance. The writer can vary the stories from the slave era and life in the African jungle – as he imagines it if he has never visited the interior of Africa – and build his racist fantasy on what already exists in the literature. For example, in the synchronic map below, the headings exemplify how scriptwriters fulfil the mythemes that perpetuate the myth. Writers determine the characters in all these films and novels. They recreate primordial Black male figures and rely on speculation and conjecture to naturalise myths about ‘blacks’ in the examples below.

<b>Savage Body</b>	<b>Savage Mind</b>	<b>Object of Desire</b>	<b>Clash of Wills</b>
The black brute Beast-like man  <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> , 1915	Pathological  <i>Training Day</i> , 2001	‘The White female Goddess’  <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> , 1915 <i>Patch of Blue</i> , 1965 <i>Far From Heaven</i> , 2002	Civilisation v. Savagery  Black beast figure defeated by heroic White men  <i>Robinson Crusoe</i> , 1719 <i>King Solomon's Mines</i> , 1885 <i>Heart of Darkness</i> , 1902 <i>Tarzan of the Apes</i> 1914
Man-like beast  Macro-phallic and strong  <i>Emperor Jones</i> , 1933	Obtuse and infantilised  <i>A Soldier's Story</i> , 1984	‘White female Goddess’ as revenge against the White patriarchal male  <i>Sweetback's Song</i> , 1971	‘Black beast’ figure battles with White male ‘heroic’ figure who dominates ‘the beast’  Result: failure to transcend into a self-determined man <i>Mandingo</i> , 1975
Attractive Black phallic body  <i>Blade Trilogy</i> , 1998-2003	Enigma: supernatural  <i>The Green Mile</i> , 1999	Liberated White female and sexually willing partner  <i>Jungle Fever</i> , 1991	White male strives to tame and control Black male but the Black male defeats him and triumphs over hegemonic masculinity <i>Deep Cover</i> , 1992 <i>Collateral</i> , 2004
Abject and inhuman black body  <i>Predator</i> , 1987	Irrational and immoral  <i>Black Caesar</i> , 1973	White male as romantic hero <i>Brother to Brother</i> , 2004 <i>Six Feet Under</i> , 2001-2005	Hegemonic masculinity overturned by humanist Black manhood <i>Jerry Maguire</i> , 1996 <i>Ali</i> , 2000

Ronald L. Jackson does not refer to Lévi-Strauss's diachronic and synchronic mythemes. He analyses how White supremacist ideology dehumanises the Blacks

through preferred readings that demonise the Black body before the White gaze. Jackson argues that racist narrative fiction from the seventeenth century onwards and mimetic parody in blackface minstrelsy continually reiterate the inferiority of Blacks.<sup>160</sup> He states that the demonology of the Black body through monstrous stereotyping of exaggerated black features is a key form of White supremacist ideology. Such practice keeps the Black body captive and puts it on display. This happens when Blacks are bought and sold, and when Blacks become worthless, therefore they are lynched and castrated and publicly strung up for the White gaze.

Through minstrelsy, Jackson identifies nineteen stereotypes that include the African savage, the happy slave, the devoted servant, the social delinquent, the sexual superman, and the mental inferior.<sup>161</sup> In my mapping of diachronic and synchronic stories and characters, each of the subjects that determine the character and fate of the Black male ties into Jackson's explanation of White supremacist ideological construction of the 'Nigger' archetype in popular fiction. This black phantom is a conflation of irrational thinking and inhuman treatment, according to Joel Kovel, who explains it in terms of the dehumanisation of Black people, namely, White supremacists taking away everything that constituted Africans' physical, cultural and spiritual life whereby their existence was controlled and reinvented by White racism.<sup>162</sup>

These mappings may appear to be arbitrary, but they are linked by the structural system of White racist control of Black subjectivity in popular fiction. What makes the diachronic and synchronic mapping paradoxical is the way inculcated racism reiterates similar myths of Blacks' savage 'nature' and their life or how it

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<sup>160</sup> Op cit, Jackson Ronald L. (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body : identity, discourse, and racial politics in popular media*, p12

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p24

<sup>162</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, (1984), *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, p36

rejects them and presents alternative perspectives and insights about Black masculinities in America today.

Before Shakespeare wrote *Othello* he was conscious of people from Africa and of men classified as Moors. Honigmann notes that Shakespeare knew the British Ambassador who liaised with the Moorish Ambassador to the King of Barbary when he visited England in 1600 to meet Queen Elizabeth I. The six-month stay at a Moorish embassy in London generated considerable topical discussion and gossip.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, the source material for *Othello*, *Un Capitano Moro* by Cinthio in 1565, gave Shakespeare the opportunity to research the Moors more rigorously and redress his previous portrayals of Moors, namely Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* in 1593 and the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* in 1596, before *Othello* debuted in 1604.

Adam Lively's (1999) *Mask: Blackness, Race and the Imagination* studies the shifting concepts of race and explains the significance in the Abolitionist era from the eighteenth century onward with respect to the 'noble savage' and the ways in which he is perceived by sentimental imagination in literature and poetry.<sup>164</sup> Lively goes on to unpack the perception and the construction of the 'noble savage' in the White imagination. What stands out in Lively's examination is that myth is built on archetype: he particularly refers to Jung's explanation of the collective unconscious and archetype as good and evil; specifically, God as good, God as light and God as creator of life, and conversely Satan as evil, black and corrupting, and his followers as dirty, sexually abnormal and sinful.

These archetypes establish a foundation in the unconscious concerning the fall from grace and the expulsion of men and women for sexual sin, and they occupy the

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<sup>163</sup> Op cit, Honigmann, E.A.J, (2004) *The Arden Shakespeare Othello*, p2. The portrait *The Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth*, 1600-1: English school, early seventeenth century, is part of the University of Birmingham Collection.

<sup>164</sup> Lively, Adam, (1999) *Mask: Blackness, Race and the Imagination*, Vintage, UK, p55



imagination. Othello conforms to the synchronic myth if we choose to read him as such. He represents an archetype, if we accept the criterion by which this is judged, namely a primordial archetype in the human unconscious, according to Jung.<sup>165</sup> If we do not read Africans as primordial, beasts or Satanic figures, as I believe Shakespeare resisted, how does Othello adhere to the myth of the Black male beast? I believe the answer to this question lies primarily in the *personal unconscious* of Shakespeare as author, and the public's reception of the play over a 400-year period.

In 2004 the *South Bank Show* featured the history of *Othello*, and cultural critics, directors, actors and psychologists<sup>166</sup> stated that over a 350-year period the production of *Othello* has depended on good actors. A great deal of credit has gone to various actors in the role of Iago because it is the bigger role and the character often overshadows the actor playing Othello. They all agree that Paul Robeson's portrayal marked the modern transformation of the character in *Othello* because Robeson was the first Black man to play Othello in the twentieth century and he brought a real Black identity and experience to the play that the drama previously lacked. His intimate scenes with Peggy Ashcroft in the 1930 London production caused such a shock because Robeson was a Black man and therefore kissing a White woman was still considered to be shocking.

In that *South Bank Show*, Jonathan Miller stated that the play does not need racial conflict to make it work.<sup>167</sup> It would be the same play if Othello were White. That statement is extraordinarily obtuse and unconvincing. The subject of interracial desire and Black masculinity is what sets *Othello* apart from other plays, particularly because it

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<sup>165</sup> Op cit, Jung, Carl, G., (1968), *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p3-4

<sup>166</sup> <http://www.imdb.com/title/t0705828/>

<sup>167</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/howard-jacobson/just-like-othello-and-david-beckham-we-see-only-the-best-in-ourselves-565068.html>

challenges racial ideology, and in countless productions directors and actors have compelled the audience to question their racial views.

One of the central strategies that have worked to dispel the myth of the Black male beast in *Othello* is the use of language, gesture, costume and setting. The 1952 Orson Welles film and most productions included the 1981 BBC production with White actor, Anthony Hopkins in the in blackface, uses the mise-en-scène to dispel any notion of a savage past or desire to return to the desert or jungle.

Othello is never dressed as a half-naked savage. His costumes include military uniform, as worn by Sir Willard White in the RSC 1990 production, Anthony Hopkins's opulent Elizabethan costumes in the 1981 BBC production and Eamonn Walker's baroque grandeur in the Globe Theatre production in 2007 (Fig.#4, 5 and 6). The mise-en-scène also provides grand settings in palatial interiors and exotic exteriors that establish Othello's accepted authority and paradoxically his 'Otherness'. The centrality of the drama's characterisation rests on Othello's speeches and deportment, none of which denotes savagery.

This is the vital difference between Othello in blackface by White actors and blackface minstrelsy in American vaudeville and Othello in Hollywood cinema. Othello is not performed as a minstrel: he is a man who possesses interior psychological and exterior physical conflicts. His speech in 1.3.L115-170 tells the royal court of his courtship with Desdemona and disproves his use of black magic or drugs to seduce her. Moreover, in his speech in 2.1.L180, when he returns to Desdemona from battle having conquered the Turks, he says, "It gives me wonder great as my content to see you here before me! O my soul's joy..." By the end of the speech (2.1.L190) the other characters and the audience are left in no doubt about his love for Desdemona or his heroism in the service of the State. He is not a

figure of savagery because he is not written that way, played that way or dressed in a manner that suggests he is an inferior man-like beast. In the 2007 Globe production with Eamonn Walker as Othello, we can see by the audience's facial expressions that his words of love to Desdemona, (see Figure 4). He does not provoke racial anxiety when he expresses love and kisses her (Figure 5).

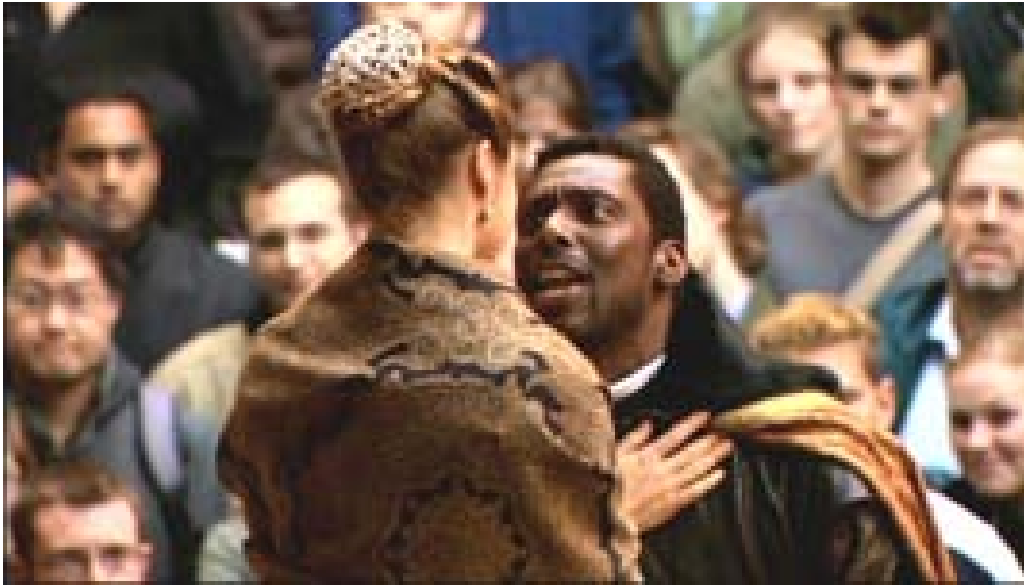


Fig.4



Fig.5

In the open-air Globe production, because the play is performed in front of a crowd on a thrust stage, the audience can always be seen (Figure 6 overleaf), and a clear indication of their response to the action and performance is provided. (Figure 7 overleaf).



Fig.6



Fig.7

The cause-effect structure of the narrative also allows the audience to identify with Othello because he is the character who is wronged. He knows he has not deceived or tricked Desdemona; he won her heart and this is the point that Othello/Anthony Hopkins makes in (A3.S3L193) to Iago in Figure 8.



Fig.8

The story has the structure of a suspense thriller. Iago plots to do Othello wrong, for irrational motives, and unknown to Othello and Desdemona, Iago deliberately manipulates them and other characters to carry out his plan. The audience is moved by Othello's predicament, so it is not difficult to empathise or identify with him. The audience's heart goes out to Othello in Act Five because after he has killed Desdemona and he realises that Iago has fooled him, the audience can see and feel his distress and grief. We are compassionate towards him because Iago's behaviour is unconscionable. The audience's identification will not work if the actor in blackface or the Black actor is played as a 'savage'. If he acts like a 'Coon', that is to say an obtuse, childlike adult, a 'Sambo', who is a frightened inarticulate idiot, or an Uncle Tom, an obsequious, passive and ignorant servant, the audience will not care for him and possibly not care about him.

Hollywood has traditionally preferred to represent 'blacks' in this manner from the earliest period.<sup>168</sup> The iconography of the shuffling stupid Coon of Willy Best as stepin-fetchit has left an appalling legacy. Moreover, such caricatures have upset African-American audiences, who have expressed deep shame because racial images on screen attest to their humanity through representation.<sup>169</sup> Consequently, they have actively disavowed any sense of propinquity with the figure.<sup>170</sup> No Black Tom, Coon, or Buck can play Othello. I would extend Bogle's keystereotypes to include the Sambo and the 'Brute caricature'.

There is a difference between the Buck and the Brute in twenty-first century post-classical film. The Buck is constructed as an insatiable, sexually violent beast, and the Brute is played as a violent and pathological criminal who cannot be placed in a film where he can act out sexual violence against women because of the risk of backlash. An audience today might therefore find countless Black 'Brute caricatures' in supporting or minor roles where they are the violent criminals. They can be found in television cop programmes such as *NYPD Blue* from the 1990s and *The Wire* (2001-2008), and in the degrading images of 'black' criminal caricatures in *The Shield* (2002-2008). These cop shows present an endless stream of stereotypical, ignorant, petty criminals whose description does not position their social or psychological humanity. Samuel L. Jackson in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and other starring roles also compounds the idea of violent 'blacks' who have no emotional or sexual relationships because they lack a humanity that

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<sup>168</sup> Op cit, Strausbaugh, John, (2006), *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture*, p201 and pp201-246

<sup>169</sup> Op cit, Jackson Ronald L. (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: identity, discourse, and racial politics in popular media*, pp44-45

<sup>170</sup> Van Peebles, Melvin, *Classified X* (Mark Daniels 1997 France /USA)

aligns with an audience's deepest frustrations and greatest hopes of equal citizenship or social affirmation.

In John Strausbaugh's *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture*, he studies the historical and social circumstances that have promoted and celebrated blackface performance in popular entertainment. Strausbaugh's argument underpins the idea that America prefers to see Black people as inferior. He positions this principally by studying the representation of Black people in film and weighing up the cost through audience pleasure and through the buying and selling of Negrobilia: the bric-à-brac of racist stereotypes and their collectable value to White Americans.

His research questions why there is a need in the twenty-first century to collect bric-à-brac that depicts racist images of African-Americans and what that implies. These questions will be fully explored in the following chapter but the immediate reference to Othello marks the difference between his character in blackface, where actors are forced to question the assumptions put forward by European-Americans concerning the savage myths that construct the Black male as a beast.

I have argued throughout this chapter that Othellophobia and Othellophilia are principally based on a dichotomy of fear and desire. Shakespeare presented a character that confounded the myth of Black savagery. Actors playing the role in blackface have to overturn the myths that have been 'naturalised' to find the intellectual humanity of the Moor of Venice. This runs contrary to the myths of the inferior and 'savage' nature of Africans. Using the headings I have established, I want to explore the myths that address 'blacks'. Shakespeare defied the myth of the savage body and savage mind. He positioned Othello's object of desire for a White female but defied the myth of a Black rapist. In the dash of wills, Shakespeare fulfilled the triumph of the

White male over the Black but showed the victory to be hollow. Consequently, why did American cinema embrace these myths?

I will take up these questions in Chapter three through a focus on the first African-American independent film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971). I will examine *Sweetback's/Song* as a contestation of the 'Savage Body' myth and discuss the film as a prototype anti-traditional narrative text. I have argued that Othello is an archetypal character constructed through synchronic and diachronic myths. I have also suggested that Shakespeare addressed those myths and resisted them. Hollywood's reiteration of the 'savage' based on the many films produced from 1915 to 1967 often uncritically reproduced mythemes of the Black male as a beast; I will therefore consider the psychological impact of this on a Black audience.

*Sweetback's/Song* also enables this research to investigate post-classical American cinema because the film was released when the major studios were in dire financial crisis from 1968 to 1973.<sup>171</sup> During that period, the Black Liberation Movement raised political Black consciousness in the USA, the UK, Africa and Latin America. I will consider whether the Black Liberation Movement influenced Melvin Van Peebles, the writer, director and producer of the film, and discuss whether Black consciousness had an impact on the audience who saw the film at the time, extending the question to consider its current influence on independent Black cinema. I will also use screen shots analysis where necessary to illustrate my argument because they provide precise images from scenes and exemplify the mise-en-scène. I will also use the subtitles to evidence the dialogue of the film and consider whether the conversations between the characters can be read as rhetoric for Black liberation.

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<sup>171</sup> Williams, Linda R. and Hammond, Michael, eds, (2006), *Contemporary American Cinema*, Open University Press, McGraw Hill Education, UK, pp42-43 in the Chapter 'Debts, Disasters and Mega Musicals: the Decline of the Studio System' pp 41-59



CHAPTER THREE: *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971, USA)

Through textual analysis of the film *Sweetback's/Song* I am going to discuss how the film contests the myth of the Black male beast and overturns the standard visual style and narrative strategies of mainstream film. I will therefore compare and contrast it with other Blaxploitation films. Van Peebles's objective was to make films that redefined the representation of race in the frame: "1. NO COP OUT. A I wanted a victorious film. A film where niggers could walk out standing tall instead of avoiding each other's eyes looking once again like they'd had it".<sup>172</sup> He aimed to challenge what Hollywood manufactured as a portrait of 'blacks'. He also wanted to document the fight by Black people against oppression in America, which contested Hollywood's invention of 'blacks'.<sup>173</sup> This meant liberating Black characters from the rigid paradigm of Hollywood's racial codes, that asserted 'blacks' were inferior and needed to be controlled by White characters, and from Hollywood's White studio production systems.

Joel Kovel has argued that myths about the subhuman character of Blacks through irrational and speculative racist fantasy are deeply rooted in the slave trade in European and American history. Therefore, ideas such as the Hamite curse, notions about African women mating with chimpanzees (resulting in Black Africans having bestial and depraved sexual instincts, particularly towards White women) and that people of African ancestry have an inferior intelligence to Europeans are racist fantasies. Kovel stresses that as long as White people live in a culture of racism it influences their conscious rejection of racial equality. It also affects White supremacists' unconscious fear about Black people, which is aggravated if they feel threatened by Black equality and issues concerning their human rights.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Van Peebles, Melvin (1996), *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song: The Screenplay The Diary, The Soundtrack*, Playback Press, UK, p9

<sup>173</sup> *Baadasss Cinema* (Isaac Julien, 2002, USA) Van Peebles statement at 06:09-06:42 minutes on DVD

<sup>174</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, (1988), *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, p53

### 3.1 The collective unconscious and Hollywood's hegemonic authorship

I will discuss the Ego persona and the shadow and explain how it 'forges' Hollywood's hegemonic authorship. I will also examine how the Black phallic body affects identification in narrative film. In discussing the 'savage body myth' in *Sweetback's/Song* I will also question whether various stories portraying the bodies of Black men as phallic and subhuman amount to what Lévi-Strauss calls a "mytheme": that is, the same theme reiterated, implying the innate 'nature' of Blacks. In addition, I want to explore whether the personal and collective unconscious, as defined by Jung (Figure 9), and Black collective consciousness, as discussed in Black sexual politics, question the meaning of a primordial Black phantom.

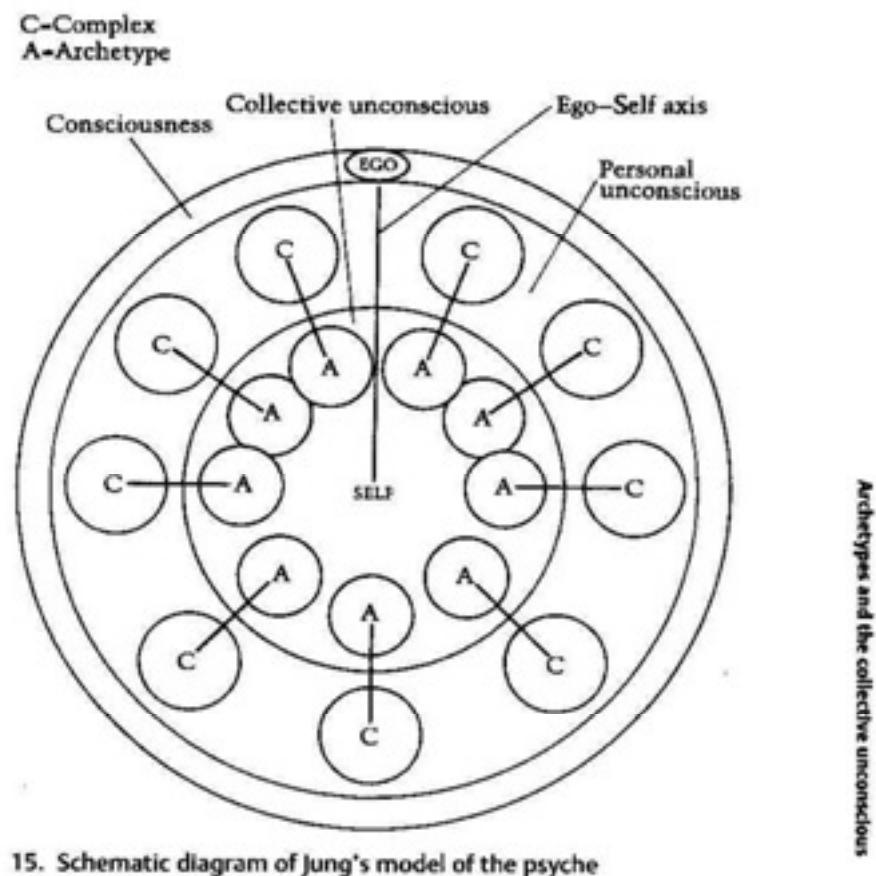


Fig.9

The 'savage myth' can be understood through two key considerations in Jung's explanation of the collective unconscious, that is, his definition of the Ego persona and the shadow, and the 'stages of life' rites of passage. In the outer ring in the diagram above, Jung explains that the Ego is the conscious dimension of the psyche. In the personal unconscious, the psyche develops complexes based on things experienced but forgotten, shown in the inner ring of the diagram. In the centre lies the collective unconscious where universal archetypes such as God, Mother, Child, Heaven, Satan and evil figures exist in our universal belief systems.

Jung explains that in order to succeed in this world, 'man' presents a persona that is an exterior mask of charm, social grace and attractive attributes. This encompasses ideological principles that include moral Christian values, honesty, dignity and virtue, but it hides darker compulsions. The persona is the ideal picture of a man, a portrayal that presents a heroic image because that is how we prefer to be seen and how others see us when we adopt this persona.<sup>175</sup> Anthony Stevens says:

[...], Jung postulated archetypal components play specific roles in the psychic development and social adjustment of everyone. These include the *ego*, *persona*, *shadow*, *anima*, and *animus*. Jung considered these to be archetypal structures which are built into the personal psyche in the form of complexes during the course of development. Each is a psychic organ operating in accordance with the biological principles of adaptation, homeostasis, and growth. Though we make use of them and experience them in ways unique to ourselves, they nevertheless perform the same functions in all human beings everywhere.<sup>176</sup>

Jung goes on to explain that the archetype with the most disturbing influence on the Ego persona is the interior shadow. It is characterised by our depraved and evil compulsion, which we struggle to restrain.<sup>177</sup> Anthony Stevens further explains:

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<sup>175</sup> Carl Jung, *Aion*, CW9 Part 21, pars 13-19, in Storr, Anthony, ed, (1998), *The Essential Jung*, Fontana UK, p91

<sup>176</sup> Stevens, Anthony, (2001), *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, UK, p61

<sup>177</sup> Carl Jung, *Aion*, CW9 ii, pars 13-19, in Storr, Anthony, ed, (1998), *The Essential Jung*, Fontana UK, p92

In dreams the shadow tends to appear as a sinister or threatening figure possessing the same sex as the dreamer, and is not infrequently a member of a different nation, colour, or race. There is usually something alien or hostile about it, which gives rise to powerful feelings of distrust, anger, or fear. This is why Jung felt justified in regarding the shadow as a *complex* — that is to say, a cluster of traits bound together by common affects — which, like all complexes, had an archetypal core, in this instance, the archetype of the Enemy, the Predator, or the Evil Stranger.<sup>178</sup>

Jung says that the shadow is a moral problem because, if we become conscious of it, we must recognise our own capacity for depravity and evil but rather than accept this we unconsciously project it onto other people. The shadow is also characterised by our own sense of inferiority and our insecurities; therefore, in order to preserve the Ego, the persona works to mask our basic fears through projection. Jung states:

As we know, it is not the conscious subject but the unconscious, which does the projecting. Hence, one meets with projections, one does not make them. The effect of projection is to isolate the subject from his environment since instead of a real relation to it there is only an illusory one. Projections change the world into a replica of one's own unknown face.<sup>179</sup>

Jung also says that constant projection prevents people from seeing their own illusions and it depletes their soul and faith. In the personal unconscious, “a man may recognise the relative evil of his nature” but he is seldom able to perceive evil as a part of himself.<sup>180</sup>

The persona, the ideal picture of a man as he should be, is inwardly compensated by a feminine weakness, and as the individual outwardly plays the strong man, so he becomes inwardly a woman, i.e. the anima, for it is the anima that reacts to the persona. But because the inner world is dark and invisible to the extravert consciousness, and because a man is all the less capable of conceiving his weakness the more he identifies with his persona...<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Op cit, Stevens, Anthony, (2001), *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*, p64

<sup>179</sup> Carl Jung, *Aion*, CW9 ii, pars 13-19, in Storr, Anthony, ed, (1998), *The Essential Jung*, Fontana UK, p92

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, p93

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p96

Unlike the Ego's persona and shadow dialectic that establishes the formation of someone's psyche, the stages of life form rites of passage that exemplify a civilisation's cultural, social and spiritual place on earth. This amounts to,

[...] learning the language or dialect of one's community, acquiring a knowledge of its values, rules, and beliefs. Playing in the peer group, meeting the challenges of puberty and adolescence, being initiated into the adult group, accomplishing courtship and marriage, and child-rearing, contributing to the economy through gathering and hunting, participating in religious rituals and ceremonies, assuming the responsibilities of advanced maturity, old age, and preparation for death. All these stages are apparent in all human communities known to anthropology and therefore obey the psychological law...<sup>182</sup>

I posit that the stages of life and the Ego's persona and shadow dialectic exemplify a character's civilisation. Hollywood often omits these factors of culture and identity in its representation of Blacks and it works to fix 'blacks' as inferior and subhuman.

The personal unconscious provides the opportunity to consider Hollywood's hegemonic construction of archetypes based on their authorship of racial segregation and the social arguments that have historically justified the exclusion of African-Americans from equal participation in American society. Archetypes are defined as symbols that link humankind's cultural and psychological experience of the world and yet the authorship of post-classical film frequently represents African-Americans as lacking adherence to the ideological, philosophical and moral parameters that govern the White Judaeo-Christian psyche. Instead, Black men are often depicted as an archetypal phallic enemy, a savage monster or an evil black shadow who threatens the Ego persona of 'man' and the sacred universe in which we live.

This representation might be the result of ignorance concerning sub-Saharan African civilisation, but it does point toward the expurgated history of Africans that

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<sup>182</sup> Op cit, Stevens, Anthony, (2001), *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*, p60

was taught by European-Americans from the 1600s to the 1900s. Consequently, in the early 1900s, the opposition to segregation by the Niagara Movement<sup>183</sup> of William DuBois and Marcus Garvey's 'Universal Negro Improvement Association',<sup>184</sup> worked to decolonise the minds of African-Americans by teaching Black people that they had a history and a dignity and a beauty they must be proud of. This drive helped people to reclaim their indigenous identities, and it developed their conscious Black pride. When Black people were enslaved, they could not fulfil the Jungian stages of life because Whites controlled their lives. Under apartheid in the USA, during the Jim Crow era, Black people were still enslaved because they were not free to set up and implement the stages of life that Jung considered important to fulfil the personal and communal social customs that would establish a civilisation.

Omitting the stages of life/rites of passage narrative of Black people's lives in the post-classical film contributes to the myth of a savage because the characters lack the social rituals that attest to a civilisation. Additionally, Hollywood's hegemony relies on the idolised exterior persona and the evil interior shadow. Today, corporate Hollywood constructs many stories about idolised personae in genre films, which helps to explain the Othellophobia that prevents 'blacks' from achieving dominance over White characters. For example, Will Smith as the title character *Hancock* (2008) has special 'super powers' and they are used in the service of White America and not against it. In the television series *24* (2001-2004), the African-American actor Denis Haysbert played President David Palmer but he was never allowed to use his power against White America, even though the villains, foreign and White American used their power against the USA in the television series .

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<sup>183</sup> White, John, (1985), *Black Leadership in America 1895-1968*, Longman, UK, pp45-46

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, pp76-77

Beginning with the script, American cinema often over-determines 'blacks' through the mise-en-scène. In the classical era 'blacks' were often given dialogue that presented them as obtuse, their hair, make-up and costume were shabby, and they were poorly lit so they looked very dark (cf. *Hallelujah!* (1929), *Green Pastures* (1936) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943)). Furthermore, because 'blacks' were perceived to be 'inferior', they were not pivotal to the story; therefore, they could be sidelined or killed off. There were a few exceptions to this rule, most notably Dooley Wilson's Sam in *Casablanca* (1942), and Sidney Poitier, the transitional star between the classical and post-classical era, whom I read as the Othello type, a dignified servant of the State with a clearly dramatised humanity. The practice of keeping the Black characters as marginal figures is exemplified in *Nurse Betty* (2000). The two Black characters in the film, Morgan Freeman and Chris Rock, play a couple of macabre but comic hitmen. When the writer kills them off at the end, their deaths have no affect on the central character/s but it does affect a Black audiences reading of them when we learn they are father and son. Because the writer withheld this information he controls our empathy.

Exceptions to the rule, however, do not change the rules and many writers appear to 'forge' characters based on Hollywood's representation of 'blacks', as do the media industries, and the social relations Whites have with Black people in segregated America.<sup>185</sup> These factors often result in portrayals of one-dimensional, sex-obsessed Bucks, such as Eddie Murphy's character Reggie Hammond in *48Hrs* (1982), begging the question of whether the White hegemonic psyche is preoccupied with physically powerful and phallic Black bodies because this type of man threatens their Ego persona.

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<sup>185</sup> hooks, bell, (1992), *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, pp14-15 and chapter 1 'Loving Blackness as Political Resistance', pp9-20

In the sixty-one essays collected in Denes and Humez's (1995) *Gender, Race and Class in Media*, the authors consider how psychological and physical separation exist in a multi-racial postmodern society. The unifying themes of the essays discuss the overt and covert systems of marginalisation and segregation in the popular youth culture of the 1980s and 1990s. The essays stress that even though White youths participated in hip-hop culture, a profound divide existed in America because of the limited social contact Whites had with Blacks. This relates to education, work, housing, religious practice, and social customs, including high school and college students working together. It also extends to work colleagues having dinner together in each other's homes, or Blacks and Whites dating each other and thereby learning about the emotional and spiritual bonds they share as Americans and Christians. Media texts might suggest racial unity among America's youth but segregation is still in place. By restricting contact with African-Americans, such segregation exacerbates the myth of Black people's identities, whereby they continue to remain phantom figures in the White American psyche because even though they are not seen, owing to segregation, they are not out of mind.<sup>186</sup> In fact, Blacks' self-expression in hip-hop compounds the hypersexual and violent image of the corrupting influence of Blacks.

Ronald Jackson explains how a manufactured pathology characterises Black men and women. He says White America depicts most Blacks as welfare dependents who lack intellectual and professional distinction: they are perceived as undisciplined, criminally inclined, and therefore not prepared to work for a legitimate living.<sup>187</sup> Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* and bell hooks in *Black Looks* make similar observations on America's racial history.

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<sup>186</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: identity, discourse, and racial politics in popular media*, pp63-64

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, pp44-45



The aforementioned myth is supported by the belief that 'blacks' (as a perceived entity rather than humane beings) are instinctually sexual and lack parental responsibility because they cannot restrain their passions. Additionally, Jackson dissects the way the media represent how Black people instil specific fears in the majority of White Americans. These fears are historically rooted archetypal prejudices against non-White people: claims that Blacks are violent and conspire to attack Whites. Additional claims are that Blacks are innately sexual and their corporeal bodies are indecent and pose a threat to decent White Americans. In short, Cornel West, Jackson, hooks and Patricia Hill Collins believe the media industries use the Black body as myth through an iconography and a narratology about the pathology of Blacks. This strategy incites racial fears in the American collective conscience about the mind and body of Blacks.<sup>188</sup>

We can also separate the savage body myth into three parts: the phallic Black monster, the black symbol of predatory evil, and an uncivilised subhuman with no anthropological cultural rites of passage that evidence and affirm his humanity as exemplified in the stages of life. The myth of the savage is perpetuated through Hollywood's hegemonic authorship, which can be read as an unconscious shadow projection as well as an ideological racist fantasy.

In this thesis, Hollywood's hegemonic authorship refers to men who invest in a dominant heterosexist accumulation of power and control over weaker men, dependent women and non-White people who lack power. This is projected onto the characters in post-classical independent and mainstream cinema, which inherited a dominant Christian, heterosexual, patriarchal, American worldview. It also refers to a system of power that supports the exploitation of weaker nations and their people by means of White male

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<sup>188</sup> Op cit, Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004), *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, p42

privilege through government agencies and corporate financial dominance. Since the era of colonial and imperial expansion, these systems have been supported by education and research institutions as well as IT multinationals and the military, all of which have historical positions of power. These systems of power prevail in the USA in the name of democracy, an ideological principle that the two-party nation shares with its people. Hollywood normalises all of its narrative fiction based on this ideological principle, and it is told as a written, audiovisual construct through *mise-en-scène*.

The manufacture of written and visual material that claims Black people are inferior grows out of a denial of Africans' stages of life and rites of passage, which portrays Blacks as savages. The containment of the stages of life rituals, namely not showing how Black folks are socialised through traditions, works to maintain the myth that Blacks are unlike Whites because we do not see and learn how their customs form their civilisation or the ways that they resemble ideological systems in Western society. Since Hollywood's narrative cinema frequently omits a cultural exploration of African civilisation and the psychological identity of its people, it fosters the idea that they lack both.

The colonial control of the body is central to Black sexual politics and archetypes in the collective unconscious. With regard to hegemonic authorship, the shadow, and my definition of Othellophobia as a fear of re/enslavement, the defeat of colonial rule in Santa Domingo arguably left a profound and pathological hatred of Blacks in the White psyche. In the first part of the BBC4 programme *Racism: A History*, several professors cite the event as a major upset to colonial dominance. What differentiates it from other rebellions such as the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion in Jamaica, or the 1831 Nat Turner slave rebellion in the USA, is that in Santa Domingo, Blacks defeated the colonial powers.

The conquest of the Iberian peninsula by the Moors, however, has created a primal fear in the personal unconscious. I posit this because the mixing of African cultural practices with European customs during the Moorish conquest modernised the infrastructure of Spain in specific regions,<sup>189</sup> proving that the Moors were not ignorant 'savages', they were intellectual equals, but Hollywood seldom examines that cultural history. The history of the Moors and other Africans is rarely given a cultural and psychological examination that attests to their culture, philosophies or civilisation.

This omission extends to the experiences of African-Americans under the control of White America. Through the exclusion of a narrative exploration of the cultural psychology of Black characters, the myth of the 'savage' is maintained because Hollywood's hegemonic authorship seldom questions the myth of the inferiority of Blacks. Racist fantasy uses these elements to claim the savage 'nature' of Blacks but also to project the idea of the 'savage' onto the body as a phallic threat.

In many Blaxploitation films and crime thrillers from the 1980s to the present, the characterisation of the criminals suggests Hollywood's racist fantasy and hegemonic authorship; that is to say, the unconscious preserves its Ego persona by projecting depraved acts onto the shadow. This works towards an understanding of Othellophobia because it allows the hero to be an idolised persona that appeals to the European-American ideological Ego and it frames the shadow as a black predatory enemy capable of unconscionable acts of sin and evil. Crucially, it prevents the black enemy from subordinating the White hero. According to Jung, the shadow contains all that we cannot accept about ourselves.

The shadow is a living part of the personality and therefore wants to live with it in some form. It cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness. This problem is exceedingly difficult, because it not

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<sup>189</sup> Cleugh, James, (1952), *Spain in the Modern World*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, UK, pp70-71

only challenges the whole man, but it reminds him at the same time of his helplessness and ineffectuality.<sup>190</sup>

The post-classical text as a projection of realism, rather than reality, manifests the stages of life because narrative in films such as *Spellbound* (1945), *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Equus*, (1977), and *Zelig* (1983) shows White civilisation and the psychological labyrinth involved in achieving rational thought and morality. It also exemplifies the conflicts between the idolised persona and the demonised shadow, for example in *Training Day* (2001), where the idolised Ego persona is exemplified by the young, White, law-abiding police officer Hoyt, played by Ethan Hawke. The archetypal black evil forces are 'the three wise men', White high-ranking law enforcement officers. Also, the drug dealer Bookerman, played by Scott Glenn and the pathological criminal Alonzo, played by Denzel Washington. These are shadow figures: respectively a black corrupting agent and a Black phallic homicidal monster. I believe hegemonic authorship demonstrates the construction by the collective unconscious of an archetypal enemy as an evil black force, a symbolic black agent and a Black phallic male.

Jung says the unconscious Ego is compromised in terms of accepting its weakness because there is a struggle between the persona and the shadow. Moreover, for men whose Christian patriarchal identity depends on their concept of virtue, the shadow demonstrates the profound complexities that can arise if conscious man becomes aware of his capacity for depraved behaviour. Therefore, rather than accepting this capacity, displacing it onto a phantom 'shadow' offers men psychological reassurance in the preservation of their Ego persona. In further discussion of the shadow, Jung goes on to say:

[the]...inferior part of the personality; sum of all personal and collective psychic elements which, because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in life

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<sup>190</sup> Op cit, Jung, Carl, (1968), *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, pp20-21

therefore coalesce into a relatively autonomous “splinter personality” with contrary tendencies in the unconscious. The shadow behaves compensatory to consciousness; hence its effects can be positive as well as negative.<sup>191</sup>

Jung's explanation of the shadow seems to relate almost exclusively to men of European heritage. When we apply the explanation of the shadow to men of African heritage, anomalies occur. Jung says that the shadow is characterised by being of the same sex as the man projecting and the shadow is black. Since the symbolic shadow is not white, are we to understand the shadow in the Black male psyche as a demonic black phantom? A castrating sexual monster inclined toward bestial depravity as enacted by the slave master, or the ‘inferior’ hegemonic Black male beleaguered by depraved compulsions?

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effect. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real.<sup>192</sup>

One of the ways to make sense of the Black male psyche is to question whether his shadow is manifested through internalised racism because the African-American unconsciously believes himself to be a savage inferior. Questions then arise such as whether the Ego's persona and shadow relate to enslaved Blackmen who are not able to fulfil the ‘stages of life’ matrix. Alternatively, do Black men unconsciously project the archetypal black evil figure as their racial opposite? I will examine these questions in *Sweetback's/Song* and independent Black film.

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<sup>191</sup> Jung, Carl, (1951), *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self. Collected Works of C. G. Jung Volume 9 Part 2*, Princeton University Press, USA, p513

<sup>192</sup> Op cit, Jung, Carl, (1968), *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p13

### 3.2: *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) synopsis

The story centres on Sweetback, whose 'natural' sexual prowess develops from the age of twelve, when he loses his virginity to a prostitute and she christens him Sweetback. He grows up to be a 'stud' for hire to women in need of sexual fulfilment. As a male hustler, his reputation brings him many clients and he performs live shows to excite customers. One fateful evening the police take him to appear in a line-up; on the way to the police station, they investigate a disturbance and arrest another Black man. They beat up this young Black man and the sight of the brutality of the policemen compels Sweetback to retaliate, and he almost beats them to death.

Sweetback and the young man, Moo-Moo, go on the run. They hide but they are discovered by Hells Angels who want to punish them for trespassing and the only way out when challenged is sexually to conquer the female leader of the gang. Triumphant, Sweetback satisfies her as no one else has and the gang lead him to another hideout; however, they then send the police to arrest Sweetback and Moo-Moo. Faced with incarceration and police brutality at gunpoint, Sweetback kills the policemen. Members of the Black community offer to help him escape but he puts Moo-Moo's life before his own because Moo-Moo represents a hopeful future for Black liberation.

The police storm the homes and premises of Black people in the ghetto, but these people will not help the police. Sweetback moves around and as his fame spreads Black communities begin to defy the law. The members of these communities obstruct the police through disinformation and attack, allowing Sweetback to escape after he has been caught and the police Commissioner has told an officer to beat him up. Eventually, when the hunt for Sweetback entices White citizens to act as bounty hunters with bloodhounds and guns, Sweetback outwits them and the police, and he escapes to Mexico.

### 3.3: *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* - critical concerns

Central to *Sweetback's/Song* is the position Van Peebles takes at the start of the film regarding the Black body. He presents the Black audience with stereotypes that address the myth of African-Americans' identity as sexual subjects. He does not present a historical discourse on the subject of enslavement but instead allows the audience to free-associate, using their Black historical experience of segregation and federal and corporate disempowerment, which have limited their freedom and exploited their bodies in the labour market. This experience is coupled with their contemporary knowledge of poverty and the effects it has on their lives. Asking the audience to discard their Hollywood frame of reference in favour of their African-American experience makes them more critically engaged.

Van Peebles opens the film by showing several prostitutes in a kitchen watching a foundling man-child eating. They stare as the boy eats from a cast-iron pot; and from the women's expressions it seems clear he is a foundling because clearly he has been neglected. This is seen by the appalling state of his skin, his unkempt filthy hair, the scars on his face and the scabs on his head where his hair has not grown.



Fig.10

In the next sequence, a woman is washing her private parts when she sees the boy walk past her door. At this point, the brothel has become his home and he is a houseboy doing chores, such as supplying the female sex workers with towels. The woman calls him into her room, tells him to close the door and proceeds sexually to initiate the boy, who appears to be aged about twelve and is played by thirteen-year-old Mario Van Peebles.

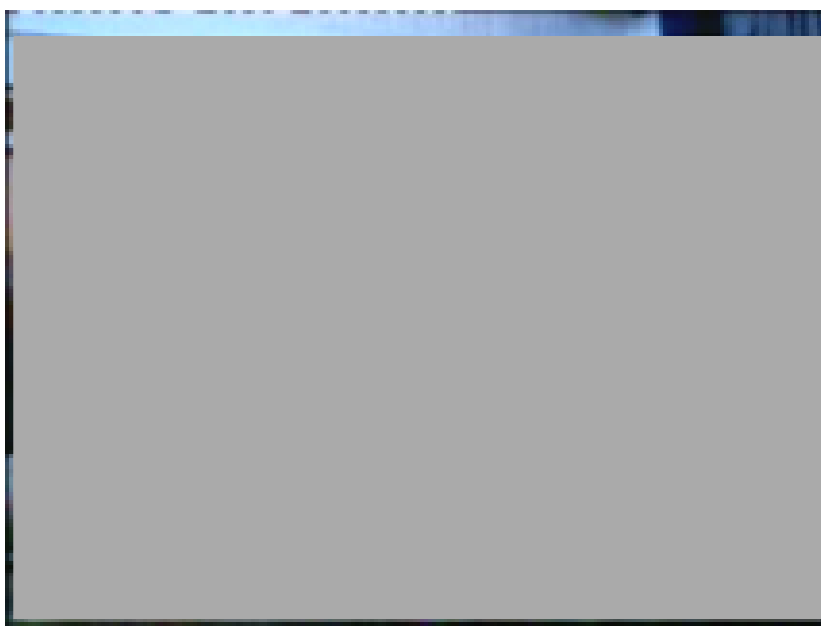


Fig.11

As a virgin, he is inexperienced, but she guides him into the basic act of intercourse. From this union she christens the boy Sweetback owing to his 'natural' ability to satisfy a woman, and the child finally emerges, post coitus, as a man. Van Peebles does not provide a montage to show the stages of life, rites of passage Sweetback goes through growing up in the brothel. Instead, the audience is left to assume he has led a restricted life. Because the story is about his sexual and social enslavement, it arguably exonerates Van Peebles from omitting the psychological and social experience of Sweetback, because he did include this exposition in his debut film *Story of a Three Day Pass* (1967) and the later *Watermelon Man* (1970).





F.12

Instead, Sweetback rises up from a symbolic primal scene as a man born of a mythic black Jezebel, whereby he is transformed into a man unencumbered by a hegemonic socialisation process. Thus, he differs from the European male born of the 'White female Goddess' as a child of the Judaeo-Christian patriarchal marriage. Van Peebles does two key things that demonstrate his consciousness of Black culture in America. First, he does not conceal the bodies of Black men and women from the age of puberty, when they were historically bought and sold or used by overseers and slave owners.<sup>193</sup> Second, he dares to suggest that female psychological and emotional desire can only be found through sexual gratification with an innocent man-child who cannot exploit her.

If the audience reads the film against the grain of Hollywood myth and its iconography of heroes and villains, they can reference their experience of poverty in America's ghettos and rural communities. Donald Bogle refers to Hollywood's stereotypes of Jezebels and Bucks, both figures defined by their licentious and

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<sup>193</sup> Blessingame, John W. (1979), *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, Oxford University Press, p161, chapter 4 'The Slave Family' pp149-191

destructive personas<sup>194</sup> that bring about chaos and disruption, with White Americans tempted by their corporeal bodies. By refusing to adhere to the established narratives about Black sexual bodies as a site of sin and a sight of primordial lust, Van Peebles disavows America's moral judgements of Blacks that hooks<sup>195</sup> and West return to in the ongoing debate on Black sexual politics.

Cornel West perceptively says that "Americans are obsessed with sex and fearful of black sexuality. The dominant myths draw black women and men either as threatening creatures who have the potential for sexual power over whites, or as harmless desexed underlings of white culture".<sup>196</sup> Supremacist ideas of this kind can be traced back to the acculturation of Africans on the plantation, as Blassingame has argued.<sup>197</sup> When this is combined with Paul Hoch's study on the myth of Black sexual corruption and villainy in literature, it demonstrates how Black skin is read as a signifier of inferiority tied to Blacks' life of perpetual bondage,<sup>198</sup> which Martin Luther King's 1963 speech challenged.<sup>199</sup>

Many cultural theorists and film critics in 1971, and indeed throughout the history of Black film criticism, have argued that regardless of Van Peebles's best intentions in making *Sweetback's/Song*, he did not successfully accomplish his aim because the character and the narrative are misogynistic, phallogentric and reiterate most stereotypes of Black sexuality.<sup>200</sup> It is easy to understand this criticism of the film because it does not employ the strategies of classical narrative realism but instead deploys strategies of documentary realist cinema. Narrative

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<sup>194</sup> Op cit, Bogle, Donald, (1994), *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Black in American Films*, p13

<sup>195</sup> Op cit, hooks, bell, (2003) *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, p69

<sup>196</sup> Op cit, West, Cornel, (1994/2000), *Race Matters*, p119

<sup>197</sup> Op cit, Blassingame, John W. (1979), *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, pp154-155

<sup>198</sup> Op cit, Hoch, Paul, (1979), *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity*, p44

<sup>199</sup> Scott King Coretta, (1984) *The Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Robson Books, pp95-98 'I Have A Dream'

<sup>200</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone, (2000), *Signifying Practices*, pp185-186

realism strives to present a world within the diegesis that resembles the world we live in and the ideological and psychological values that the status quo defines as 'normal'.

Realist cinema works to destabilise the fictional world by criticising its ideology and deconstructing the seamless verisimilitude of cinematic language and grammar through the use of audio and visual signification. Van Peebles's intention was to overturn Hollywood's invented narratology and iconography of 'blacks' and the myth of the Black male as a beast that were established from the silent film period in 1930 until 1960. Lerone Bennett argues that he employs the myth of the Buck in order to question the myth of the savage, a point with which I agree. The treatment of women in the film suggests, however, that *Sweetback* is a misogynist, and Michele Wallace and other critics consider misogyny to work against Black cultural nationalism and liberation.<sup>201</sup>

Van Peebles overthrew Hollywood's neutralisation of 'black' sexuality but this action has had paradoxical consequences. *Sweetback's Song* is the first film to liberate Black men's sexual desires, which were held in check through Hollywood's hegemonic authorship. The film also plays, however, to the widely-held view that Black men are primarily sexual. Charles Johnson, a Black gender theorist, reads this as a White male concept internalised by most Black men.<sup>202</sup> I disagree with this passive reception theory; I read it as a diachronic myth retold in spoken and written language, and a synchronic myth ideologically positioned as the innate 'nature' of Blacks that progressive men can disown and gender activists can reject.

The critical response to the film in 1971 and after has struggled to balance these opposing camps. This might be because of specific cultural factions and their

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<sup>201</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone, (2000), *Signifying Practices*, pp194-195

<sup>202</sup> Op cit, Charles Johnson, 'A Phenomenology of The Black Body' pp128-129 in Goldstein, Laurence, ed, (1994), *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures*, University of Michigan Press, USA

agendas. On the one hand, there was the civil rights movement and its diminishing aim in the early 1970s to bring about integration. On the other hand, the Black Panthers endorsed the film because it affirmed Black activism and sexual Black power. Black feminists in different camps, such as Radical, Black Sisterhood, Womanist and “cultural critics”, have approached the film with specific knowledge of the history of disempowerment of African-American men. Michele Wallace’s reading of Sweetback as a character is effectively translated in her theorisation of Black men in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. She explains Sweetback through White men’s sexual violence against Black men.

The American black woman is haunted by the mythology that surrounds the American black man. It is a mythology based upon real persecution of black men: castrated black men hanging by their necks from trees, the carcasses of black men floating face down in the Mississippi; black men with their bleeding genitals jammed between their teeth. Black men shining shoes, black men being turned down for jobs time and time again; black men watching as their women go to work to support the family...<sup>203</sup>

Her further examination of the history of White men’s violence against Blacks leads her to surmise that at the centre of the White American male psyche is a pathological hysteria about Black men’s sexual anatomy and its power.

On one level, the emotional hysterical level and the level on which most powerless white men react, white men feared the black men’s sexual dexterity, the black man’s sexual appeal, and the black man’s attrition for the white woman. But on another level, on the level at which actual power changes hands, white men feared the black man’s penis as a starting point of black families...<sup>204</sup>

Wallace continues by explaining that Black men had to get back at their oppressors, and they had to punish Black women “for fucking white men for all those years”, which instilled guilt and ambivalence in the Black feminist discourse of the 1970s.

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<sup>203</sup> Op cit, Wallace, Michele, (1990), *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, pp15-16

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, p72

In 1975, Jim Pines pointed out that *Sweetback's/Song* differed from Blaxploitation films because its aims were quite separate. *Sweetback's/Song* exemplified the struggles of a Black man searching for freedom and a Black consciousness that would change his life. Pines does not consider the character to be a revolutionary: he argues that he is a rebel in search of an identity, a Black man violently abused by the police and America's system of racist oppression. Pines praises the film for its use of propaganda and says that it is mobilised by single-mindedness, a quality the Panthers admired and Van Peebles deployed.<sup>205</sup>

Unlike most critical approaches to the film, which Guerrero argues in his examination of *Sweetback's/Song*, citing the objections of Black film reviewers and Black civil rights organisations to the sexist and immoral behaviour aggrandised in the text, Pines, along with Yearwood, does not assess *Sweetback's/Song* by the criteria of narrative cinema.<sup>206</sup> Pines reads the film as a folktale with a central Black folk hero who is liberated by challenging White racist tyranny and sexual violence. In the image below, the police unshackle Sweetback and violently beat Moo-Moo, kicking him in the groin. The police assault finally motivates Sweetback to use his shackles, the symbol of the enslavement of Blacks, to punish the racist policemen who are abusing their powers as law enforcement officers.

Pines argues that Van Peebles's aim was to make a statement about the history of Black representation in film, which he did first with *Watermelon Man* (1970). That film employed a classical character cause-effect narrative system, and a text that mapped out a number of the Jungian stages of life's rites of passage, which collapse when the character Jeff wakes up one morning to find that he has mysteriously transformed from a White into a Black man. With *Sweetback's/Song*,

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<sup>205</sup> *Badass Cinema* (Isaac Julien, 2002, USA) Van Peebles made these points 06:09-06:42 minutes

<sup>206</sup> Op cit, Guerrero, Ed, (1993), *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, p90

Van Peebles dispensed with the bourgeois refinements of characterisation in favour of a Black rebel who embodied the overall grievances of Blackmen rendered powerless by America's institutional racism and the racist attitudes of hegemonic White males who would not tolerate a challenge to their authority from Blacks. The bikers who initially want to kill Sweetback for 'trespassing' exemplify this attitude.

Furthermore, Bogle, Pines and Yearwood argue that because Van Peebles rejected Hollywood's hoard of 'black' stereotypes, he looked toward America's inner cities to imbue Sweetback with the trickster scams of hustlers, con men, pimps, lover-men and street survivors that a specifically African-American audience would immediately recognise because those men lived within the ghetto. Pines also believes that the film's merit lies in its uncompromising narration, namely, the cultural and social specificity of African-American life experience. Sweetback is different from his Blaxploitation counterparts because the gangsters and anti-heroes that populate Blaxploitation, especially John Shaft, are arguably meant to appeal to a White audience,<sup>207</sup> but Sweetback is different because he holds White men, particularly the police, responsible for his disempowerment and phallic enslavement.

One of the most profound aspects of the character Sweetback is that he does not show any emotional or spiritual satisfaction in any of his sexual conquests. He never attains moments of peace, pleasure or propinquity with the women he has sex with, nor is he at peace in the environment in which he is trapped. Pines says:

*Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* is not a revolutionary film, as it has been argued; rather, it is a remarkably effective radical film, some of whose prerogatives might be useful in dealing with (what doesn't yet exist, I suspect) a black, community-oriented, revolutionary form of cinema. Certainly, in this respect, *Sweetback* remains the most interesting example of black cinema to date.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Op cit, Guerrero, Ed, (1993), *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, p92

<sup>208</sup> Pines, Jim, (1975) *Blacks in Films*, Studio Vista, UK, p123

Yearwood's assessment of the film draws on Wallace and Pines's arguments.

In his contextualisation, Yearwood says,

[...] Diawara makes the point that *Sweetback* "is the paradigmatic text for the 1970s blaxploitation films" (1993, p9). Huey Newton, Black Panther Party minister of defense, found *Sweetback* refreshing and an important political film (1972, p116). The black cultural nationalist arts group, the Kuumba Workshop (1978) viewed the film as lewd and sensational. In their opinion, it failed to advance the cause of black revolution. [...] Michele Wallace characterizes *Sweetback* as "fantastically misogynistic" (1993, p206).<sup>209</sup>

Ed Guerrero<sup>210</sup> and Yearwood believe the film was chiefly judged on its character representation and its story,<sup>211</sup> and Manthia Diawara believes the film has to be explained in terms of its narrative structure because it overturns the classic narrative structure.<sup>212</sup>

What is distinct about *Sweetback's/Song* and the 'savage body' synchronic mytheme is how Van Peebles contests the myth. The animalistic Black body is based on the myth of the big Black penis and a prodigious sexual skill of unrestrained heathen depravity. Van Peebles criticises the myth, however, by showing *Sweetback's* desperate journey as an allegorical runaway slave escaping White institutional racism and bondage: the circumstances that dictate *Sweetback's* life fix him as a 'savage' but Black liberation decolonises his mind. This links into the history of Black liberation, and draws on the need to fulfil the Jungian stages of life. As a Black activist and cultural critic,<sup>213</sup> Van Peebles demonstrated that powerlessness can reduce a man to a savage body especially if he is inscribed as little more than a black copious penis. The paradox is that in the irrational mind, Van Peebles is inscribed as a savage, regardless of his intellectual attributes, because in the film he has a big penis and Black skin.

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<sup>209</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone L. (2000), *Black Film as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration and the African-American Tradition*, pp185-186

<sup>210</sup> Op cit, Guerrero, Ed, (1993), *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, pp87-88

<sup>211</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone L. (2000), *Black Film as a Signifying Practice*, p186

<sup>212</sup> Diawara, Manthia, (1993), *Black American Cinema*, p11

<sup>213</sup> Mendik, Xavier and Schneider, Jay, eds. (2002), *Underground USA, Filmmaking beyond the Hollywood Canon*, Wallflower Press, UK, p107-108

### 3.4 The Myth of the Black phallic body

Across the field of this research, critics and academic theorists agree on what has always defined Black men. The Black male body is both a site – a location – and a sight – a visible entity of physical excess. Frantz Fanon said the measurement between Black and White sexual anatomies is unanswerable; nevertheless, the Black body is loaded with exaggeration.<sup>214</sup> It is primarily imagined in two specific ways: first, in terms of its hypersexual power because the penis is seen as over-large; second, the Black body is read as potentially dangerous because of its musculature and physical strength. I have not discovered any evidence that contradicts this myth, even though critical and theoretical debates in sexual politics have tried to demystify the subject.

Self-aware Black men do not limit their identities to a phallic existence, as advocates of progressive Black masculinities from the 1990s to the present have emphasised through their coalition with Black feminists and gay activists to promote Black liberation across gender and sexual preference divides. This issue is made very clear in the Berkeley 'Men's Centre Manifesto', part of the Black Men's Movement that Clyde W. Franklin maps out in *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*.<sup>215</sup> The intensions and strategies of their manifesto and issues of 'The National Organization for Men Against Sexism' (NOMAS) are publicised at an annual conference. The first paragraph of the NOMAS Mission Statement offers proactive ways of contesting the myth of Black primitivism and Black men's phallocentric depravity.

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<sup>214</sup> Op cit, Friedman, David F. (2003), *A Mind of its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, p97

<sup>215</sup> Majors, Richard G. and Gordon, Jacob U. (1994), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*, Nelson-Hall, USA, pp6-9



## NOMAS Revised Statement of Principles

The National Organization for Men Against Sexism is an activist organization of men and women supporting positive changes for men. NOMAS advocates a perspective that is pro-feminist, gay-affirmative, and committed to justice on a broad range of social issues including race, class, age, religion and physical abilities. We affirm that working to make this nation's ideas of equality substantive is the finest expression of what it means to be men.

We believe that the new opportunities becoming available to women and men will be beneficial to both. Men can live as happier and more fulfilled human beings by challenging the old-fashioned rules of masculinity that embody the assumption of male superiority.<sup>216</sup>

The above statement of intent and related principles of practice are strategies which many Black gender activists use to dismantle myth as a naturalising system of ideological dominance. Moreover, NOMAS suggests there are a number of Black men and women who are deconstructing the sign, signifier and signified that forge the myth of Black phallocentric identity. The collection of essays in Marcellus Blout and George Cunningham's (1996) *Representing Black Men* concerning a more inclusive acceptance of Black men's identities builds on NOMAS's aims. Moreover, Haki Madhubuti's (1990) *Black Men: Obsolete, Single Dangerous? African American Family in Transition* proposes an Afrocentric reclamation to redefine psychologically Black masculinity in the 1990s because he repudiates phallic mastery as the answer to masculinity.<sup>217</sup>

All the essays in Athena D. Mutua's (2006) *Progressive Black Masculinities* argue that progressive masculinity in the twenty-first century has to profit from the hard-won policies and social gains of Black activism. It must also build on the Black feminist epistemology that Patricia Hill Collins brought to the forefront in the 1990s as well as Black gay rights that repudiate phallocentric masculinity. Michael Kimmel says Black hypermasculinity and overcompensation of White racist disempowerment

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p9

<sup>217</sup> Op cit, Madhubuti, Haki R. (1990), *Black Men: Obsolete, Single Dangerous? African American Family in Transition*, pp103-104

represent a destructive social practice<sup>218</sup> that re-enslaves Black men. Kimmel's analysis relates to the social studies on Black manhood and masculinity by the psychologist Joseph White and the clinical services director James Cones in *Black Men Emerging*.<sup>219</sup>

David Friedman's study on the history of the penis examines religious, cultural, social and psychological debates. He notes that the sexual anatomy of Black men has provoked fear and fascination and describes it as "macrophallic", that is, a signifier of immense sexual power.<sup>220</sup> Friedman concurs with Frantz Fanon that the Black penis stands in place of the Black man<sup>221</sup> and poses a threat to White hegemonic power.

The subjectivity of Blacks has relied on the shifting perceptions held by Whites from the Abolitionist period right up to hip-hop's global era of renegotiated racial essentialism. The reiteration in Western narrative fiction of the phallic Black male as a beast indicates a deep angst. One cannot point to an example of the 'savage body', however, because men of African heritage, regardless of their skin colour or the dimensions of their sexual anatomy, are not beasts, which suggests Blacks are perceived as an archetype in the collective unconscious.

Joel Kovel discerns that aversion to Blacks often included fantasies among White men of castrating them.<sup>222</sup> Frantz Fanon argued that White men and White women who are Negrophobic actually desire sexual relations with Blacks.<sup>223</sup> Jonathan Rutherford says the 'savage body' is a figment of the Western mind,

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<sup>218</sup> Op cit, Michael Kimmel 'Toward a Pedagogy of the Oppressor' pp70-71, in Mutua, Athena D. ed, (2006), *Progressive Black Masculinities*,

<sup>219</sup> White, Joseph, L and Cones, James, H. (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, Routledge, USA, pp157-158

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p106

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, p110

<sup>222</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, (1988), *White Racism*, pp72-73

<sup>223</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, p156

particularly the imagination of White men.<sup>224</sup> Other cultural theorists such as Baldwin,<sup>225</sup> Cleaver,<sup>226</sup> Hall,<sup>227</sup> hooks,<sup>228</sup> Mercer,<sup>229</sup> Hoch,<sup>230</sup> and Friedman<sup>231</sup> have also examined the subject of the phallic Black male and reached similar conclusions. If these debates on the sexual anatomical distinction of men of African heritage are drawn together, they frequently end up in the same cul-de-sac, namely the Black body as a site of potent, abundant power and sexual threat.

Moreover, the historical inscription (that is to say, allegations written by white supremacists from the earliest historical period up to the present that claim Blacks are subhuman, phallic and savage)<sup>232</sup> that classifies the Black body into types indicates some of the ways we can understand the European and American mind. Between 1600 and 1800 White builders of empire denied the humanity of Africans and thereby commoditised their bodies into types, which meant they were bought and sold for their labour and breeding qualities. Thus, several archetypal bodies came to represent Black sexuality: the Hottentot Venus as a copious body and the Jezebel as the sinuous body; the prodigious male as a hypersexual body and the corporeal male, brainwashed through subjugation, as the dole black.<sup>233</sup> John Strausbaugh's research on Blackface racist memorabilia, minstrelsy, literature and film argues that the iconography of the Buck and Jezebel, Sambo, Coon, Mammy, Uncle Tom and Black Brute inscribed Blacks as inferior in the popular consciousness of White

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<sup>224</sup> Chapman, Rowena & Rutherford, Jonathan, (1988), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, UK, pp64-65

<sup>225</sup> Baldwin, James, (1985), *The Price of The Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985*, Michael Joseph UK, 'The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy', p297 and pp289-304

<sup>226</sup> Cleaver, Eldridge, (1968), *Soul on Ice*, Delta Books, USA pp164-65

<sup>227</sup> Op cit, Hall, Stuart, (1997), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* 'The Spectacle of Other' pp244-245

<sup>228</sup> hooks, bell, (1992), *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, 'Reconstructing Black Masculinity', p96

<sup>229</sup> Mercer, Kobena, (1994), *Welcome To The Jungle*, 'Black Masculinity and the Sexual Politics of Race' p134

<sup>230</sup> Op cit, Hoch, Paul, (1979), *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity*, 'Masculinity as Interracial Competition for Women' p46

<sup>231</sup> Op cit, Friedman, David, M., (2003), *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, p106

<sup>232</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, pp50-51

<sup>233</sup> Op cit, Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004), *Black Sexual Politics*, pp56-57

America and, as a result, the Black body was then fixed as primitive rather than intellectual.<sup>234</sup> Ronald Jackson agrees with Strausbaugh's findings.<sup>235</sup>

To a great extent Fanon paved the way for twentieth-century debate and analysis concerning the Black male body because of his work as a psychiatrist with mentally troubled patients. One of the most effective tests he conducted involved word association, where he asked patients to think of the word Negro and say what came to mind. Relating to their socio-historical cultural period, they replied "[...] biology, penis, strong, athletic, potent, boxer, Joe Louis, Jesse Owns, Senegalese troops, savage, animal, devil, sin".<sup>236</sup> Fanon further explained that when other European patients gave the test to their acquaintances, the responses relaying the same ideas about Negroes increased. Fanon says "the Negro is a phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety".<sup>237</sup> Although Fanon and Jung use different language, I believe the phobogenic object can be read as a shadow figure at a conscious level. Fanon says the sight and thought of Blacks in the colonial mind instigates irrational fear and anxiety. Central to this is a fixation with the sexual character of Blacks. Fanon's European patients imagined the Black penis as something abnormal; it was not just a reproductive organ or part of the human anatomy that brought pleasure in sexual union. They imbued the penis with supernatural power that signified depraved and debauched sexual acts, and for them it was larger than life.<sup>238</sup>

Fanon's work represented a breakthrough at the time because he was able to work beyond speculation and deal with the psychological, ideological and cultural ideas in the minds of his patients. When Fanon went to Paris he experienced

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<sup>234</sup> Strausbaugh, John, (2006), *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture*, The Penguin Group, USA, pp286-287

<sup>235</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, p24

<sup>236</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, p166

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p151

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p155

profound alienation, as widely-held racist ideas were projected when people looked at him.<sup>239</sup> In his chapter 'The Fact of Blackness' he explains how he became conscious of the fact that no matter how intellectually astute or refined he had become, in the Negrophobic mind he was fixed at a genital level because he could not escape the history of Christian, phallogentric and hegemonic thought.

His explanation derives from his argument that the Negro is a phobogenic object, and the neuroses of his patients explained the wider implications of the French colonial psyche with regard to the Africans they had enslaved, colonised and controlled throughout the diaspora. Fanon says:

I have said that the Negro is phobogenic. What is a phobia? I prefer to answer that question by relying on the latest work of Hesnard: "Phobia is a neurosis characterized by the anxious fear of an object (in the broadest sense of anything outside of the individual or, by extension, of a situation". [(Hesnard, Angelo, 1949, *L'Univers morbide de la faute* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, p79)] Naturally that object must have certain aspects. It must arouse, Hesnard says, both fear and revulsion. But here we encounter a difficulty. Applying the genetic method to the understanding of phobia, Charles Odier wrote that all anxiety derives from a certain subjective insecurity linked to the absence of the mother.<sup>240</sup>

The phobic element that lies at the core of the neurosis is the Black body, which evokes associative fears in the colonial psyche. Fanon speculated that the Negrophobic trauma could have been caused by a sexual assault experienced by the White subject but this, in fact, was not the case. In my opinion, Negrophobia is rooted in the White male psyche from the 1500s to the 1800s when they witnessed Black men's violent resistance to enslavement as they were taken away from their families and lost their freedom.

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid, pp109-110

<sup>240</sup> Ibid, pp154-155

Historically, the trauma for the Black man is his loss of freedom, his violent resistance and his continued violent rebellion against the enslaving White men. The trauma for the White man is *the sight* of the Black man's violence, as well as the continued violent rebellion that leaves the supremacist White male in no doubt that he could be killed or attacked for his crime of enslavement and oppression.<sup>241</sup> In the conscious and unconscious Negrophobic mind, this fear of violent punishment is projected onto all Black men. It is exacerbated by the sight of the naked body of the Black male and the power invested in its corporeality. The Negrophobic man is aware of the productive and reproductive potential of the body because of the labour of Blacks in Africa, America, the Caribbean and other colonies. Fearful and guilt-ridden, the Christian irrationally exaggerates the corporeal power of Blacks. As a result, the Negrophobic male can transform the Black body to encompass mythic savagery and bestial acts of sexual humiliation against White men and White women.

Fanon's discourse is very useful but today it has to be considered against a backdrop of fifty years of social and cultural changes with respect to racial equality and human rights in Europe and America. By the 1970s, Black cultural nationalism fed off Fanon's theories of the Negrophobic White. Eldridge Cleaver's argument in *Soul on Ice* clearly exemplifies his version of a White phobogenic reaction to African-Americans. His polemic describes 'The Omnipotent Administrator' as a White male who claims jurisdiction over the human body and owns the brain that organises the running of the world. 'The Supermasculine Menial' was the Black male, who was the body, and specifically the penis. For Cleaver, the Omnipotent Administrator's penis by his own admission was nothing to speak of. When 'The Omnipotent Administrator' realises that he has mistakenly awarded the greatest

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, p155

pleasure to the Black penis, he decides to renege on the plan and cuckold him, restrict access to white women and control the Black because his penis is powerful and larger than life.<sup>242</sup>

Cleaver's arguments demonstrate the legacy of dealing with racist ideology in colonial and imperial societies where men refuse to acknowledge the humanity of people of African descent. Fanon's idea of the Negrophobic male can also be read in the character Iago, whose response to Othello seems phobic. Iago is irrational when he thinks about Othello or sees him. In his face-to-face confrontations with Othello, his thoughts often conflict with his deferential and domineering behaviour. He is envious of Cassio's promotion, he is irrational about Othello's marriage, and his premeditated destruction of Othello includes killing Desdemona, who is innocent. His fixation on Othello also goes beyond the homosocial bond of men-at-arms at times of war. Iago moves from homosexual frustration in Act Two, where he acknowledges Othello's gentle nature as a quality he admires. In (3.3.L.470) they share a pact to kill Cassio, which results in an emotional closeness between the men. This culminates with Iago's sexual and physical domination of Othello's mind when he drags him to the bed and tells him to strangle Desdemona (A4.S1.L.200).

In countless Blaxploitation films, the myth of the 'savage' body is played out through sexual fixation on Blacks by White male characters. Michele Wallace distils these issues by theorising how White America has primarily considered the Black body to be a sexual object. Having witnessed the Black cultural nationalist initiatives and the empowering effects thereof, Wallace astutely points out:

Black men began to harp on the white man's obsession with their genitals and that was the very point at which their own obsessions began to take hold. Baldwin under pressure, Jones [Amiri Baraka], Cleaver, and many others began to glorify the primitivism of the black

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<sup>242</sup> Cleaver, Eldridge, (1968), *Soul on Ice*, Delta Books, USA pp164-165

man, to take his macho out of the category of human error and place it in the category of divine destiny.<sup>243</sup>

These issues seem to have affected Melvin Van Peebles when he made *Sweetback's/Song* in 1971, because Black Power and Black cultural nationalism underpinned the everyday life of African-Americans in the counterculture period from 1970 to 1975 in the USA. What is central to this political era is its fostering of a coalition of interest groups, initially the civil rights movement and subsequently specific interest groups: the Women's Liberation Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement, anti-Vietnam War factions, and hippies, who challenged the social norms of post-war America.

In *Sweetback's/Song*, Van Peebles negotiates the sexual politics of the Black Power period and he suggests Black men's liberation will lead to racial equality for Black women but that is a simplistic approach to women's subjugation. Furthermore, because none of the men in the film has a relationship with Sweetback, from beginning to end they are expendable stock characters who lack a psychological and political dimension; they do not distil a civil rights, Black nationalist, or Black separatist perspective. Instead, the audience are compelled to draw on their Black collective consciousness and read the characters according to their own experiences.

One of the key sequences in *Sweetback's/Song* occurs in a room that functions as a theatrical performance space. The room is filled with Black and White male and female onlookers who watch as a young woman enters alone and walks among them. A female in drag, disguised with a hat and beard, masquerading as a Black male street hustler, accompanies her and they stroll around the room past the seated onlookers as

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<sup>243</sup> Op cit, Wallace, Michele, (1979/1990), *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, p73



though they are a couple. They make a grand show of their 'courting' and the female drag hustler undresses the 'feminine' woman and proceeds to undress herself, revealing a large black strapped-on phallus. To the delight of the onlookers, the women couple in a comfortable missionary position and fornicate for the pleasure of the audience.



Fig.13

What makes the erotic pantomime sequence so important is the way it combines discourses on the Black body. First, because Melvin Van Peebles was the actor, writer, director and producer, he defied the structure of classical Hollywood narrative film. *Sweetback's Song* does not have the conventional narrative of the causal agent as the lead character who makes things happen. Sweetback is constantly reacting to things that happen in his hostile world. In classical narrative convention, he resembles a victim seen in many film noirs such as *Detour* (1945), and neo-noirs such as *Point Blank* (1967), in that he is terrorised by a corrupt police force and endures crime and poverty in the urban ghetto.

Second, because Sweetback is a hustler, Van Peebles takes the stereotype hypersexual persona and dramatises his vulnerability and dependence on the Black community for shelter and alliance. In the scenes below, we can see how Van Peebles masculinises the female body through the use of a phallus and the two women who proceed to make love.



Fig.14



Fig.15

Third, in the erotic pantomime sequence, Van Peebles positions Black and White American men and women as onlookers who are fascinated by Black sexual expression, which problematises the Black body by blurring anatomical distinction. The fe/male masquerading as a hustler is transformed from a drag queen into a man. By showing us a phallic female, and a copious male, Van Peebles implies that Black men and women are sexually empowered by the site and the sight of the penis.

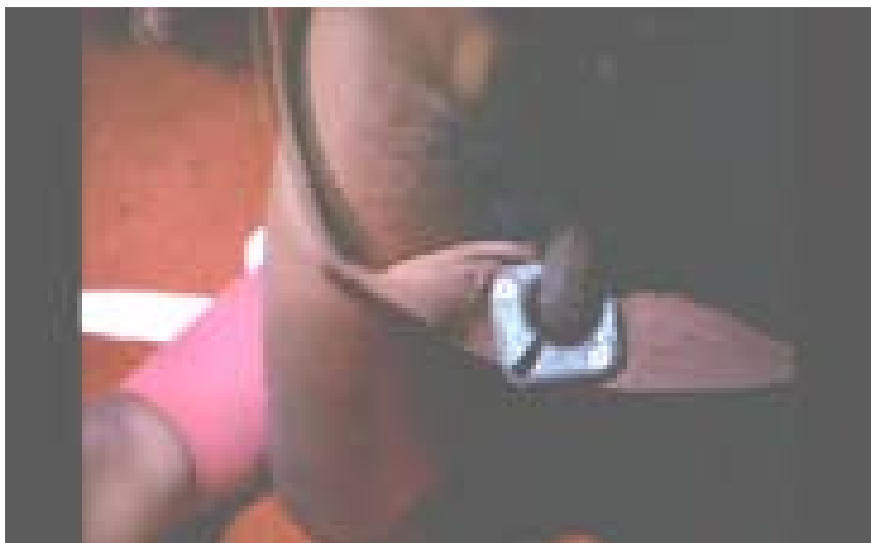


Fig.16

This 'act' makes the Black body profoundly uncanny in the phallogentric psyche that had historically questioned why Africans have Black skin and large bodies. Van Peebles renders the scene devoid of shame, which is one of the most powerful aspects of this sequence and the entire film. He negates the accusation of Black sin and shame by probing Americans' sexual fascination with the subject and he unashamedly appears naked in the film and has sexual intercourse on camera.<sup>244</sup>



Fig.17

In Friedman's *A Mind of Its Own*, he observes that in Egypt, Greece and the Roman Empire, the penis was a symbol of worship, power, pride, manliness and

<sup>244</sup> *Baadasssss!* (Mario Van Peebles, 2003, USA) Interview with Melvin in which he describes his experience.

masculinity: a symbol of divinity.<sup>245</sup> During the Roman Empire, a well-endowed man could be promoted on the basis of penis size alone.<sup>246</sup> With America's social history of apartheid from 1896, it is possible to read how politically disempowered Black men might have mistakenly considered their penis as the instrument of manhood and their corporeal bodies as a phallic symbol of masculinity. Wallace identified this possibility in her work in 1979/1990 and bell hooks further explored the issue in her chapter 'it's a dick thing: beyond sexual acting out' in 2004.<sup>247</sup>

Their overall argument postulates that in this hip-hop era Black men have internalised the idea that possessing a large penis allows them psychologically to humiliate their White male oppressors because they believe it is no longer political power coming out of Washington that affects their lives. For these men, life on the streets, in the media, music, pop videos, sport, entertainment and fashion is what counts; therefore, Black men can intimidate Whites through material gains and their sexualised bodies, as dramatised in Mario Van Peebles's *New Jack City* (1991) with its gangster character Nino Brown.

Through a range of source material provided by cultural critics and gender theorists, bell hooks accurately summarises some of the oppressive systems of power that underpin race, gender and sexuality in America's multiracial society.

In an imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal culture hatred of Black masculinity finds its most intense expressions in the realm of the sexual. The dehumanization of the black male sexual body (often taking place with black male consent) is widespread and normalized. There are few places black males can go to get the sexual healing they need that would allow them to exert healthy agency. Victimized by racist white projections of sexual pathology, most black males fear naming dysfunctional sexual behavior is tantamount to agreeing that the black male is pathological.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Friedman, David, M. (2002), *A Mind of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, p20 and chapter 1

<sup>246</sup> 'The Demon Rod', pp1-42

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, p.21

<sup>248</sup> Op cit, hooks, bell, (2004), *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, p68 and pp67-84

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 82

In spite of these social systems and African-Americans' cultural awareness of them, some critics, such as Eldridge Cleaver, would have us believe the large Black penis relates exclusively to the Negrophobic. This is premised on the historical notion of the archetypal evil Black phantom that threatens to destroy civilisation, the heathen jungle 'savage', and the contemporary Black male as a pathological phallic rapist and criminal. These ideas have been the basis of racist fantasy and indeed they are played out through the fetishism of *some* White men.

Kobena Mercer has discussed issues of White male fetishism of Black male bodies in 'Reading Racial Fetishism: the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe'.<sup>249</sup> The core of his argument is that the Black body can be compartmentalised into body parts as fetish objects that stand in for the whole person through the gaze of the artist's camera eye and the audience's voyeurism. Mercer's argument is only tangentially related to dominant cinema but it better explains why Hollywood restricts the sight of Black male bodies in the frame. The archetypal Black male body is so replete with phallic myth that Hollywood cinema usually refrains from showing Black men as lovers because they can rely on the savage myth to dominate any image of him. To present the Black man as a lover rather than a phallus is to include him in a world of 'normal' civilisation where he is not an alien presence, which is the 'Other'.

Hollywood cinema, unlike gallery photography, targets a mass audience, but right-wing Christian fundamentalists have historically made it clear that they do not approve of sexual images of Blacks in mainstream culture and Hollywood courts a right-wing audience because they represent a considerable percentage of the film-going public. In 1991, Channel 4's *Banned Season*<sup>250</sup> exposed and brought many right-wing social and ideological opinions to the centre of the race, sexuality and gender debate.

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<sup>249</sup> Op cit, Mercer, Kobena, (1994), *Welcome to the Jungle*, pp188-189

<sup>250</sup> [http://25by4.channel4.com/chapter\\_21/article\\_2/print](http://25by4.channel4.com/chapter_21/article_2/print) 15.12.2008

Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina stated his conservative views in his 1989 denouncement of the 'repugnant images of Blacks' in Robert Mapplethorpe's work. His polemic on the floor of the US Senate was racist and homophobic in the extreme. Pointing at the image of *man in a polyester suit*, he spoke about the penis as a savage object. Jesse Helms and right-wing conservatives are a reminder that phobogenic or irrational responses can reduce the body to a subhuman entity or a sexualised fetish fantasy, but there are other reactions. Jesse Helms used his federal power as Senator to maintain segregation in some Southern States and he blocked federal funding for AIDS research and racial equality initiatives.<sup>251</sup>

Mercer's argument concerning fetishism offers little that is new, primarily because his premise rests on the idea of the passivity of Black men and the active control of them by White men. To a great extent, Mercer's ideas build on 'The Fact of Blackness', in which Fanon explains how Negrophobic White men fix the Black man at a genital level.<sup>252</sup> This point toward an archetypal idea of the overpowering presence of Blacks in the irrational psyche where those in the dominant Western culture can make of the Black what their will dictates. Mercer's study does not fully explore Mapplethorpe's obsessive control of Milton Moore, better known as the *man in a polyester suit*, who was Mapplethorpe's lover.<sup>253</sup> Mercer's reading of the Black body limits fetishism to Whites but in *Sweetback's Song*, Van Peebles has fetishise Blacks, and indeed his own body. He has made a phallus of himself (see Figure 21) and Mercer's argument fails to include Black men's agency, fantasy, authorship or their pleasure in claiming phallic power, which African Rotimi Fani-Kayode and Black British photographers Robert Taylor<sup>254</sup> and

<sup>251</sup> <http://www.answers.com/Senator%20Jesse%20Helms> 15.12.2008

<sup>252</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin, White Mask*, p157

<sup>253</sup> Morrison, Patricia, (1995), *Mapplethorpe: A Biography*, MacMillan, UK, p249 and pp252-253

<sup>254</sup> <http://www.taylor-photo.co.uk/newhome/index.shtml> 17.8.2008

Ajamu<sup>255</sup> have explored. Many men in Black music have fetishise their bodies through African tribalism and futurist styles, as seen in videos by Seal such as *Crazy*,<sup>256</sup> as well as those by Sisquo and Dru Hill.<sup>257</sup>

Moreover, Scott Poulson-Bryant's (2005) *Hung: A mediation of the measure of Black men in America* explores the sexual identity of Blacks and their performance in hip-hop, sport, and the porn industry; Ronald Jackson's *Scripting the Black Masculine Body* and Shawn Taylor's *Big Black Penis: Misadventures in Race and Masculinity* offer two key perspectives. Jackson studies social, legal, medical and cultural discourses on the historical treatment of Blacks in mainstream American society and documents how White America imagines Blacks.<sup>258</sup> Taylor considers how Black men in underdeveloped social areas construct their masculinity and he discerns that hip-hop culture allows many Black men to invest in the myth of the big black penis because Black men without social power believe their bodies are the only real estate and power they have.<sup>259</sup>

The unifying assumption in the aforementioned texts, with the exception of those by Fanon and Jackson, is that Black men have enormous penises. Literally to believe that men of African heritage are innately better endowed than are men of European heritage is fallacy incarnate. The *Big Penis Book*<sup>260</sup> has 364 pages of male nudes from Africa, Europe, North and South America who have large genitals. In the photographs by Pierre Verger, taken in South America, Africa, the Caribbean

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<sup>255</sup> <http://www.sexmutant.com/ajamu.htm> 17.8.2008

<sup>256</sup> <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=3im0kpNJSml&feature=related> 17.8.2008

<sup>257</sup> <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=6oH-mTA1LGo> August 2008

<sup>258</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, pp11-12 and p139

<sup>259</sup> Op cit, Taylor, Shawn, (2008), *Big Black Penis: Misadventures in Race and Masculinity*, pp149-150

<sup>260</sup> Hanson, Dian, (2008), *The Big Penis Book*, Taschen, USA, p77, p166, pp202-206

and the USA, the bodies of Black people display a fragility and erotic sensuality that defy the gross excesses of the myth of the phallic beast.<sup>261</sup>

In *Dreamboys 4*,<sup>262</sup> containing two hundred photographs of nudes from Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, South America and the USA, all the models further problematise the issue of size because the men have small, medium or large penises regardless of whether they are Black or White. In *2Blue*,<sup>263</sup> twenty-first century photographers are working to overturn the myth of the phallic Black male and complicate the myth of Black and White phallic rivalry because all the photographs are of gay couples Figures 18, 19 and 20 in intimate poses of love and affection and many of the couples are interracial.



Fig.18



Fig.19



Fig.20

These photographs problematise the myth of racial hatred between Black and White men because they clearly demonstrate unfetishised erotic and emotional desire.

<sup>261</sup> Verger, Pierre, (1996), Catalogue, D.A.P publishers, USA

<sup>262</sup> Grand, Marcello, (2003), *Dreamboys Volume 4*, Studio Magazines, Australia

<sup>263</sup> Grand, Marcello, (2004), *2Blue*, Studio Magazines, Australia



The World Wide Web has millions of pornographic photographs of naked bodies that contest the myth of size with respect to Black and White men. In the 1980s, the journal *TEN8* critically questioned the myth of the Black male phallic body and explained its ideological construction as a form of dehumanising oppression.<sup>264</sup> These points may seem tangential to film but they are linked by pan-African initiatives by Black artists to redefine themselves outside the 'savage body' myth, yet the myth is perpetuated. The actual size of a penis is not the real issue: it is the archetypal meaning of the male organ and the power attributed to it. The history of masculinity has indicated, men's ideal image of their masculinity rests on the concept of strength, sexual potency and phallic power that is signified in the minds of other men.

Film studies frequently overlook the construction of Black men's sexual identity and masculinity chiefly because post-classical cinema seldom produces films that feature Black men as erotic spectacle. Subsequently, Yvonne Tasker's essay 'Black Buddies and White Heroes', heavily influenced by Yearwood's research, explains the dominant and subservient roles of Black and White men in action film but not the emotional or sexual identity of African-American men. Wider social and cultural issues are often neglected in film studies, such as the social impact of Motown stars on Black men. Marvin Gaye was not only a role model of Black romantic heroism, but his socio-political music also expressed a worldview. *What's Going On* (1971), had cultural impact, particularly on Black men, and his erotic and spiritual identity on *Let's Get It On* (1973) and *Here My Dear* (1978) laid bare the psychological terrain of Black sexual politics that Hollywood authorship completely failed to imagine because of the myth of the Black beast.

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<sup>264</sup> Sunil Gupta 'Desire and Black Men' pp84-85 in *TEN8 Critical Decade* Vol.2 No.3, 1992, UK

In *Sweetback's Song*, Van Peebles displays his body in the 'Biker sequence' as a site of sexual gratification. White folks looking up at him gaze in admiration because he has sexually satisfied Prez, the leader of the gang; however, the smiles conceal the envy and malevolence the men feel, which is revealed in the next scene when they take him to a hideout and call the police to arrest him. Furthermore, because Sweetback puts on his bowler hat and sports a white bow tie, the scene becomes polysemic. It references the Vaudevillian Black showmen, such as Bert Williams, who did blackface, and the Nicolas brothers, whose energetic dance routines thrilled Black and White audiences alike, but updates the thrill to address the sexual revolution and draws on a history of Blacks as erotic spectacle.



Fig. 21

Because his sexual performance is emotionally disconnected, that is, he has no interest in or feelings for the woman, he remains a Buck who lacks a psychological and racial kinship that explains his full humanity, and that is the position that Black bodies have occupied in the hegemonic psyche.<sup>265</sup>

<sup>265</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, (1988), *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, pp68-69

Ronald Jackson studies the ideological and anthropological depiction of Blacks and discerns the contradiction in White America's classification of the savage Black and their desire for Black women.<sup>266</sup> The fact that White people have sexual relations with Black women and Black men indicates that they do not actually believe Blacks are not fully human, even though "dominative racists" and "aversive racists" treat them inhumanly. Instead, tensions that lie in Christian moral self-discipline and sexual curiosity are revealed.

In Western society we live with a documented history that claims Black people are sexually more proficient; it is therefore understandable that some people are fascinated by that and want to prove or disprove the myth. The paradox is that, whether true or not, the myth is reiterated to imply that Blacks are instinctually more immoral and sexually corrupt than are Whites. In post-classical cinema, this is evidenced in hegemonic authorship where Black men are written as pimps, drug pushers and gangsters who use and abuse Black women and corrupt White women, as seen in *The Mack* (1973), or who prostitute White men, as dramatised in *American Gigolo* (1980). In Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000), the Wakefield family's lives are almost destroyed when a Black drug pusher hooks their daughter on cocaine and heroin. He sexually corrupts her and eventually prostitutes her, so her father has to go in search of his only child and return her to her home and mother. An explicit sex scene with the evil black lover and the corrupted White fallen goddess works to incite fear of the phallic Black body and instil the myth that Black men are consumed by ungodly compulsions.

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<sup>266</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, p12



Fig.22

This is the daughter's point-of-view shot, where her lover is blurred in her mind.



F.23



Fig.24

Here are point-of-view shots when they are interrupted during sex and he withdraws and goes to the door naked to make a drug deal as she watches him. Moments later, she indicates to him that she wants a 'fix' and he penetrates her with the syringe and resumes having sex with her. The sequence instills the danger and corruption of the phallic evil Black and the vulnerability of the young White female goddess.

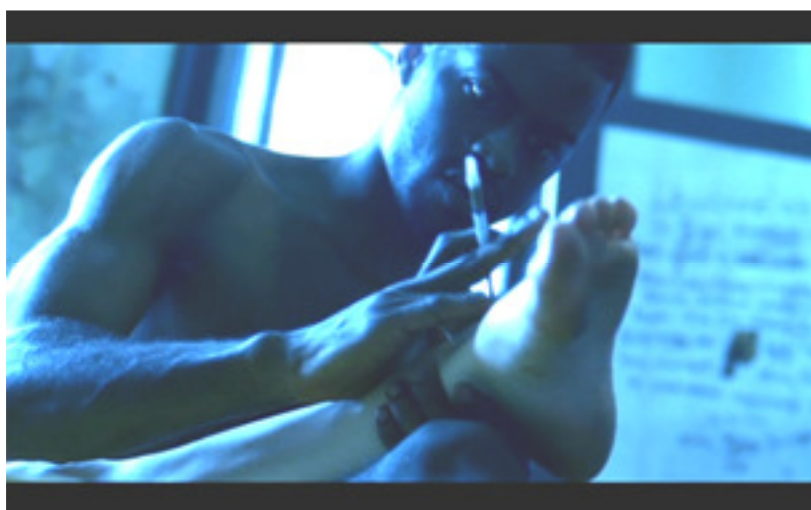


Fig.25

The archetypal myth of the evil black in the collective unconscious works subliminally in narrative film. There is the phallic Black man in the personal unconscious, juxtaposed with the diachronic and synchronic myth of the Black male as a phallic predator. This underlines not only the iconography of the bodies of Black men in post-classical cinema but also the narratology of the myth. Consequently, even if a film consciously strives to reject the myth of the big evil penis and the monstrous shadow, the myth is already in place: it exists.

Hence, post-classical film is not reliant on Blacks to play these roles: even though many African-American actors are cast as that stereotype, the idea of sexual corruption and evil can be projected onto any man if he is blackened by the archetypal shadow figure and depicted and read as evil, dirty, corrupt and immoral. The Black male beast is not just the Black man's body, it is the symbol of sexual depravity and heathenism, and Dracula, monsters, aliens and ghost figures can be read as shadow figures in the personal and collective unconscious because they embody many of man's debased compulsions that he cannot accept and therefore projects onto a shadow.

Postclassical cinema in its generic conventions and hegemonic reading of American racial hierarchy has, however, demonstrated its preference for depicting Blacks as fulfilling the myth of the 'savage' and phallic entity. How much of this is rooted in religious, psychological, philosophical and economic expansionist principles is almost indeterminable. Nevertheless, what post-classical cinema repeatedly demonstrates is that it believes in the rites of passage that engendered Graeco-Roman philosophy and imperial expansion, Western Judaeo-Christian civilisation, and White supremacy in the age of colonial Europe and imperial America. Classical and post-classical films have celebrated White culture and its position as moral guardian of the world in films such as *The Ten Commandments*

(1923 & 1956), the *Star Wars* saga (1977-2005), and the James Bond films (1962-2008), where black deeds and the moral consequences of greed, sex and villainy are defeated. In these films, we can find both myths: the black evil figure, such as Number 1, the head of "Spectre" in *Thunderball* (1965), and the phallic Black man, such as Yaphet Kotto as Mr Big (Kananga) in *Live and Let Die* (1973). All of these scripts contain archetypes present in the collective unconscious as God and satanic figures, whose dedication to good and evil is marked by their physical and psychological distinctions.

David Friedman explains that the narrative of the penis as a signifier of power in antiquity and evil in the age of Christianity has a complex history in Western culture as a result of the fall of Adam and Eve, bringing with it the age of shame in the medieval period.<sup>267</sup> Additionally, David Goldenberg in *The Curse of Ham* studies religious discourses on Black skin and says it has left a contradictory legacy that has shaped the Judæo-Christian mind, principally because Black skin has been historically re-written to allege that Africans are inferior. However these interpretations were not in the Old Testament: ideas of this kind were manufactured to support the economic exploitation of Africans.<sup>268</sup>

It is necessary to understand that both myths play off each other, feed into each other and obscure the rational thoughts of people of all races. In *Sweetback's Song* Van Peebles draws on both myths because he sets up the lead character as a phallic hero to compensate for a lack of social, political and economic power. He does this because he believes phallic power translates into masculine power. Van Peebles is also aware that Black skin is read as a signifier of inferiority; therefore, he depicts the police as

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<sup>267</sup> Op cit, (2003), Friedman, David, *A Mind Of Its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis*, pp32-33

<sup>268</sup> Op cit, (2003), Goldenberg, David, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, p197

prejudiced and violent and asks the audience to decide what constitutes inferior humanity; skin colour or unconscionable conduct.

Furthermore, at no time in the film do Black women suggest they want any relations with White American men, which indicates Van Peebles's Black collective consciousness and authorship. His inscription of Black female sexuality, however, robs the women in the film of a political consciousness and a voice. Patricia Hill Collins argues that sexual relationships between Black women and White men degrade Black women in the minds of Black men.<sup>269</sup> This is because Black cultural nationalism and liberation require Black men to work with Black women in order to decolonise their minds and achieve unity with Black women. If Black women remain the property of White hegemonic men, Black men usually fail to develop a progressive, self-defined successful future. The ownership of Black women allows dominant White men to leap into the place of the Black male and act out any sexual or abusive fantasy.

Moreover, because none of the women provides narrative psychological investment in challenging the myth of the sexuality of Blacks or demonstrating African-American political activism, it is left up to the audience proactively to inscribe all of the women. Again, classical narrative film does not do that: it provides characters with psychosocial journeys through narrative involvement, whereby the characters transcend corporeality and sexual gratification to achieve moral Christian decency or eternal love. This is characterised by the Lothario-like character Marcus Graham in *Boomerang* (1992), who relinquishes his promiscuous life for the love of one woman whom he learns to respect.

In *Sweetback's/Song*, Van Peebles stages many scenes where he alone is the sexual master of all he surveys and, even if he does not pursue a woman, she

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<sup>269</sup> Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004), *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Routledge, USA p262

wants him because he is hypersexual. This is demonstrated when he is on the run and he is sexually seduced by a Black woman. One sexual conquest after another is filmed in the same style. Sweetback is positioned on top of various women and he goes through the act of intercourse. In these scenes, there are no shot-reverse shots of characters' faces to establish a Black cultural narration that displays their deepest feelings. Gladstone Yearwood says,

Narration is a form of social history that plays a central role in the promulgation and reproduction of dominant ideologies. Narrative has a mythic function that facilitates the institutionalization of a group's lifestyle and choices. The Black filmmaker's primary task is to create, by definition reality for members of his or her community, to allow them to perceive their universe in a distinctly new way.<sup>270</sup>

Furthermore, in the 'biker scene' Melvin Van Peebles depicts full frontal nudity and actual sexual intercourse.<sup>271</sup> In *Hit Man* (1972), *Slaughter* (1972), *Coffy*, (1973), *Cleopatra Jones* (1972), and *Willie Dynamite* (1974), none of the actors engages in actual sex. First, those Blaxploitation films are crime fiction narratives and not porn flicks. Second, the White directors and the studios that produced the films could not force actors to perform sex, not only because of the legal implications, but also because their films had to be passed by the MPAA censorship board. Third, Hollywood's union production crew would not work on pornographic films. Van Peebles was aware of these issues and took advantage of them so that he could hire a non-union production crew who wanted to work on his film.

In *Sexuality in the Movies* (1975), Thomas Atkins and other film critics discuss Hollywood's treatment of sex and sexuality, social and moral concerns, the role of the church, state laws and MPAA national concern to maintain standards of decency. The debates on the manner and morals of sex in the cinema indicate that

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<sup>270</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone, (2000), p11 'Perspectives on Black Film Theory and Criticism', pp1-17

<sup>271</sup> Van Peebles, Melvin (1996), *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song: The Screenplay, The Diary, The Soundtrack*, Playback Press, UK, pp88-89



the 'Bike sequence' goes beyond the prior conventions of American film because Hollywood had never before shown an explicit scene of mutual interracial passion. In *100 Rifles* (1969), Jim Brown and Raquel Welch have a love scene that leads to sex but the scene is constructed in Hollywood's conventional shot-reverse close-ups to show their desire, which leads to their kiss, and the tension that follows, until they fall onto the bed kissing; the pull-focus shot then indicates they are having sex.

In post-classical cinema, the regulations of Hollywood film production and the visual codes that connote the phallic power of the Black male body have radically changed. Today there are Black independent filmmakers such as Spike Lee, Carl Franklin and John Singleton who document Black experiences. The love scene below Figure 26 in Singleton's *Baby Boy* (2001) shows the sexual pleasures shared between a couple and it is visually pleasing because the framing, camera angles, three-point lighting and shot duration emotionally convey the verisimilitude.

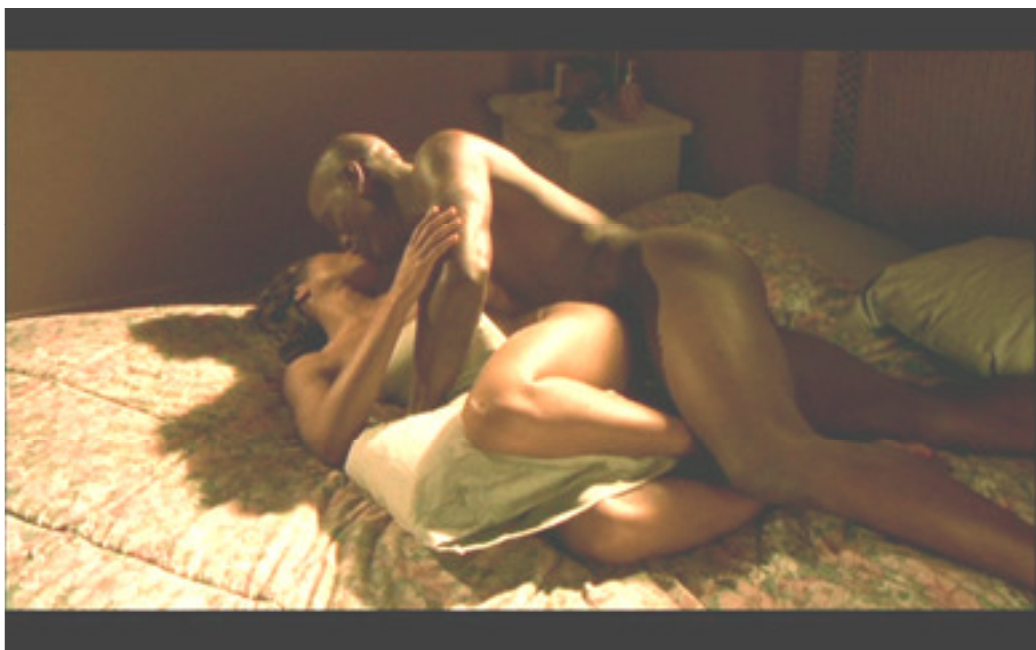


Fig.26

What we also find in post-classical cinema are White American directors who have never bought into the racist ideology of Hollywood's hegemonic authorship;

such directors include Norman Jewison, Michael Mann, and John Sayles, who continually disavow the savage body myth in films such as *A Soldier's Story* (1984), *Collateral* (2004) and *Honeydripper* (2007). Cameron Crowe's *Jerry Maguire* (1996) also challenges the myth of the Black male beast in its depiction of Rod Tidwell, played by Cuba Gooding Jr., by focusing on how to re-interpret the American Dream in a more inclusive way that portrays American manhood outside the oppressive regimes of hegemonic masculinity. Tidwell is written as a romantic hero, a loving husband, father, friend and hard-working Christian capitalist. What the film clearly demonstrates is that the projection of the shadow and the construction of hegemonic authorship using the myth of superiority and inferiority are specific choices.

Furthermore, today we can see how Black and White independent filmmakers reject Hollywood's racist iconography and narratology and look beyond the frame to discover African-American epistemological experiences that revitalise American cinema. In the classical era, Hollywood placed next to no value on the needs of Black audiences, therefore overlooking the power of the romantic Black star. When they used Harry Belafonte in *Carmen Jones* (1954) and *Island in the Sun* (1957), they failed to allow him to fulfil his role as an active romantic lover owing to the Hays code.<sup>272</sup> Belafonte had the looks and the body for the romantic role but Hollywood neutralised his passion. During the era of segregation, White America made it clear they did not want to see 'blacks' in a sexual context; therefore, films suggested intimacy through the mise-en-scène.

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<sup>272</sup> <http://www.artsreformation.com/a001/hays-code.html>

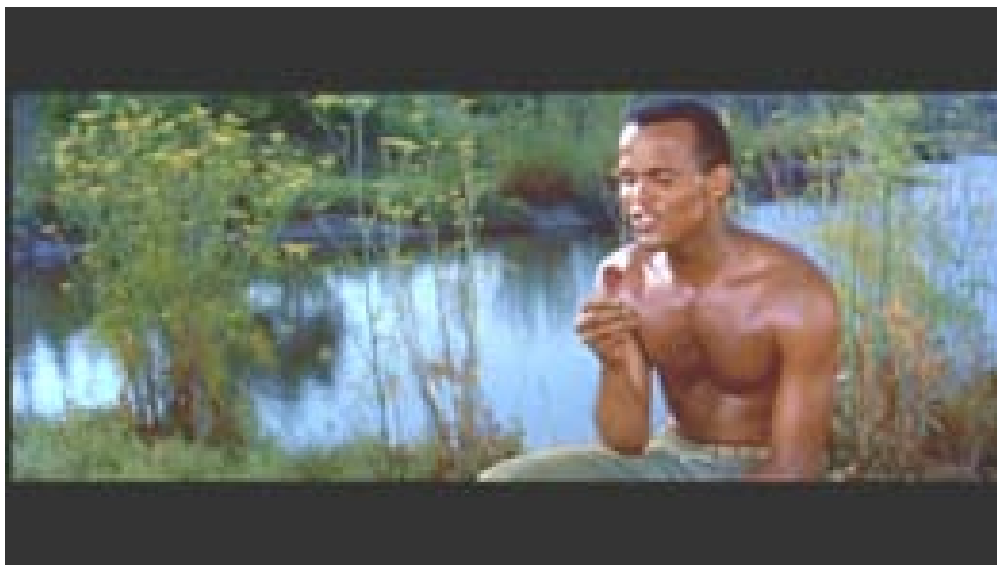


Fig.27

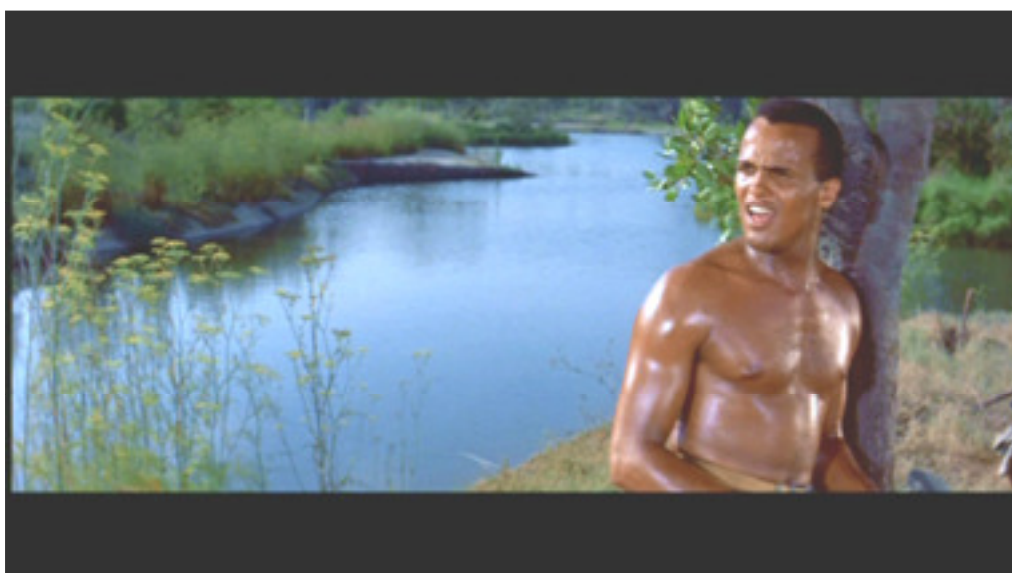


Fig.28

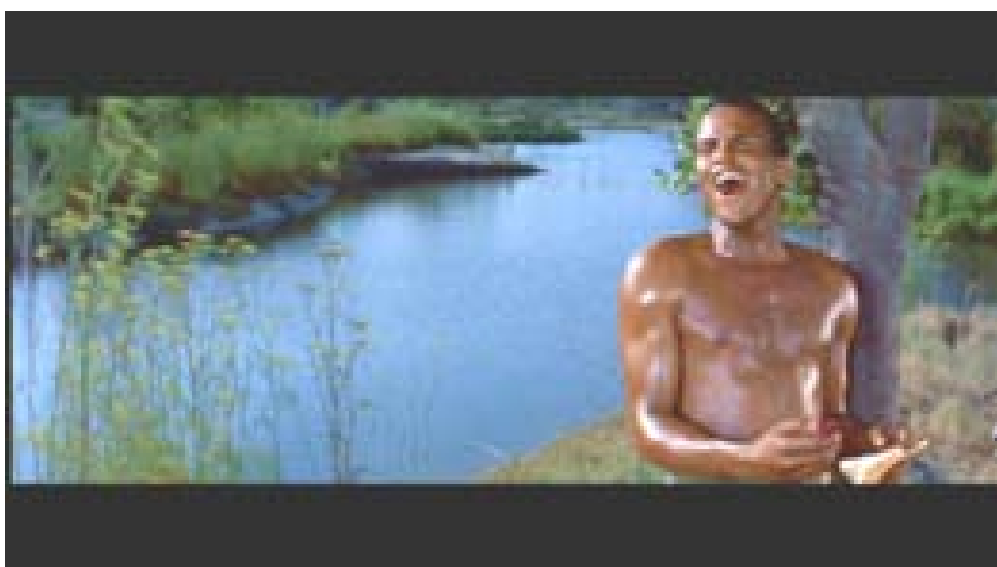


Fig.29

In this scene, the audience is required to make a connotative reading of his passion through the song he is singing, which expresses his frustration at being separated from Carmen Jones in Figures 27, 28 and 29. The rose and the love letter that she sent inflame his passion. The denotation and the connotation work to imply his excitement, particularly as he continues to sing and his body becomes more expressive. What this scene and most of the film lacks are Joe and Carmen together sharing moments that fulfil and complete their passion. In the post-classical era this changed.

Fred Williamson, Richard Roundtree, Jim Brown and a number of athletes came to Blaxploitation as Black men as erotic spectacle, which thrilled the audience because they had almost no interest in seeing Sidney Poitier as a lover. They wanted new and younger men conscious of the Black activist issues and the objectives of Black liberation. This consciousness was not always evident with the characters but it was often embodied by the actors speaking in defence of their films, as Ron O'Neal had to do in 1972 when *Super Fly* was critically attacked as morally reprehensible by the NAACP.<sup>273</sup> Other stars and directors also expressed their political and personal views as African-Americans striving to contest or change the myth of the pathological phallic 'black', or the evil black shadow archetype that Hollywood's hegemonic authorship projected onto the Black body.

A Black audience wanted heroes who were committed to uplifting Black male identity and celebrating Black male sexuality. Richard Roundtree and Fred Williamson fulfilled that role in their films. They demonstrated Black sexual power very much in line with James Bond. The publicity for *Shaft* tagged the character as a Black James Bond, and this displaced the sight of the penis onto the symbolic presence of the narcissistic and aggressive charm of the Black antihero.

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<sup>273</sup> *BadAsssss Cinema*, (Isaac Julien, UK/USA, 2002), <http://www.isaacjulien.com/films/bac>



Fig.30 Fred Williamson and Gloria Hendry in *Black Caesar* (1973)

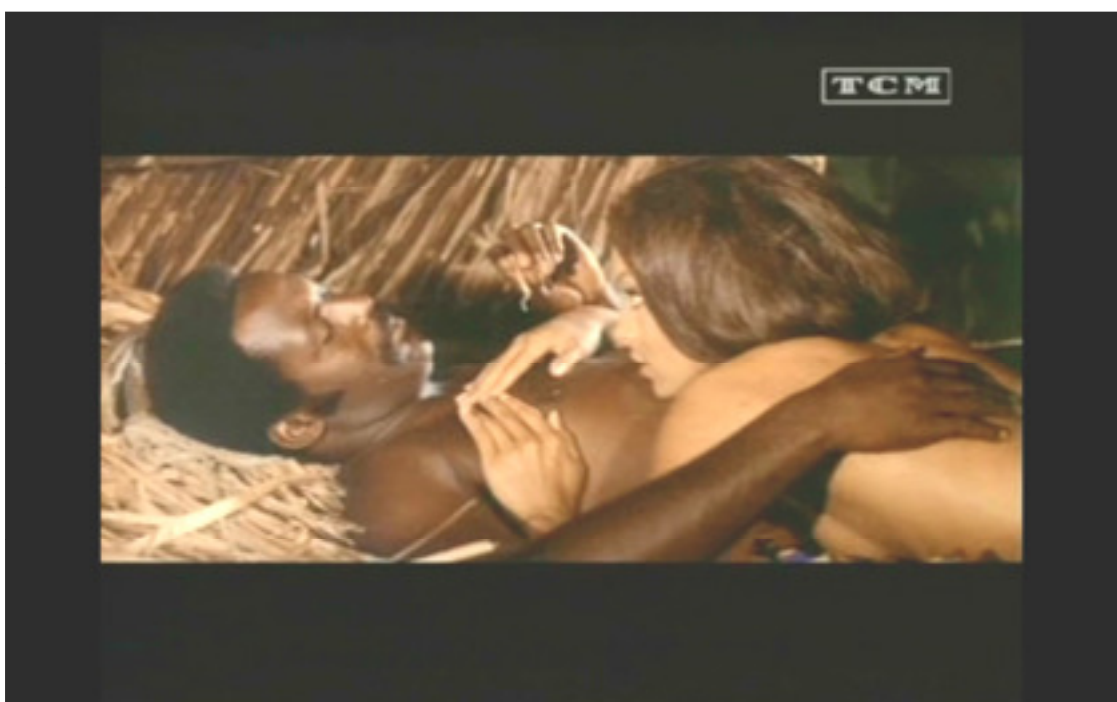


Fig.31 Richard Roundtree in *Shaft in Africa* (1973)

Today, the continuation of the myth of the phallic Black male arguably results in a convergence of hegemonic ideals of power and dominance, and an overemphasis of the penis as a visual signification of sexual power and size as a symbol of abundance. That is to say, "the more you have, the more you've got". In a capitalist system of personal accumulation, quantity represents substance. Therefore, the value placed on the sexual/reproductive organ often represents the perceived notion of power one man has over another.

Under these circumstances, the reiterated stories of Black men's sexual anatomy are diachronically told across volumes of written, spoken and visual texts, and the synchronic mytheme infers that the gross Black penis is demonic, bestial and savage. Post-classical cinema recycles these myths through hegemonic authorship and they serve at least two aims: by classifying the Black penis as gross, they establish the non-White sexual anatomy as normal and safeguard the Ego persona; furthermore, by stigmatising the Black body as subhuman, they determine that its reproductive and sexual function is degenerate.

In film, all of this translates as a body that lacks an emotional dimension of worldly love and spiritual transcendence, which is why the omission of specific rituals in the rites of passage is so damaging to the psychological identity and cultural civilisation of the characters. Van Peebles's *Sweetback* arguably falls into this trap but he does not become a 'savage'; instead, he can be read as an alienated body in search of a Black alliance and masculine identity, signified by self-determination and building a life to open up the possibility of legitimate employment, a home, a wife and children, and socio-political empowerment.

The myth of the savage Black body and the sight of the large Black penis operate through a paradoxical state of mind: even if Black men do have larger

penises – and there is no medical or genetic proof that they do – the irrational mind depicting the Black penis as ‘larger than life’ would always psychologically and symbolically suggest it is more than it is, ranging from a perception of it as supernatural to phenomenal. Hollywood and post-classical cinema have persisted in perpetuating these ideas.

I began by positioning the Jungian Ego persona and its shadow and said that Hollywood’s hegemonic authorship projects all that it cannot accept about the idolised Ego persona onto a shadow figure. This can manifest as a symbolic monstrous other, thus dramatising a struggle between the persona and shadow that Jung explains as a handsome hero and his dark shadow, as exemplified in Dorian Gray. It can also manifest as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Oscar Wilde and Robert Louis Stevenson use these characters to expose the struggle between good and evil, moral Christian decency and inner sexual drives and urges that both tempt and destroy men. Cinema has explored both works and the multifarious themes of repression, transgression and sexual abandon that relate to archetypes.

Post-classical cinema has shown that archetypes in the collective unconscious fuel the imagination of their hegemonic authors and what they demonstrate on an unconscious level is that the Black male is not a heroic archetype with which they are culturally or ideologically familiar. Consequently, American cinema has not chosen to depict or explain the heroic Black male figure of Saint Maurice<sup>274</sup> in European theology.

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<sup>274</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, (1913), St Maurice, leader of the Theban Legion, massacred at Agaunum, about 287, by order of Maximian Herculius. Feast, 22 Sept. The legend (Acta SS., VI, Sept., 308, 895) relates that the legion, composed entirely of Christians, had been called from Africa to suppress a revolt of the Bagandæ in Gaul. The soldiers were ordered to sacrifice to the gods in thanksgiving but refused. Every tenth man was then killed. Another order to sacrifice and another refusal caused a second decimation and then a general massacre. (On the value of the legend, etc., see *Agaunum* and *Theban Legion*.) St Maurice is represented as a knight in full armour (sometimes as a Moor), bearing a standard and a palm; in Italian paintings with a red cross on his breast, which is the badge of the Sardinian Order of St Maurice. Many places in Switzerland, Piedmont, France, and Germany have chosen him as celestial patron, as have also dyers, clothmakers, soldiers, swordsmiths and others. He is invoked against gout, cramps, etc.

By focusing chiefly on European and American white myths about heroism and 'normality', it positions anything outside that focus as 'Other'. Paradoxical anomalies do occur, however, when images of heroism involving Black people are shown as Christian and pious. The archetypes in the collective unconscious discussed by Jung are not simply images of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses in mythology, nor Christian figures and all White heroes and Black villains. The human psyche in its stages of life translates Whiteness into myths about purity and blackness. David Goldenberg cites this in his research on religion and racism.

White is the symbol of Divinity or God,  
 Black is the symbol of the evil spirit or damnation,  
 White is the symbol of light...  
 Black is the symbol of darkness and darkness expresses all evils  
 Whiteness is the emblem of harmony;  
 Blackness is the emblem of chaos,  
 White signifies supreme beauty,  
 Black ugliness,  
 White signifies perfection;  
 Black signifies vice,  
 White is the symbol of innocence;  
 Black, that of guilt, sin, and moral degradation.  
 White, as positive color, indicates happiness;  
 Black, a negative color, indicates misfortune.  
 The battle between good and evil is symbolically expressed by the  
 opposition of white and black.<sup>275</sup>

Hollywood prefers to use these binary oppositions not only to commodify the narrative and visual codes but also to 'naturalise' Whiteness into the widely accepted myth in the collective conscious and the Christian capitalist unconscious.

When we look at Black sexual politics, pan-Africanism, Afrocentricity, and Black critical discourse several things become evident. William DuBois and Cornel West at the beginning and end of the twentieth century, and Patricia Hill Collins and Ronald

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<sup>275</sup> Op cit, Goldenberg, David, (2003), *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, p2, source cited in William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Responses to Blacks, 1530-1880*, (Bloomington Ind., 1980) p122



Jackson at the start of the twenty-first century, show that American White supremacists and the widely-accepted myth they employ to frame White American society are not conducive to the humanity and liberty of African-Americans. An intersection can be discerned: first, the racist fantasy of White supremacists based on their bigoted and prejudiced notions about Black folks; second, Hollywood recycling of those attitudes through the unconscious projection of shadow figures; finally, through the conscious invention of diachronic and synchronic myths in its visual texts, many African-Americans have steadfastly rejected those myths and values because White supremacy and shadow projection pathologise Black people's humanity. Additionally, the phallic monster dehumanises the psychological development of the sexual identity of Black men and their construction of a progressive masculinity that rejects hegemonic lore and heterosexist laws.

Van Peebles did not explore Black inclusive sexual politics, as championed by current "progressive masculinity" aims, in *Sweetback's Song* because the film is informed by the Black nationalist and liberation concerns of its time. What is important today is that a high percentage of Black men are conscious of their history and of the sexual politics of Blacks, as documented in DVD commentaries in which the choices in making films for a racially conscious public are discussed. This is also made clear in the commentaries by Norman Jewison on the DVD of *A Soldier's Story*, Michel Mann on the *Collateral* DVD, and Rodney Evans on the *Brother to Brother* DVD. Each of these filmmakers has drawn on debates in cultural theory, sexual politics, and Black identity discourse; all are aware of the myth of the 'savage body' and the Black male perceived as a beast. What they have shown is their rejection of, contestation of and anger towards the way a majority of Hollywood films continue to portray 'blacks' in a

world that has evolved to the point where Barack Obama is the first Black president of the USA.

In conclusion, post-classical cinema has built on the legacy of classical narrative film that deploys *mise-en-scène* visually to construct identities of characters, their psychological motives, their goals and their ideological class position and power in American society. To accomplish this character formation it employs a system of widely-held myths. If we divide them into the two areas of the personal and collective unconscious on the one hand and diachronic and synchronic myths on the other, we can discern that the 'savage body' is an idea rather than a fact. This idea is multifaceted and manifests a myriad of monstrous figures.

Since the first contact with Black people of African ancestry, White supremacist empire builders have chosen to portray the Black body as primitive and inferior. Post-classical film has translated those ideological myths and racist fantasies into countless films. Sometimes independent filmmakers reject the myth and strive to oppose it, ignore it, or deconstruct it. In our culture and society, however, we cannot deny that the myth of a Black 'savage body' exists. The myth of the 'savage body' exists as an anthropological narrative and metaphor that is evidenced by America's slave trade and enslavement, their plantocracy, and the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* supreme court ruling that inaugurated segregation and the system of Black disempowerment, enacted to assert that Blacks are inferior to Whites. Historically, Hollywood normalised these ideas through hegemonic authorship by feeding back the myth of the 'savage body' through a narratology of an obtuse, criminal, sexual predator that caricatures 'blacks'.

Furthermore, what persists with profound effect on the myth of the phallic pathology of Black men is that Hollywood is premised on narrative fiction; it is therefore not bound by laws of authenticity or evidence. The verisimilitude of narrative fiction allows post-classical film full artistic licence to invent realism, not reality, depending on the cultural climate and political ideology of the times, and Black characters can encompass all the anxieties of the author and cultural imperialism. Consequently, these ideas are used to indoctrinate a global audience with myths about race, gender, sexuality and the innate nature of a people.

The gross penis and phallic body myth, along with the Jungian archetypal evil enemy, is a way of determining 'blacks'. It lacks any rational evidence concerning the emotional and spiritual construction of the intellectual and sexual identities of Black people. Post-classical cinema seldom chooses to explore the sexual identities of Black people from an Afrocentric or diasporan-African perspective that reclaims the link to homeland and customs, as discussed by Molefi Kete Asante<sup>276</sup> and Haki Madhubuti.<sup>277</sup> Consequently, European/American hegemonic culture imagines Blacks through a Western perspective and consequently it fails to consider how Black people maintain their African spirit and Afro-sexual customs. Consequently, White supremacist ideology maintains a primitive understanding of Black identities.

Therefore, although the shadow ostensibly constructs our flawed self, we have to consider our conscious desire to be imperfect, pagan and free. The 'savage body' myth associates Blacks with sexual depravity and heathenism but it also indicates a guilt-ridden wish to reclaim a body unburdened from original sin that practises pagan spiritual worship freely, as witnessed in Africa. In terms of

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<sup>276</sup> Asante, Molefi Kete, (1989), *Afrocentricity*, African World Press, USA, pp40-41

<sup>277</sup> Op cit, Madhubuti, Haki, (1990), *Black Men; Obsolete Single, Dangerous? African American Family in Transition*, pp78-79

conscious capitalist hegemonic masculinity, the large penis symbolises imperfect pagan freedom. The imperfect element I read as the dialectic between Christian capitalist control and spiritual tribalism juxtaposed with a hunter-gatherer autonomy. Thus, the 'savage body' myth reminds conscious humankind what has been lost.

## CHAPTER FOUR- A SOLDIER'S STORY: THE MYTH OF THE SAVAGE MIND

In this chapter, I will define the myth of the 'savage mind' in two ways. First, Africans who became Americans have a specific understanding of their identities as Black people in America because of the history of their enslavement and the psychological oppression inflicted on them. This is exemplified through the myth and the assertion that 'blacks' who retain African physical and psychological traits are savage by nature; however, those who aspire to White physiognomy and psychological characteristics, such as stoic rationalism, transcend their savage nature. The second definition concerns the idea in White supremacist ideology that people of African heritage do not possess cognitive thinking or sophisticated ideas about civilisation because they come from a region considered undivided and without a culture. Consequently, unlike European Americans, they are considered inferior because they allegedly lack a philosophical, political, economic and cultural understanding of life.

Joseph L. White, Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, and James H. Cones, Clinical Services Director and Professor of Psychology and African-American Studies, provide insightful research in *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*. Through their historical and social studies of post-emancipation trauma in Black men in the USA, they clearly explain the experience that many Black men have undergone.

To contest the notion of African-American 'savage minds' – that is to say, what is contained in the psyche is of no cultural, ideological, spiritual, or philosophical merit because it lacks Western comparative value – I will include William DuBois's explanation of "double consciousness".<sup>278</sup> Additionally, the agenda

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<sup>278</sup> Sundquist, Eric J. (1996), *W.E.B. DuBois Reader*, Oxford University Press, USA, p102

of Marcus Garvey's 'Universal Negro Improvement Association'<sup>279</sup> and the Black Panther Party's 'Ten Point Programme' exemplify the psychological, ideological, and socio-political aims and objectives that evidence Black consciousness at the start of the twentieth century and later informed Black activism and revolutionary thought.<sup>280</sup> This refutes the myth of the obtuse nature of Africans and it evidences Black unity, class-consciousness and specific interpretations of a Negro caste system. White America has historically treated light-skinned and dark-skinned Black people differently, even though America never classified light-skinned Blacks as White. This differentiation has, however, resulted in certain African-Americans regarding themselves as superior to other Black folk on the basis of their physical features, which have been deemed more attractive than Negroid features.

In *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, Joel Kovel provides extremely useful theorisation and study on the treatment of Black people by White America, especially regarding the erroneous perceptions maintained by "dominative" and "aversive" racists. He says former Southern slave masters who controlled the lives of Black people exemplify the dominative character, and most White Americans from the Northern states have ghettoised Blacks, which demonstrates their aversion to mixing with 'blacks' as they have imagined them.<sup>281</sup> This aversion was manifest in the segregation system which operated from 1896 until 1964, when the Civil Rights Act made it unlawful to continue such practices. During WWII, the American armed forces were segregated and this had a deep impact on the psychology and masculinity of African-American men, who were keen to prove themselves equal to White Americans. Charles Fuller's 1981 Pulitzer Prize-winning off-Broadway drama

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<sup>279</sup> White, John, (1985), *Black Leadership in America 1895-1968*, Longman, UK, p76

<sup>280</sup> Boyd, Herb, (1995), *Black Panthers For Beginners*, Writers and Readers, UK, p130

<sup>281</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, (1988), *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, p35

*A Soldier's Play* explores how segregation and inculcated racism affect Blacks. Fuller served in WWII and, as a Black man with a personal and collective Black experience of the racist attitudes of White America, he focused on the psychological damage that internalised racism has on Black men. Fuller's script for *A Soldier's Story* (Norman Jewison, 1984) examines inculcated racism from an African-American point of view through the perceptions the central characters have of themselves.

What is particularly distinctive about the film is that it explores how the loss of faith in White American cultural ideology and its imagined truth destroys the lives of Sergeant Waters, the antagonist, and leads to suicide and murder. Additionally, the premise of the 'savage mind', which is perceived as the inability of Blacks to be civilised according to Western standards of culture, disavows African civilisation and how Black Americans have transformed their cultural heritage into African-American expressivity in the USA. I will address these issues by considering Frantz Fanon's explanation in 'The Fact of Blackness' of how Blacks understand themselves when they are judged as the savage and uncivilised 'Other'. Gladstone Yearwood's theories on how to translate Black subjectivity in cinematic terms to disclaim Hollywood's White patriarchal narrative also underline resistance to dominant modes of production and spectatorship.

Norman Jewison is a White Canadian director of mainstream and independent film. His *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968), *A Soldier's Story* (1984), and *The Hurricane* (1999) have all deployed anti-traditional narrative strategies and visual styles that show how to overturn racial stereotypes and culturally politicise Black identity. In *Racism*, Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown offer a very clear reading of racism and how it serves to divide and

rule in a capitalist society. I shall use their research to underline how the military-industrial complex has deployed racism to sustain the power system of the status quo, particularly during WWII, the setting of *A Soldier's Story*. I will also use a range of essays by Thomas Cripps, Ed Guerrero, Jim Pines, Jane Gains and Donald Bogle to explain how African-American cultural thought is expressed in film.

The aim of this chapter is to show that the myth in American culture of the 'savage mind' of Blacks is linked with seventeenth-century and colonial ideas of the inferiority of Blacks, and that these notions have been internalised by Whites and used to brainwash people of African descent. I contest that internalised racism underpins Othello's psyche, and that mytheme has been replayed in countless dramas since the early seventeenth century.

*A Soldier's Story* has the distinction of looking at internalised racism from a Black rather than a White perspective and it provides an effective way of criticising films that covertly use the theme of inculcated racism to substantiate the myth of Black males as beasts through diachronic stories and synchronic mythemes. I want to begin the chapter by establishing that race is not just fixed by the idea of the savage mind or body as it has been for hundreds of years. Stuart Hall suggests that a much more interwoven and polysemic process is at work regarding classification of racial identity as inscribed in Western society. Mapping out Hall's argument will allow for a historical and cultural account of the irrational and contradictory ideas that racists have put forward. It will also open up a space to examine how Black people understand each other.



#### 4.1: *A Soldier's Story* (Norman Jewison, 1984, USA) Synopsis

Inculcated racial inferiority and the destruction of the identities of Black men through the myth of the 'savage mind' in the American consciousness constitute the synchronic mytheme of the story. The film opens in 1944. Sergeant Waters is killed by an unseen assassin. At the barracks of a Black regiment in the Deep South, Captain Taylor, a White officer, informs the Black soldiers that Waters has been murdered and he confines them to base to prevent them taking revenge against the racist townsfolk or the Ku Klux Klan.

A month later, Captain Davenport, a Black officer, is sent to investigate the murder. When he meets Colonel Nivens he is treated as an inferior and told that the death of a Negro is unimportant. When he meets Captain Taylor, the officer responsible for Black soldiers, Taylor is stunned because Davenport is an intelligent and proud Black man. Taylor flaunts his West Point military background but Davenport is a qualified lawyer who has the same rank, so he demands Taylor's full co-operation.

Davenport begins the investigation and learns that two White officers were questioned in connection with the killing. In the first of seven flashbacks, Davenport discovers that Sergeant Waters reprimanded Sergeant Wilkie for being drunk on guard duty and he demoted him. Sergeant Waters also pretended to admire Private C.J. Memphis, a strapping, simple country and Blues man, but he actually disliked Blacks who personified 'Negro behaviour'. As a mulatto, Waters believed Southern Black folk were savage and intellectually inferior to him.

In the second flashback, Private Peterson tells Davenport he disliked Waters because of his persecution of C.J. and his tyrannical treatment of other Black men, including himself. Davenport learns that Black soldiers were used to win baseball

games; they were so good Captain Taylor believed they could defeat the New York Yankees. C.J. was a star player who helped the team to win a key game. After that game, the men were celebrating as Waters entered the barracks and racially insulted them, telling C.J. he was an ignorant Coon. Peterson reminded Waters he was *not* White and their argument led to a fight in which Waters beat up Peterson. Taylor tells Davenport he has requested that Davenport be relieved of the investigation and Davenport tells him he knows about the White officers and threatens to arrest him unless he co-operates.

In the third flashback, Waters refuses to take orders from Whites any longer because he is full of self-hatred. He snarls and scares a Lieutenant, refusing to play the obsequious Negro, so the Lieutenant beats him up and then pulls a gun on him. Captain Davenport confronts Colonel Nivens with these facts and threatens to leak the story, whereupon he is given grudging permission to cross-examine the White officers.

Davenport questions another Black soldier and discovers Sergeant Waters falsely accused C.J. of murder, and a gun is found under C.J.'s bed. Afraid of the consequences, C.J. strikes Waters and he is arrested. Peterson is disgusted with Waters's racist and deferential conduct, so he goes to speak in defence of C.J.

Davenport has further suspicions about the murder and through several other cross-examinations learns that Waters accused C.J. of murder to provoke his assault on him, a superior officer, for which C.J. was locked up pending charges. Waters plotted this because he *believed* inferior Blacks, like unsophisticated C.J., confirm to White people that Blacks have savage minds. Distraught, C.J. hangs himself, and Peterson kills Waters to avenge C.J.'s death and as retribution on

behalf of the entire company of Black soldiers assaulted and insulted by Waters's racist tyranny.

Captain Davenport prepares to leave after bringing the men to justice, but the pain of racial hatred weighs heavily on him. Captain Taylor commends him and says he will have to get used to Black men in equal positions in society. Captain Davenport tells him he *will* have to get used to it.

#### 4.2: *A Soldier's Story* Contexts

The story and plot of this film resonate with the history of the enslavement of Africans in America and the racist indoctrination that started in 1619, when slave ships brought Africans to Jamestown in Virginia. Joseph L. White and James H. Cones insist that African-Americans cannot be understood without reference to their experience of enslavement and their post-emancipation trauma when the Supreme Court endorsed segregation and the unwritten Jim Crow laws subjugated the majority of Black people.

The myth of the African 'savage mind' can be explained effectively if we reverse the notion of objective truth and facts and overturn what European American religion, anthropology and science have provided as evidence for the lack of civilisation among Blacks. This approach is the basis for the research by White and Cones on the psychological identity of African-American men. They argue that America during the enslavement period refused to acknowledge the history and culture that existed in Africa during the pre-colonial age.<sup>282</sup> The basis for their analysis of the Black male psyche is that men of African heritage retain, in what Jung defines as the personal unconscious, forgotten memories of their former African kinfolk, bequeathed to them through both the African oral tradition of former slaves<sup>283</sup> and written US folklore. The latter comprises allegories and parables expressing the African spirit and the soul of Black Americans. According to John Blessingame<sup>284</sup> and Harold Courlander, the documented realist conditions of the antebellum period and the stories from that era of the trickster hero Brer Rabbit

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<sup>282</sup> White, Joseph L. & Cones, James H., (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing the Future*, Routledge, UK, pp118-19

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p21

<sup>284</sup> Op cit, Blessingame, John W., (1979), *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, p127

represented the intelligence and wit of African-Americans despite White oppression and brutality.<sup>285</sup>

White and Cones reject the White European-American idea of the savage mind of the African and Black American.<sup>286</sup> They argue that the reading and inscription of enslaved Africans is endorsed by “The traditional psychological view of Black male slavery, advanced by Ulrich Phillips, Stanley Elkins, and Orlando Patterson, [which] revolves around two interrelated psychosocial themes: the overwhelming power of the slave master and the influence of social conditioning”.<sup>287</sup> In Stanley Elkins’s book *Slavery* (1968), he argues that the slave master totally dominated all aspects of the lives and thoughts of Black males, which instilled a sense of powerlessness, inferiority and failed masculinity. Orlando Patterson agrees with Elkins and states that after years of conditioning, the Black came to believe in his innate inferiority and the superiority of his master. This historical process of institutional racism often resulted in the Black man internalising a dehumanised perception of his humanity.

This view of the childlike male slave who lacks discipline, self-assertiveness, and the ability to think logically necessary to take on the expected male role would become the basis for the twentieth-century deficit/deficiency psychological theories designed to explain Black male social pathology... The social pathology stereotype, or the deficit/deficiency model of Black male behaviour, is an observation created by White males from their perspective that is passed off as objective.<sup>288</sup>

White and Cones position their argument on the cultural differences between men of European-American and African heritage. They argue that African culture

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<sup>285</sup> Courlander, Harold, (1976), *A Treasure of Afro-American Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Recollections, Legends, Tales, Songs, Religious Beliefs, Customs, Saying and Humour of People of African Descent in the Americas*, Crown Publishers USA, pp466-467

<sup>286</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph L. & Cones, James H., (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, p32

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p24

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, p16

was not built on capitalist domination and exploitation of human and natural resources, nor were the rites of passage of Africans towards the fulfilment of masculinity based on continual competition and domination, as they are in Western culture. Clyde W. Franklin concurs with this view.<sup>289</sup> White and Cones explain that harmony with nature and the community typified African pre-colonial agrarian life, which is confirmed by Clyde W. Ford's studies of the spiritual history of Africans.<sup>290</sup> White and Cones reject the idea of the total submission of Blacks to Whites and discuss several resistance strategies implemented by Blacks in times of both slavery and freedom.

In *A Soldier's Story*, resistance to White authority lies in small acts of rebellion, such as deliberately losing the baseball game that would have brought merit to the White officers rather than the Black soldiers. On a more profound level, rooted in the collective conscious of the Black soldiers is contempt for the bigotry of White officers since they are suffering the indignity of being perceived as intellectually and socially inferior; however, they refuse to capitulate to the prejudice that defines them as mentally and physically savage.

In White and Cones's social examination of Black masculinity and African-American cultural identities, they posit a viable construction of Black manhood based on Afrocentric psychology. They define it as "an African-American way of being". This social and historical approach to Black identity politics takes into account indigenous African traditions of community relations that mapped a rite of passage for African males and created their identities as African men. Janet Mancini Billson offers a stark contrast to this point of view in her thirty-year study of five African-American boys from

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<sup>289</sup> Op cit, Clyde W. Franklin II "Ain't I a Man": The Efficiency of Black Masculinities for Men's Studies in the 1990s, p273 in Majors, Richard G & Gordon, Jacob U. eds, (1994), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*, Nelson-Hall, USA

<sup>290</sup> Ford, Clyde W., (1999), *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*, Bantam, USA, pp174-175

teens to manhood.<sup>291</sup> She documents their debilitating lives; they lack a sense of their African heritage to draw on in order to survive. The boys' powerlessness is exacerbated by their alienation as Black men who are unsupported by education, employment and housing policies. The five inner city Black boys have no philosophical or cultural knowledge of Afrocentricity, and as a result they lack a historical understanding of their prospects for success as freeborn Black men.

Many of the social studies of Blacks by various scholars to whom White and Cones refer relate to Jung's idea of the stages of life and I will discuss this as I unpack the text of the film, but I want first to show that White and Cones reject the myth of the 'savage mind' since they are influenced by William DuBois and Marcus Garvey. Because of the social impact of DuBois and Garvey at the start of the twentieth century, White and Cones put forward considerable evidence to substantiate new African-American psychology, that is to say, how a Black collective consciousness and the personal unconscious influence the Black psyche, and the ways skin colour constructs their identities. This discussion will aid the textual analysis of the film and explain the psychological trauma experienced by the characters.

In *A Soldier's Story*, all of the Black characters are conscious of the duality of Black and White perceptions of African-American humanity. They are acutely aware that White officers psychologically know next to nothing about them because the history of Jim Crow racism has kept the two races apart through institutional racism and personal prejudice. They also know that as Black men, their history of enslavement unites them whether they like it or not. This unity historically extends from the divide of the light-skinned who worked in the master's

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<sup>291</sup> Mancini Billson, Janet, (1996), *Pathways to Manhood: Young Males' Struggles for Identity*, Transaction Publishers, USA, pp251-252

house to the dark-skinned Black slaves who worked in the plantation fields. Although it historically affected the lives of slaves on the grounds of skin colour, the slaves and freed enslaved Blacks after 1896 learned that regardless of how they understood their humanity, White supremacist American ideology read or inscribed them as various savage types and essentially as inferior to civilised and intellectual White Christians. In the *Souls of Black Folk*, William E. B. DuBois wrote

[...] the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts...two warring ideals in one dark body... The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.<sup>292</sup>

In *A Soldier's Story*, Captain Davenport and all of the Black soldiers are keenly aware of "double consciousness" because their intelligence and their humanity are constantly in question owing to the army's institutional segregation laws and the officers' treatment of Black men, whether they are light- or dark-skinned. As a Mulatto, Waters has historically internalised the myth of the 'savage mind': he reads everything Private C.J. Memphis does as savage and mentally inferior. For example after Captain Taylor rhetorically asks C.J. how he caught the baseball out of the sky and C.J. tells Taylor he has bird blood, Sergeant Waters ridicules C.J.'s reply as shown in the screenshots overleaf.

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<sup>292</sup> Sundquist, Eric J. ed, (1996), *The Oxford W.E.B. Du Bois Reader*, Oxford University Press, UK, p102, Chapter 2, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (1903)





Fig.32



Fig.33



Fig.34



Fig.35



Fig.36



Fig.37

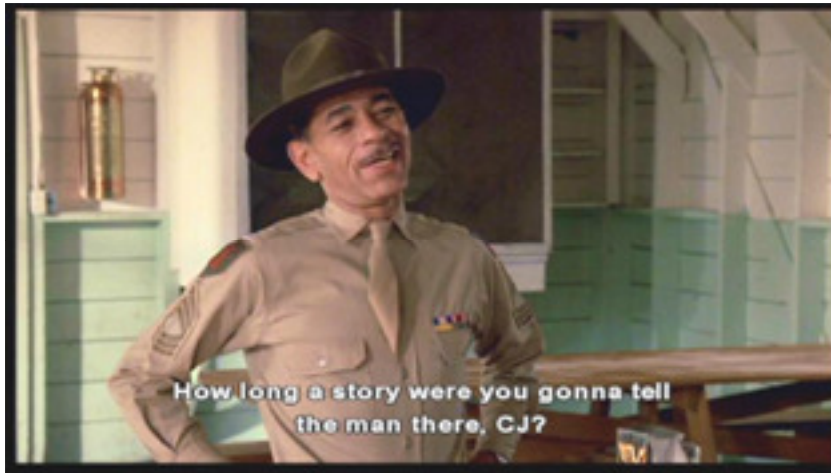


Fig.38



Fig.39



Fig.40

Throughout this sequence, Sergeant Waters is confined in the frame alone and even though he dominates the scenes with other Black soldiers he is depicted as more of a tyrant than a powerful man who commands respect from his men. When we take into consideration the myth of the savage mind, it is paradoxical that the superior

soldier appears to be without the rational judgement and compassion of his Black 'brothers in arms' during WWII when all of the men were subjected to racial discrimination. What is particularly relevant to this study is that Sergeant Waters has the same malevolent inculcated racism that characterises Iago. He is irrational and his motives to destroy C.J Memphis echo Iago's resentment of his low rank and Othello's strength, charm, trust by fellow soldiers and his appeal to the high-ranking leaders of the military.

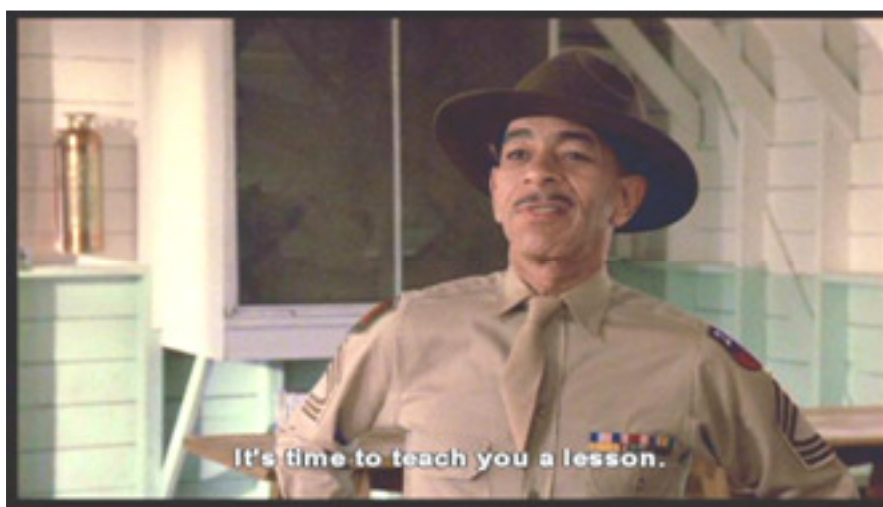


Fig.41

Sergeant Waters's social frame of reference points towards his consciousness of Marcus Garvey's 'Universal Negro Improvement Association' (UNIA).<sup>293</sup> In the first flashback, Sergeant Waters rebukes Sergeant Wilkie when he points out that Black Americans do not have equal opportunities or the chances that America extends to White people; Waters tells him that did not stop his father and his family from gaining a better education than their forefathers had or from using their intelligence to improve their lives. The irony throughout the sequence is that, although the eight-point objectives of the UNIA are a part of Sergeant Waters's bid for upward mobility, he equates success with White hegemonic power rather than Black humanist dignity because as a Mulatto

<sup>293</sup> White, John, (1985), *Black Leadership in America, 1895-1968*, Longman, UK, chapter 5 Marcus Garvey (1880-1940), The Ghetto Messiah, "On 1 August 1914, he established the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and the African Communities League- the UNIA." pp76-77

he inherits the dialectic of being an outsider: as a light-skinned 'black' he is rejected by Whites and out of place with Blacks.

White and Cones, along with Clyde Ford, an African-American psychologist and Professor of African Myth Studies, argue that Black Americans learn White America denies them the rights of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>294</sup> Therefore, Black men are compelled to reclaim their African heritage and rebuild their life on African traditions of community and social responsibility as husband, father and warrior.<sup>295</sup> White and Cones, as well as Clyde Ford, explain how ancient African myth concerning customs and traditions can be translated into the everyday life of Blacks as experienced in the USA. This is demonstrated in the conflation of White hegemonic values with Afrocentric ideals in the eight-point platform of the UNIA:

1. To champion Negro nationhood by redemption of Africa
2. To make the Negro Race conscious
3. To breathe ideals of manhood and womanhood into every Negro
4. To advocate self-determination
5. To make the Negro world-conscious
6. To print all the news that will be interesting and instructive to the Negro
7. To instil racial self-help
8. To inspire racial love and self-respect<sup>296</sup>

Ideas and ambitions of this kind rebut the myth of a 'savage mind' because the agenda of the UNIA is perceptive, forward planning, as well as culturally and socially inclusive in its aims. White and Cones address each of these concerns<sup>297</sup> outside the historical period<sup>298</sup> of the UNIA and juxtapose it with the three other movements that evidence the intellect, artistry and humanity of the intelligence and spirituality of African-Americans.

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<sup>294</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph L. & Cones, James H., (1999), *Black Men Emerging*, pp44-45

<sup>295</sup> Ford, Clyde W, (2000), *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*, Bantam Books, USA, p28 and pp33-34

<sup>296</sup> Op cit, White, John, (1985), *Black Leadership in America, 1895-1968*, Longman, UK, p76

<sup>297</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph L. & Cones, James H., (1999), *Black Men Emerging*, pp26-28

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, pp61-63 and chapter 3 'An Opposing View: The Black Construction of Social Reality' pp47-64

They source the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and the Black power movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In all of these movements, the political agenda for each pressure group pointed toward their intellect and humanity, as evidenced in the ten-point programme of the Black Panther Party:

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community
2. We want full employment for our people
3. We want an end to the robbery by the White man of our Black Community
4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings
5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present-day
6. We want all black men to be exempt from military service
7. We want an immediate end to police brutality and murder of black people
8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails
9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the USA
10. We want land, bread, housing, education, dothing, justice and peace<sup>299</sup>

Jules Archer, in *They Had a Dream: The Civil Rights Struggle from Frederick Douglas to Marcus Garvey to Martin Luther King and Malcolm X*, considers the Black activist and Black consciousness objectives to be clear signs of the struggle by African-Americans to elevate themselves above the White supremacist myths of savagery.<sup>300</sup> Additionally, tangible examples of the intelligence of African-Americans is evidenced in the Harlem Renaissance, with writers such as James Weldon Johnson, A. Phillip Randolph, and Countee Cullen expressing their existential Black experience. Furthermore, in his essay 'Looking for Modernism' Henry Louis Gates Jr. makes it clear

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<sup>299</sup> Boyd, Herb, (1995), *Black Panthers For Beginners*, Writers and Readers, UK, p130

<sup>300</sup> Archer, Jules, (1992), *They Had a Dream: The Civil Rights Struggle from Frederick Douglas to Marcus Garvey to Martin Luther King and Malcolm X*, Viking Press, USA, p226



that Black people across the diaspora do not share a homogeneous identity of Blackness or a singular unified psychology.<sup>301</sup> Louis Gordon's explanation of Black philosophy also demonstrates Black intellectual cognition and erudition, which contests the myth of a savage mind.<sup>302</sup>

Film theorists such as Manthia Diawara, Gladstone Yearwood, Ed Guerrero, and Thomas Cripps have argued throughout their body of work that many American narrative films fail to examine the psychology and historical identity of Black characters. This is chiefly because post-classical American cinema has absorbed White America's claim to supremacy and their films have replayed that ideology to their global audience, thereby essentialising the inferiority of 'blacks'.<sup>303</sup>

In Molefi Kete Asante's *100 Greatest African-Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, he makes it clear that the historical and contemporary significance of all the entrants form a continuum of Black critical thought from Frederick Douglas, Alan Locke and Ira Aldridge,<sup>304</sup> who rose to fame as a Black Shakespearean actor playing Othello, to Marcus Garvey and James Weldon Johnson. He does not debate whether Blacks possess cognition or intellectual thought; he and John Hope Franklin believe it to be self-evident.<sup>305</sup> Thus, Jung's rites-of-passage account of the evolution of a civilisation is paralleled in White and Cones's explanation of the historical convergence of African-American epistemology in their stages of life.<sup>306</sup>

Black epistemology is the knowledge many diaspora subjects gain through their survival and experience of segregation according to R. Sentwali Bakari:

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<sup>301</sup> Henry Lois Gates 'Looking For Modernism' in Manthia, Diawara, ed, (1993) *Black American Cinema*, pp200-201

<sup>302</sup> Gordon, Lewis R. ed, (1997) *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, Routledge, UK, p4-5

<sup>303</sup> Op cit, Cripps, Thomas, (1977), *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film 1900-1942*, pp97-98

<sup>304</sup> Asante, Molefi Kete, (2003), *100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, Prometheus Books USA, p26, pp114-117 and pp137-138

<sup>305</sup> Op cit, Franklin, John Hope, (1980), [5<sup>th</sup> Edition], *From Slavery To Freedom*, pp414-415

<sup>306</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph L. & Cones, James H., (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, pp132-133 and pp131-151

Afrocentric psychologists and sociologists agree that African epistemology already existed at the base of African-American culture. Afrocentric scholars cite a definite continuation of the African orientation, which helps to define the general design for living and the patterns for interpreting reality for African-Americans. Somehow, the African ancestors' ways of knowing and understanding filtered through the chaos of slavery and oppression and became embedded in the spirits, hearts, and souls of their descendants.[...]The research on ancient African civilisation also suggests that Africans perceived the world differently than the world view imposed on them by European oppressors. A strong interpersonal relationship with others as well as harmony, peace with nature, communalism, and spirituality characterized African epistemology.<sup>307</sup>

A prime example of Black people acquiring specific knowledge of White racial attitudes through institutional racism was demonstrated during WWII. Segregation in the US armed forces united Black people in their objective for equality. African-Americans, guided by A. Philip Randolph, planned to march on Washington DC on 1 July 1941 to protest at continued discrimination and ill-treatment in the armed forces.<sup>308</sup> In *Fighting Racism in World War II*, James and colleagues argue that the humiliating treatment and discrimination Black men experienced in the armed forces in 1916 to 1918 informed them in the 1940s, whereby they demanded an end to Jim Crowism in the military; however, President Roosevelt would not sign the order to end segregation.<sup>309</sup> The editors of *Fighting Racism in World War II* cited many speeches by ordinary soldiers that clarify they did not believe in White America's democracy. Here is one example of many statements:

What is this democracy I am fighting for? Where is it? Since when are Cotton Ed Smith and Senator Bilbo and the Democratic Party of Franklin Roosevelt my good friends? Why must I die for them? I am not afraid to fight. Negroes have been some of the greatest fighters in history. But the democracy I want to fight for, Hitler is not depriving me of. I know the people who have kept me away from it of seventy-

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<sup>307</sup> Bakari R. Sentwali, (1997) *Epistemology from an Afrocentric Perspective: Enhancing Black Students' Consciousness through an Afrocentric Way of Knowing*, University of Northern Colorado, Conference Paper, p2

<sup>308</sup> James, C.L.R. James, Breitman, George, & Keemer, Edgar, eds, (1980) *Fighting Racism in World War II*, Mondad Press, USA, p96

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, p11



five years by rifles and revolvers, by state law and lynch law! You Franklin Roosevelt, Conrad Hull, and Jack Garner tell us why we must go and shed our blood for something that we have never had.<sup>310</sup>

C.L.R James and colleagues refer to specific events during the war years that demonstrated Black people's political awareness that Jim Crow military law robbed them of their freedom and their lives. One of the prime examples of this was "the case of Pvt. Ned Turman" a Black American soldier who suffered army institutional racism. Turman and a White soldier got into an altercation on a bus. The White soldier insulted him and a fight ensued and Turman was beaten by the White soldier and Turman grabbed an MP's gun and shot the soldier, at which point, Turman was shot dead by another White MP. As punishment for Turman's audacity the Black soldiers from his troop were rounded up and beaten by White soldiers. An official investigation by the War Department soon followed and a "whitewashed" report was made that distorted the events so that the army could disclaim racial conflict.<sup>311</sup>

In *A Soldier's Story*, Sergeant Waters served in both wars and he personally understood the way his humanity was not recognised because many White Americans rely on a speculative perception of 'blacks' that negates African-Americans' ancestral civilisation as well as their cognitive skills. Many Black people learnt, however, to overcome the prejudiced judgement of American bigots based on their critical knowledge, which assessed the inaccuracy of the judgements of White supremacists. Blacks were astute enough to discern that White racists do not have the humane ability to appreciate or acknowledge African civilisation and the humanity of Black Americans, primarily because the everyday reality as

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid, p29

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, pp128-132, 'The case of Pvt. Ned Turman. He Died Fighting for Democracy'.

experienced by Black people concerning their empirical and psychological way of life is linked to a Black collective consciousness.

By the 1980s, with the impact of Afrocentric studies, many African-Americans recognised how their “way of being” and the knowledge they acquired about Black and White America through segregation and oppression gave them insight. On the one hand, because of the dehumanising consequences of racial prejudice, many Black people developed knowledge concerning the negative ways in which White supremacists evaluate what it means to be ‘black’. On the other hand, many Blacks acquired a cognitive recognition of their humanity that is greatly valued in Black cultural identity politics.

Consequently, Black epistemology relates to “double consciousness”. Clyde W. Franklin’s essay, ‘Men’s studies, the Men’s Movement, and the Study of Black Masculinities: Further Demystification of Masculinities in America’ argues that the history of slavery, segregation, disenfranchisement and prejudice shapes the socialisation of the Black male psyche in the USA,<sup>312</sup> which enables a kinship to form between Black male peer groups. This affords values which White society continually fails to recognise because White supremacists underestimate the intelligence of Blacks. This is depicted in *A Soldier’s Story* where Captain Davenport tells Captain Taylor that Waters tricked C.J. into punching him because his covert aim was to imprison C.J. Captain Taylor says “Coloured people aren’t that devious...”, meaning smart. The fact that he can freely assert such an opinion to a Black man, despite his rank, reveals Taylor’s inculcated racism.

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<sup>312</sup> Op cit, Clyde W. Franklin II, ‘Men’s studies, the Men’s Movement and the Study of Black Masculinities: Further Demystification of Masculinities in America’ p16, in Majors, Richard G. & Gordon, Jacob U. eds, (1994), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*, Nelson-Hall, USA

Lynne Segal argues that most White American men have robbed Black men of their masculinity because they have disempowered Black men with respect to control over their own lives and their families. They have also negated the intelligence of Black men, thereby continuing the subjugation of Blacks that began in the slave era.<sup>313</sup> This subjugation is practised through institutional racism by psychologically enforcing the negative social manifestations of the failure of Blacks to achieve success and respect. White hegemonic power does not, however, hold itself responsible for restricting access to education and employment or allowing unconstitutional policing, which strips Black men of their civil rights.

Additionally, Black people who suffer under the tyranny of racism are frequently conscious of the denotation and connotation that operate in spoken, written and visual language because of the overt and covert ways in which they are judged. This is chiefly because the knowledge of their actual life experience and existence does not coincide with the speculated identity imagined by hegemonic white authorship or the conventions that define Black males in film. In narrative film, racism does not oppress White Christians on the grounds they are intellectually inferior and subhuman as it does with Black people in America.<sup>314</sup>

Furthermore, Black epistemology is not confined to the academic arena: it is evidenced in the work of Gil Scott-Heron's (1970) album *Small Talk at 125<sup>th</sup> Street*, containing *Whitey on the Moon* and *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, where his African-American political protest criticises White America's treatment of Blacks. Moreover, Richard Pryor's (1975) album *Is It Something I Said* deconstructs White America's injustice against Black folk, through social satire and political criticism.

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<sup>313</sup> Op cit, Segal, Lynn, (1990), *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities Changing Men*, pp184-185

<sup>314</sup> Mancini Billson, Janet, (1996), *Pathways To Manhood: Young Black Males' Struggle for Identity*, Transaction Publishers, USA, p2 in chapter 1 Strategic Styles: Individual Responses to Social Reality, pp1-23

These men contribute to the multiple voices in Black cultural criticism, dearly demonstrating their perspicacity and their intellect in popular culture.

In view of the cultural studies and social research undertaken and discussed in Cornel West's *Race Matters*, Michael Eric Dyson's *Open Mike*, and Janet Mancini Billson's *Pathways to Manhood* it raises important concerns. First, the strategies Black men today employ to survive by using their own minds and bodies and enlisting in the Armed Forces to gain equality. Second, the level of Black consciousness that exists in ghettos and middle-class communities has shaped African-American existential experience. World War II Black soldiers had to build their lives to survive lynch mobs and "*dominative racist*" and "*aversive racist*".<sup>315</sup>

Although it might appear to be tangential, I posit that Othellophobia and Othellophilia occupy the collective unconscious. The prototype Othello, the Moor of Venice, became the archetypal Black male character in drama. The symbolism of passion, courage and intelligence of the Moorish Christian convert compound the invention of the Black 'character'. That is to say, he is feared not because he is savage but because he is cultured and passionate, and as a result a White woman falls in love with him. White supremacists continue to resist that truth with every lynching and assault on the Black body. Consequently, supremacists invent countless variations on their fear of the Black/Islam or African, whereas the egalitarian humanist understands what can be learned from cultural and racial difference. What is particularly fascinating about the desire and dread of the Othello character is how we unconsciously internalise the myths that underline his identity as a Black man, and therefore I intend to explore inculcated racism in the African-American psyche through my study of *A Soldier's Story*.

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<sup>315</sup> Op cit, Joel Kovel's (1984), *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, p54

#### 4.3: *A Soldier's Story*- mythemes reconfigured

I previously identified Othellophobia as the fear among White male characters of being re/enslaved by Black male characters. Additionally, I suggested it is the fear of equivalent or superior intellect among Blacks and of their civilisation that lies at the root of the fear among White male characters of enslavement, rather than the anxiety that a beast-like man will annihilate White men. On the surface, many American films have emphasised the bestial perception of 'blacks' by first configuring a monstrous image of them as hording jungle savages on the brink of cannibalism, rape and mass murder. The narratology and iconography of the savage body and mind of Blacks were constructed from several sources such as blackface minstrels and adventure narratives: for example, *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe in 1719 and *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs in 1912. These books served as prototypes of heroic Whites and savage Blacks.

Lynn Segal believes the British slave trade resulted in a devaluation of Africans, and the adventure stories that grew out of the exploration and conquest of Africa affected the way Britain perceived Africa and its people.<sup>316</sup> This produced many adventure stories, typified by H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). The African adventure stories demonstrated how the White imago conquers rational objective reasoning and Africa's truth, namely, an accurate account of Africa that allows Africans to speak for themselves.

European-American bankers and moguls who built Hollywood's studio system of production, distribution and exhibitions, along with its classical narrative structure that translated White supremacist ideology into Hollywood hegemonic authorship, 'normalised' the inferiority of Blacks. Because cinema as a new mass medium at the

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<sup>316</sup> Op cit, Segal, Lynn, (1990), *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities Changing Men*, pp169

start of the twentieth century did not criticise racist ideology in narrative fiction or American society, it compounded the myth of the savage body and savage mind of 'blacks'.

In the essay 'The Spectacle of the "Other"', Stuart Hall makes similar points to those of Lynn Segal and relates racism to the many ways the Black subjugated image ended up on household commodities. In the Victorian home, the savage 'nature' of Blacks and Africa was tamed and fixed onto Huntley & Palmer's biscuits and Pear's soap.<sup>317</sup> Segal astutely says:

The first 'fact' about the 'black man' which the white man knew was that he was not really a man at all- a child rather than an adult, a body not a mind. White men created the image of Black men, [she now adds a capital B], as yet another contrast necessary for their own self image. 'Travellers with closed minds', African writer and literary scholar Chinua Achebe comments on the white men's and women's reportage of Africa, 'can tell us little except about themselves'.<sup>318</sup>

Because American cinema depicted 'blacks' and non-Whites as inferior, it showed no interest in examining the culture and history of Black people. Hollywood translated the indigenous populations of Africa, Australia – where Skull Island in *King Kong* is set – the Caribbean and North America as godless and savage compared with European-Americans with their advanced, Christian civilisation. The reiteration of the non-White 'Other' in visual and narrative history, written and imagined through cultural imperialism, works to 'normalise' Western cultural and material existence as the natural order of life. Charles Fuller explores the legacy of this myth by showing its destructive effects on the psyche of Black men, whose skin colour also defines them in the mind's eye of hegemonic White supremacy.

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<sup>317</sup> Op cit, Hall, Stuart, (1997), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, pp241-242

<sup>318</sup> Op cit, Segal, Lynn, (1990), *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities Changing Men*, pp169

In *Othello*, Shakespeare problematises the myth of the 'savage' body and mind of the Moor of Venice by imbuing him with an equally civilised humanity, which is displayed in Act One when Othello confronts the Venetian Duke and his court and impresses upon them why he is the man to whom they have granted power and why this civilised and cultured hero has impressed and won over the heart and mind of the State and Desdemona. These two self-evident attributes concerning Othello's humanity, bravery and cultivation disturb and threaten Iago. In *A Soldier's Story*, Fuller revisits this dialectical conflict with Private C.J. Memphis, the duped victim, akin to Othello, and Sergeant Waters, the malevolent villain, analogous with Iago.

Sergeant Waters is obsessed with the ideological myths about the inferiority of Blacks because he believes he is superior to Private C.J. Memphis based on his understanding of White hegemonic power and the perceived 'innate' savage nature of Blacks. Owing to his European bloodline of White parentage and light skin, he unconsciously believes he is more European-American than African-American. This belief is underpinned by his contempt for what he believes constitutes a savage body and savage mind.

Sergeant Waters fears C.J. represents the savage mind of Blacks, which he is desperate to renounce because of its primitive connotations for the White male psyche. Waters imagines C.J. typifies every aspect of what White supremacists inscribe onto the Black body: he is slow-witted, unsophisticated, superstitious and servile. It is Sergeant Waters, however, who is constantly striving to please his White superior officers because he aspires to be one of them. Because he is not White, however, Sergeant Waters knows he will never be granted the power of equality.

In the denotative and connotative construction of the mise-en-scène, Fuller and Jewison remind the audience they are watching a story unfold that is premised on the actual experience of racial segregation and inculcated racism in the mind of both Black and White characters. Fuller also rebuts the myth of the savage mind by demonstrating how astute the Black soldiers are about the White officers. The soldiers present the audience with two personas: the obedient servicemen who do as they are told and the resistant African-Americans familiar with segregation and how to work against white authority in the army. For example, the Black non-commissioned officers (NCOs) pay lip service to Whites but distrust them because of their historical experience of dealing with the double standard of enslaved freedom and racism.

Robert Birt's essay 'Existence, Identity and Liberation'<sup>319</sup> makes several relevant points on alienation, the detrimental consequences of racism, and the myth of the savage mind. Birt uses the work of Du Bois, Fanon, Baldwin and Herbert Marcuse and argues that racism and myth psychologically oppress Black people and rob them of their humanity.

The slave who internalizes his servitude to the degree of seeing his slavery as just or inevitable... those black people who develop inferiority complexes and a "degenerating sense of nobodiness" as a result of being indoctrinated with white supremacist values which degenerate black humanity valorize whiteness as the standard of all that is good or even "human," all manifest the deformed consciousness of deformed people.<sup>320</sup>

Sergeant Waters's alienation reveals the above-stated malady. Charles Fuller has written the character and Adolph Caesar plays him as an arrogant misfit and tragic figure. On the night he is shot and killed, he confronts two racist White officers. One is an "aversive racist", who stands back and watches while his friend, the "dominative

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<sup>319</sup>Robert Birt 'Existence, Identity and Liberation' p207 in Gordon, Lewis R., (1997), *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*, Routledge, UK

<sup>320</sup> Ibid, p206



racist", insults and assaults Sergeant Waters. He tells the White officers that he hates himself because of what he has been taught and internalised about 'blacks' from White supremacist ideology.

There are several key moments in the scene that stand out. Sergeant Waters is drunk and heading back to the barracks, weaving about the road and heading across the bridge, when he is found by the two White officers in a jeep. They acknowledge Waters is drunk and the belligerent racist officer warns him to pay the proper respect to him. Waters says he will not pay respect to them because he hates himself for what he has become. He is guilt ridden about the death of C.J. because he persecuted, framed and falsely imprisoned him. Waters cannot assuage his guilt at having carried out his plan to destroy C.J. and he is haunted by the realisation that there is no rational explanation for his conduct. Sergeant Waters imaged C.J. as his shadow, the monstrous other, but having driven C.J. to take his own life, Waters becomes conscious of how he has internalised the myth of the Black beast with a savage mind.

Sergeant Waters tells the aggressive officer, Lieutenant Byrd, that as a child his father taught him not to speak and act like an average Black man but more like an exceptional Negro. Waters does not bring up the issue of his skin colour but a Black audience will read that into his life experience because they are cognisant of the differences between light-skinned and dark-skinned African-Americans. Waters tells them that despite learning what his father taught him and following White American rules of segregation and upward mobility, this has made no difference to his circumstances as a Black man because he is not accepted, even though he wants to be respected as a full human being. Instead, he now hates himself for all that he has betrayed and destroyed in himself and the lives of others, particularly his calculated

dehumanisation of C.J. Memphis, who had never done anything to humiliate him in the eyes of White America.

Norman Jewison and Charles Fuller demonstrate a number of the concerns put forward by Diawara, Guerrero and Yearwood in their analysis of new Black cinema. The mise-en-scène works to overturn Hollywood's dominant mode of production. First, with the exception of this one, the flashbacks are told by Black characters, whereby the narrative is motivated and defined by Black cultural concerns. In this flashback, Captain Taylor is retelling what he learned from the report given by the White officers to Colonel Nevins, but this is the only flashback in which Sergeant Waters is given an accusing voice, in figure 42 and 44 . He blames himself and White American racism for distorting his perception of life.



Fig.42



Fig.43



Fig.44



Fig.45

In the sequence the truth of self-hatred, irrational racial hatred and paradoxical views of democracy, liberty and freedom mock the war for freedom at home and abroad.

Second, Waters shows he is not afraid of the White officers even though he has been obsequious and servile most of his life. In one of the most telling moments in the scene, Sergeant Waters snaps at Lieutenant Byrd, who backs away, clearly scared. Waters knows that bullies like Lieutenant Byrd and himself are more afraid than they are self-assured.



Fig.46

When Waters sees the fear in Lt. Byrd, who is exposed as lacking power and unable to instil fear in and dominate Blacks, Lt. Byrd feels compelled to abuse him. The closing minutes of Waters' life demonstrate that he is cognisant and intelligent. He has not attained social liberation but his mind has finally been decolonised of the myth of his savagery. He is not a savage; instead, he has played a fool.

The scene also sets up the classic conflict between the White master's narrative dominance over the weak Black subordinate.<sup>321</sup> Norman Jewison defies dominant patriarchal narrative by exposing the White male's inability to control the Black male. The screenshots below Figure.47 show a medium close-up where Lt. Byrd and his friend dominate the frame, but Byrd cannot control Waters, as his dialogue makes clear.

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<sup>321</sup>Op cit, Diawara, Manthia, (1993), *Black American Cinema*, p12



Fig.47

Figure 49 shows that Lt. Byrd is not intelligent: he is deluded. His dialogue reveals that he is ignorant of the objectives and reasons for WWII. Lt. Byrd is oblivious to the threat of fascism because when Waters says he hates himself, Lt. Byrd says he is not to blame, that it was God who made him an inferior Black. In Byrd's condemnation of Waters, Charles Fuller's dialogue suggests he shares a fascist ideology with White American supremacists.



Fig.48

Charles Fuller uses the diachronic myth of the Hamite curse to demonstrate that the officer's racial views are inherited and he never questions them; instead he reiterates them, thereby perpetuating the myths rather than repudiating them.



Fig.49

In *Framing Blackness*, Ed Guerrero's chapter 'Recuperation, Representation, Resistance: Black cinema through the 1980s' identifies the cultural shift that took place in the socio-political climate of that era. The changes chiefly underlined the end of the Democrats' period of power in 1980, when Black social politics for equality and self-determination were halted, primarily because of the change in policy of the Republican Party, marked by Ronald Reagan's agenda for the recuperation of the USA as the leading superpower. In addition to this, the central aim of the Republican Party was to rebuild White America's sense of national pride and consciousness after its defeat in the Vietnam War.<sup>322</sup>

The war had a profound effect on the White male psyche, particularly in the late 1970s, when the Vietnam veterans struggled to readjust to civilian life and to the changes that marked the growing empowerment of females committed to the Women's Liberation Movement that allied feminists in the 1980s. Black activism posed a further threat to White patriarchal power at the end of the 1970s. In Isaac Julien's documentary film *Baadasssss Cinema*, Fred Williamson stated that for White male characters in film it was a time of defeat and depression, but Blaxploitation meant that Black folk were getting away with things on screen that they could not get away with in

<sup>322</sup> Op cit, (1993), Guerrero, Ed, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, pp115-116

American society: under the Nixon Administration, Blacks were still subject to police brutality.

Guerrero argues that a number of films mark a transition to White male powerlessness. Although he does not cite war films such as *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Coming Home* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979), or dramas such as *Taxi Driver* (1976), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), *Network* (1976) and *Midnight Express* (1978), they are important because they reveal the inability of White men to cope under pressure. Guerrero cites *Rocky* (1976) and *Star Wars* (1977) as two films that mark the recuperation of White masculinity and the subjugation of the racial non-White 'Other'. Guerrero provides sound explanations that address White male self-confidence in the case of *Rocky* and the ways in which the audience identified with the character. He does not, however, explain how a Black politically conscious audience might despise *Rocky* and detest the way Sylvester Stallone's screenplay stereotypes 'blacks' by omitting a psychological and cultural explanation of the individuality of Black men and their personal attributes. Rocky is invested with an emotional, ideological, and religious identity as the son of Italian immigrants, and now a man with immense American national pride. Rocky's opponent is the 'black' Apollo Creed, who lacks a cultural positioning in terms of faith, politics, ambitions, family, emotional character, communities and existential choices, in addition to the challenges that mark the rites of passage of Black men in relation to identity and masculinity. Because these characteristics are absent, a Black audience is restricted to yet another diachronic caricature of a 'black' and such figures are easy to dismiss.

In his chapter 'Theorizing Black Film', Gladstone Yearwood discusses the way classical narrative cinema strives to make its construction seamless as though it were real. This process of identification enables the audience to suspend their disbelief in

the contrived and truncated story and plot and accept the characters as extensions of the audience's ideal self, a figurative alter ego that encompasses the 'normal' ideological values of dominant White society.<sup>323</sup> Yearwood states:

When Blacks are represented in the Classical Hollywood cinema, a range of signification has been objectified and restricted to signifieds of powerlessness or evil. This signification is constructed on an imaginary that has coded blackness as "the nuclear fantasy in opposition to its polar cognate, whiteness, the two being symbolic abstractions of a human vision of a world that in reality has no such absolutes" (Kovel, 1971, p62).<sup>324</sup>

Although Yearwood cites "Classical Hollywood cinema", his argument still relates to post-classical film in the 1970s with Blaxploitation such as *Across 110th Street* (1972) and later with *Menace II Society* (1993). Yearwood says that Hollywood as an industrial institution has always had difficulty in accepting Black characters because former colonial and imperial Western capitalist ideology has difficulty in dealing with women and Blacks.<sup>325</sup> He then offers useful points when he says:

In *The Birth of a Nation*, the extent to which the blacks are presented as grotesque savages out to rape white women and overcome the established order reveals a rampant primal fear. The actual darkening of the face with blackface makeup and the use of white actors to play black villains are related to the same psychoanalytic problem in Western culture, which led to women being represented by young boys in the theatre. The problem is really the inability of the dominant white, male culture to deal positively with the position of women and blacks in society.<sup>326</sup>

As persuasive as Yearwood's argument is, it lacks a fuller reading of White supremacist ideology. The continual portrayal of Black people as inferior and savage in body and mind suggests "dominative" racists have profoundly internalised the myth of the Black male beast. They have convinced themselves that Blacks are inferior on the

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<sup>323</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone, (2000), *Black Film as a Signifying Practice. Cinema, Narration and the African-American Tradition*, p152

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, p152

<sup>325</sup> Ibid, p153

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, p153



basis of manufactured White American supremacist ideology and erroneous genetic disinformation. For example, the 2008 Republican Presidential candidate John McCain accused his rival, Barack Obama, of being obtuse and lacking presidential qualifications by comparing him with Paris Hilton and Britney Spears, who are regarded as socio-politically naïve and foolish. This comment prompted the editorial board of *The New York Times* to respond to the accusation with a front-page story entitled 'Say What? John McCain, Barack Obama, and the "Race Card"' (31 July 2008).<sup>327</sup> What is particularly relevant here with respect to America's fears of Black men is that there are, according to Ronald Jackson who cites Wilson's studies on the media criminalisation of the Black male through racist propaganda. He says White America tends to perceive Blacks as irrational criminals and Whites as rational law-abiding citizens.<sup>328</sup> White and Cones reference many of the same institutionally racist media strategies that Clyde W. Franklin cites,<sup>329</sup> that also demonstrate White America's continued racial hatred towards Blacks on the grounds that Blacks are criminally pathological.<sup>330</sup>

The idea of the 'savage mind' is not restricted to the notion of ignorance or an inferior cognitive ability; it is constructed in the White supremacist imago as thoughts and actions that assume the intrinsic immoral 'nature' of Blacks. Judged by this criterion, Black men and women are perceived to be capable of all kinds of crimes. Therefore, many Black cultural theorists cite the media cases involving Willy Horton, Charles Stuart and Susan Smith that evidence the racist impulses of White Americans and their willingness to believe Blacks have savage minds.

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<sup>327</sup> <http://theboard.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/07/31/say-what-john-mccain-barack-obama-and-the-race-card/>  
Accessed 20.10.2008

<sup>328</sup> Op cit, Ronald, Jackson, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, pp82-83

<sup>329</sup> Op cit, Clyde W. Franklin, p17 in Majors & Gordon, eds, (1994), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*, Nelson Hall, USA

<sup>330</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph L. & Cones, James H., (1999), *Black Men Emerging*, pp78-79

In the 1600s to the 1900s, *Othello* functioned in a similar way. It addressed European and American audiences' prejudices and fulfilled their over-determined myths about the Black male through Othello's murder of Desdemona. The play is a classic, however, and so it is taught in elementary school and higher education institutions and asks its students and audiences to question where their racial beliefs come from and if they are true?

America's media industries often conflate facts with fantasy. In 1988 when George Bush was failing in the polls, the Republican Party used a convicted criminal, Willy Horton, as an example of the dangers Black men pose to White America and the public willingly accepted Bush's racial stigmatising against all 'blacks'. They could have referred Jesse Jackson, or Harry Belafonte as admirable Americans with international political humanist commitments but they did not:

The Horton strategy was remarkably effective for Bush. Observers hailed it as a textbook example of attack campaigning. Bush got most of the advantages of attack (such as pinning negative impressions on his opponent) without suffering much of a backlash for the attacks. For example, CBS News/New York Times surveys revealed that until the last week of the campaign, as many people blamed Dukakis as Bush for the negative tone of the campaign.<sup>331</sup>

In 1989, Charles Stuart, a White American from Boston, murdered his wife and unborn child and then accused a phantom Black man of the murder. When it was revealed that Charles was the murderer, he killed himself. The hunt by the Boston police department for a Black killer terrorised countless Black men.<sup>332</sup> Boston and the rest of the country believed Charles Stuart's story for quite some time until a reporter became aware of contradictions in the story which led to the truth.

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<sup>331</sup> <http://www.insidepolitics.org/ps111/independentads.html>

<sup>332</sup> [http://www.digitas.harvard.edu/~perspy/old/issues/2000/retro/forgotten\\_victim.html](http://www.digitas.harvard.edu/~perspy/old/issues/2000/retro/forgotten_victim.html)

Susan Smith is a White American who murdered her two children and accused a non-existent Black man of carjacking, kidnapping and murder:

In 1994, Smith led the country on a wild goose chase for nine days by blaming a fictitious black man for carjacking her Mazda with her sons still in the car. The practice of unjustly blaming blacks and imprisoning them with alarming racial disparity is not fictitious. It is a real national tragedy being revealed in studies by human rights groups and government agencies.<sup>333</sup>

What these cases have in common is that White America believed the initial stories told by the murderer. When these murder cases came to trial there was no apology to the Black communities for the racial terrorism inflicted by the police and media. Neither was there an apology to Black America for the defamatory and racist accusations by George Bush and the Republican Party in the 1988 elections.



Roland Barthes discussed the denotation of primary signification – signifier, signified and sign – and second signification – which extends to the connotations of the images – whereby if we see the photograph in Fig.50 we can identify the man as O.J. Simpson, football and film star, but also as the Black man accused and acquitted of murder, regardless of the fact that most of White America still believes he is a murderer. Charles Fuller is aware of the power of secondary signification and he asks his Black audience to reference the defamatory history of Black inferiority through the American evil black shadow vs. idolised white persona. When Fuller's 1981 play opened off Broadway the subject matter addressed a Black audience. As Norman Jewison notes on the DVD commentary, White audiences

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<sup>333</sup> <http://www.commondreams.org/views/091400-101.htm>

were not interested in stories about White America's injustice against Blacks in the segregated era of WWII.

Moreover, in *A Soldier's Story* the invariant diachronic myth of the Black beast is bound up with the synchronic mytheme of the tragic Mulatto. The mixed-race Sergeant Waters lacks kinship with Black and White Americans; therefore, he becomes the outsider, as typified by the 'coloured' woman in American literature and drama. All the academics taking part in the BBC's 2007 documentary *Racism: A History* cite hundreds of examples of institutional racism and the 'new racism'<sup>334</sup> that is supported by social policy, such as reverse racism, where affirmative action is frequently used to scapegoat Blacks for taking away employment and social position from working-class and middle-class White men. Michael Kimmel, a leading sociologist in the field of masculinity and men's studies, identifies White heterosexual masculinity as prejudiced against its opposites, doubt and distortion being used against Blacks, gays, the unemployed or politically opposing race and gender.<sup>335</sup>

In the early twentieth century up to the war years, we can see how this prejudice was translated into the social policy of segregation that disqualified Black men from competing with Whites to prove they were equal or superior. This is one of the major issues Charles Fuller contests by writing the character Davenport as a dark-skinned African-American of high rank. It not only works as a commentary exchange by Black soldiers but also as an ideological fact that unsettles the White officers, who are completely unaccustomed to intelligent and high-ranking Black

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<sup>334</sup> Op cit, Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004), *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, p33 "[...] ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and Black people as well as the social practices that these ideas shape and reflect remain intricately part of new racism, but in changed ways. The new racism thus reflects a situation of permanence and change. Just as people of African descent were disadvantaged within prior forms of economic organization, a similar outcome exists today".

<sup>335</sup> Michael Kimmel 'Toward a Pedagogy of the Oppressed', pp70-71 in Mutua, Athena D., *Progressive Black Masculinities*, (2006), Routledge, UK

personnel. When Captain Davenport first arrives in the small Louisiana town, the White community and the officers at the boot camp cannot believe a Black man has been awarded such a high status in the US Army.

#### 4.4: Overturning diachronic stories and synchronic themes

In *A Soldier's Story*, each African-American male to whom we are introduced represents contrasting personas of Black men. One of the central characters is the investigating officer Captain Davenport. He is a dark-skinned, intelligent man who is a lawyer in civilian life and he has risen to the rank of Captain. The narrative pointedly shows us that his rank as an officer is distinctive because Black soldiers and White officers cannot believe he has achieved this level in a segregated army during WWII. Their disbelief is shown whenever Davenport appears and his rank demands that other men acknowledge his status as an officer, higher in rank than any other 'coloured' man. He is also an African-American who has achieved some of the distinction promised to righteous men in pursuit of the American dream.



Fig.51

Captain Davenport is a proud officer, which is evident in the mise-en-scène. He is often positioned so that he dominates the frame in a slightly tilted-upward angle shot that increases his stature in the frame, as seen above. In other scenes, he is placed in the centre of the frame so that he dominates the men to whom he speaks. This reverses the tradition of classical narrative images of 'blacks' who occupy the margins of the frame and maintain a tenuous narrative position so that hegemonic

White characters are not reliant on them. Because Norman Jewison puts Captain Davenport in the centre of the frame, he overturns both the power given to White men in authority in the social status quo<sup>336</sup> and the narrative hierarchy as causal agent.

Captain Davenport represents the intellectual equality to which Black men in the Army aspire because he does not treat the men as inferiors. Shortly after he meets Corporal Ellis, who drives him to the boot camp and takes him around, the audience is aware of the camaraderie and racial collusion between Ellis and Captain Davenport. Corporal Ellis does not ingratiate himself; he is impressed by Davenport's rank, success, and self-determination as a Black male who fulfils what it means to be a soldier. Ellis forms a bond with him that dramatises what White and Cones refer to as "Brothers"<sup>337</sup> in an African-American peer group, where their lives are touched and influenced by their racial identity and social experience. Many Black sociologists and cultural critics refer to this as a vital aspect of the survival of Black men.<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Gladstone L. Yearwood's (2000) *Black Film Theory*, p164

<sup>337</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph L. & Cones, James H., (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, p216

<sup>338</sup> Op cit, Clyde W. Franklin II, 'Men's studies, the Men's Movement...' p15, in Majors, Richard G. & Gordon, Jacob U. eds, (1994), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*, Nelson-Hall, USA



Fig.52

From the history of Black disloyalty in Hollywood hegemonic narratives, I argue a White scriptwriter would have denied the peer bond in *A Soldier's Story* because Hollywood authorship frequently forges as 'black' caricatures who betray each other. This can be seen in many Blaxploitation films such as *Shaft* (1971) and *Troubled Man* (1972), as well as action films up to the 1990s, where the White scriptwriter preferred to ascribe the loyalty of 'black/s' to a White man rather than another 'black'. This preference dates back to the 'new negro' in films of the 1940s, such as *Body and Soul* (1947), continuing through to the bi-racial buddy movies, from *The Defiant Ones* (1958) to *Die Hard: With A Vengeance* (1995) and beyond.

The moment Captain Davenport arrives on the bus in Tynin, Louisiana, he straightens out his uniform and we see him continually brushing, fixing and adjusting his attire throughout the film. Davenport's fastidiousness symbolises his consciousness of what the savage body and mind means in White supremacist America. Charles Fuller thus challenges the diachronic narrative myth of the inferior by making Captain Davenport function as agitprop for a pan-African diaspora audience because we read him against stereotype. He reminds Black people that they can challenge White authority and demand change.



Moreover, characterisation and dramatic action through the mise-en-scène and its signifying practices of film production confirm Captain Davenport's perspicacity. Additionally, his face and body are lit through the three-point lighting system of key, fill and backlight, which complement his handsome appearance. Unlike 'blacks' in the classical Hollywood era, Davenport demands answers and responses to his questions and even when he is placed in a position of subordination, he empowers himself through contesting answers to questions and he forces White commanding officers to account for their statements. For example, Norman Jewison frames Davenport so that he dominates Colonel Nivens through angled close-ups as he manipulates Nivens into giving him the authority to question White officers.

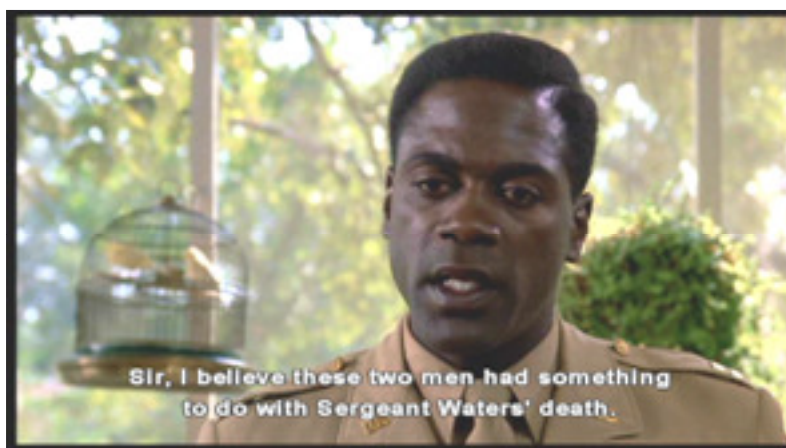


Fig.53



Fig.54



Fig.55

In addition to the interrogating dialogue throughout this scene, Captain Davenport physically dominates Colonel Nivens through the framing. Davenport stands over him and bears down on him from above.

Furthermore, Davenport does not jump to conclusions about the murder of Sergeant Waters, but other Black men do, with the exception of the killer. Davenport is also well-spoken, circumspect and he shows no interest in White women. His education at Howard University also makes him iconoclastic because Charles Fuller has stripped him of the diachronic characteristics of the black inferior with a 'savage mind'. Captain Davenport has none of the characteristics of the Coon, the Sambo, the Uncle Tom, the Black Buck, the pathological criminal, the rapist, or the watermelon, grinning 'darkie' that Ronald Jackson discusses<sup>339</sup> in relation to Bogal's four male types that Hollywood forged from the birth of the 'nigger' in 1915 to George Lucas's obtuse 'nigger figure' Ja Ja Binks in *The Phantom Menace* (1999). Nor is Captain Davenport an urban city slicker whose main trait is that of a conman, as typified by Sporting Life in *Porgy and Bess* (1959). Charles Fuller has written Captain Davenport against type. Captain Davenport is also the only man correctly to deduce who the murderer is, which exemplifies his intelligence. In contemporary American society, Richard Majors identifies Black males who construct a

<sup>339</sup> Op cit, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, pp26-27

“cool pose” as men who employ a stoic psychology that enables them to act out a dispassionate and cool response to White American racism and the threatening brutality of White men.<sup>340</sup>

Captain Davenport is also the binary opposite to Sergeant Waters. Waters is a mixed-race, light-skinned Negro. He is older than Davenport and served during WW1 in France from 1917 to 1918, but he failed to advance in rank as Captain Davenport has. Charles Fuller and Norman Jewison have written Waters as a tragic character, a man whose weakness is his loss of faith in his heritage. His mind has been colonised by Western ideology and consequently his misplaced faith in hegemonic White power compounds his internalised racism and contempt for African identity.

This is re-enforced by his speech and physical movements which are ridged, terse and aloof. Waters seldom appears comfortable in the company of Black men and the angle of the camera and the frame compositions often isolate him from group shots. At key moments, he occupies the frame alone in a crowd, such as during the baseball game, Figure 56, where everyone else is in a group but Waters is isolated. In the shot, Sergeant Waters is framed alone as though he does not belong with the White officers, the Black soldiers, or any of the Black people attending the baseball game.

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<sup>340</sup> Majors, Richard, and Mancini Billson, Janet, (1992), *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, Simon & Schuster, USA, p5 in chapter 1, ‘Cool Pose Expression and Survival’ pp1-10



Fig.56

In visual film language, the audience can be manipulated to identify with rebel characters through frame composition. In *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), the audience forms an alliance with the gangsters very early in the film because Bonnie and Clyde are framed in tracking and dolly two-shots rather than single frames and shot-reverse-shot continuity. Keeping them together asks the audience to see them as a couple rather than as strangers. The signifying practices of the characterisation of unity and bond are achieved by grouping the characters together to signify their personal friendship in balanced two-shots or framing them as a group.

When scenes are shot in this way, they establish the signifying practices in post-classical film. Although Norman Jewison is not a Black filmmaker, in *A Soldier's Story*, he does challenge the language of classical film style and meaning by rejecting many of its standard practices and empowering the characters with an identity and a voice. Jewison's *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) and *A Soldier's Story* refuse to stereotype 'blacks' as mindless. Mr Tibbs, played by Sidney Poitier, and Captain Davenport, played by Howard E. Rollings, are intelligent characters who

contest the myth of the 'black' savage mind rather than the 'Sambo' and 'Coon' depicted in many classical Hollywood films, and currently played by Martin Lawrence as the ignorant buffoon in most of his movies such as *Black Knight* (2001).

Sergeant Waters is alienated by Eurocentricism vs. pan-Africanism. On the one hand he rejects Black folk culture, but on the other hand he likes African-American music and country Blues. In the first flashback he is in a bar studying his shadow figure C.J. Memphis, who is playing Blues guitar and singing. Waters is moved by C.J.'s unselfconscious performance. C.J. plays and sings from an African-American expressive position of spontaneity, rather than the European-American position of rehearsed preparation that dominates Gregorian chants and religious choral song, because the Blues historically grew out of the slave song of spontaneous emotional expression. C.J. inherits his beliefs through African-American folk culture<sup>341</sup> and Black identity, which give him strength of character. This is typified in his speeches about the soil he carries in a pouch around his neck for good luck; when Captain Taylor asks him why he was about to jump so high to try to catch the baseball, C.J. says he has the spirit of bird in his blood, which Sergeant Waters reads as evidence of his stupidity.

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<sup>341</sup> Op cit, Ford, Clyde W., (2000), *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*, Chapter 2 The Hero with an African Face, pp16-51



Fig.57

C.J.'s spontaneous expression bursts out of him in contrast to Waters, who is reserved and lacks an Afrocentric epistemology. C.J. chooses a jubilant rather than stoic self-expression of lived and felt experience as seen in Figure 58.

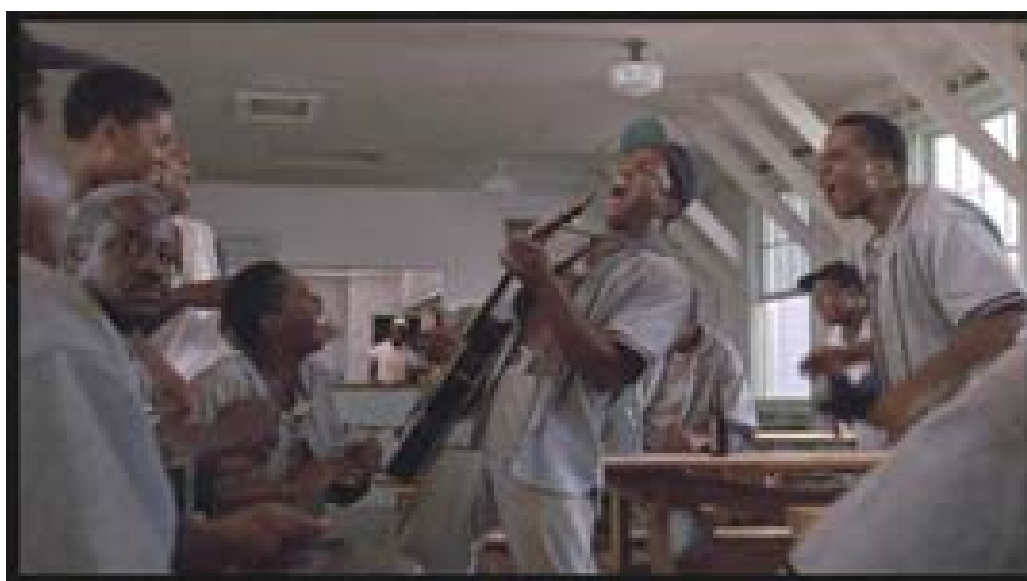


Fig.58

C.J. Memphis primarily represents what Sergeant Waters denies about himself. Charles Fuller wrote C.J. as an African-American rural everyman who stands in as a symbolic figure for countless Black men from the American South. He also plays baseball and proves himself to be a graceful and talented athlete who is liked and admired by almost all the other Black men. His talent and strength are dearly

appreciated by White officers but when he beats White ball players it provokes conflicting rational thoughts in White officers and townsfolk. The officers walk away, tormented by the failure of White men against the Black baseball team, an effect which is tempered by their pleasure in seeing the Blacks win on behalf of their regiment.

C.J. Memphis is the star player; he excels owing to his power and talent, which are shown when he hits the home run that brings his team victory. His physical strength and attractive persona are signified in slow motion, glorifying his strength in hitting the home run as his body fills the frame. This kind of shot is usually reserved for White male heroes, such as Jake La Motta when he wins his title fight in *Raging Bull* (1980). C.J. is rewarded throughout this scene, first when a pretty young woman grabs him and kisses him after he catches a White player out,



Fig.59

Second, when he runs back to base and he leaps into the air and the men affectionately embrace him, lift him up and pat him, a scene positioned between inter-cuts of the crowd. Even Sergeant Waters, despite himself, responds joyously.





Fig.60

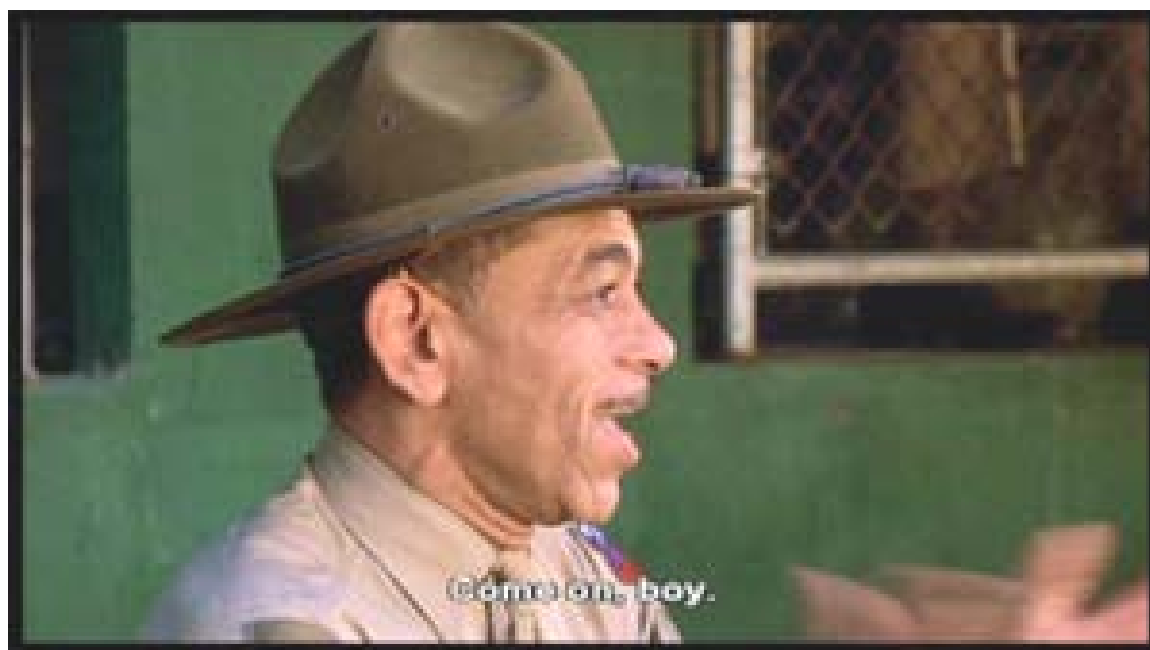


Fig.61





Fig.62

This moment of heroic mastery is important because it depicts White admiration and it links Peterson's voice-over during the flashback, to the scene in their barracks when C.J. once again uses his guitar to express his feelings. The scene is shot in deep focus, with C.J. slightly higher than the men around him. He is the focus of their attention and he imparts a joke about a protuberant Black man, which leads him into a blues song styled on the traditional confession and proclamation heard in Muddy Waters's 1955 song *Manish Boy*. These moments of Black expressivity disturb Waters because, although he is arguably spellbound by White culture, he feels the struggle experienced by Black men in American society. The fact that Waters and other Black men are oppressed by segregation in the Army exemplifies the alienation discussed by Du Bois regarding double consciousness and Fanon's argument that "In order to achieve mortality, it is essential that the black - the Negro - vanish from consciousness. Hence the Negro is forever in combat with his own image".<sup>342</sup> This indicates the depth of Sergeant Waters's irrational mind.

Through Private Peterson, we discover that although C.J. seems mentally slow, demonstrating little in the way of intellectual dexterity, he was a man who had common sense and country 'smarts'. When Waters tells the men to go and paint the lobby of the

<sup>342</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin White Mask*, p194

officers' quarters and to serve in the war effort to defeat the Germans, who consider them to be *Schwarze*, lowly blacks, C.J. replies "It don't look like we could do too much to those Nazis with paint brushes, Sarge." The comment might not be urbane but its 'down-home' country logic is most effective as a rebuke to Sergeant Waters. C.J. tells us he knows who he is as a Black man and he recognises that Sergeant Vernon Waters does not know where he fits in.



Fig.63



Fig.64

C.J. does not say it is because Waters is Mulatto, but Sergeant Waters does fall victim to the tragic Mulatto<sup>343</sup> syndrome. Bogle cites the tragic Mulatto chiefly as the light-skinned female who can pass for White. Hollywood has told her 'tragic' story many times, most effectively in *Imitation of Life* (1959), *Pinky* (1949), and in the tragic heroine Julia in *Showboat* (1936 and 1951). Hollywood, however, seldom explores the tragic life of the light-skinned Black male who either can pass for White, as seen in *Lost Boundaries* (1949), or is mistaken for White, even though he does not want to deny his racial heritage and identity, as in *Shadows* (1959).

The subject is one of great concern to filmmakers outside America, however, such as Haile Gerima, whose critically acclaimed film *Sankofa* (Ghana, 1993) explores the subject of a Mulatto man on a plantation in the slave era who is tormented because he does not know who his White father is. He suspects his father is the priest, who colonises his mind with Eurocentric notions about the sanctity and beauty of White people and the Holy Trinity, contrasted against the lascivious savagery of 'blacks'. Consequently, the Mulatto ends up killing his Black slave mother because he believes she is ungodly.

Moreover, in Joseph Zobel's novel *La Rue Cases Negres* and the 1983 film thereof by Euzhan Palcy, the story explores a Black boy's rites of passage and the subplot is concerned with the tragic life of a young Mulatto boy, Leopold, whose birthright to his father's name is rejected by his White French father. Leopold runs away but he is later caught and brought back to his father's plantation where he is beaten and debased in front of the community. In these stories, the filmmakers hold the European/American White father responsible for their sexual conduct and their

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<sup>343</sup> Op cit, Bogle, Donald, (2003), *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Black in American Films*, p9

social discrimination against Mulattoes, which problematises the sexual freedom of White patriarchy and challenges the diachronic myth of that narratology.

In *A Soldier's Story*, Private C.J. Memphis tells the men he feels sorry for Waters and this statement imbues C.J. with compassion and mercy. Waters's persecution of him makes C.J. an unwilling yet noble innocent martyr because, like Othello, he is wronged by a malcontent Iago figure who has plotted his destruction and C.J. ends up taking his own life. Waters has no rational excuse except that his mind has been savaged by inculcated racism. Unlike Iago, however, Sergeant Waters says he hates himself.

Private Peterson can therefore be read as the symbolic avenging figure who holds Waters accountable for his actions. He shows himself to be brave when he is forced to fight Sergeant Waters. He holds Waters accountable for his contempt of African-Americans and he reminds Waters that, no matter who he thinks he is, Waters can never be a White man. Sergeant Waters's naïve ideas about Northern urban Blacks being superior to Southern rural 'Negroes' are dismissed by Peterson and this is disguised in his answer to Captain Davenport's question, "Where are you from?", to which Peterson replies "Hollywood, California, by way of Alabama". He is aware and intelligent enough to know that to the eyes and minds of White America, all Black folk are inferior.

In *Othello*, the fear of re-enslavement is manifested in two ways that relate to *A Soldier's Story*. First, Iago fears the power Othello holds over his life because he suspects Othello has had sexual relations with his wife. Moreover, Iago is aggrieved because he lost his promotion in the armed forces to Michael Cassio. Second, Othello believes Desdemona's infidelity has impugned his masculinity in the eyes of the Venetian Court. His speeches in (A3.S3.L261-283), when he considers why he

married Desdemona when he should have realised that his Blackness speaks about his character in the eyes of European society, is one of the key moments of self-realisation that he is not like other, White, men and never will be. Additionally, when Iago falsely accuses Cassio (A4.S1.L35) of boasting of sexual conquest, Othello falls into an epileptic fit and Iago watches Othello's misery triumphantly. What underlines Othello's rage and mental disintegration is his loss of faith in White female chastity and White men's nobility. Sergeant Waters experiences a similar moment of existential self-awareness on the bridge when he tells the White officers that White American society has taught him to be self-oppressive and he hates what he has become.

Consequently, Othello and Waters have been enslaved by White racism and Iago's fear that that he will be destroyed by Othello's Black power over him feeds his irrational mind. The archetype of the Jungian shadow in both plays creates the mytheme of the synchronic 'savage mind' that I will examine closely in the following sub-chapter.

#### 4.5 The myth of the Black male beast: the savage mind mytheme

Fanon specifically dealt with racial self-oppression in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Instead of posing abstract questions about racial alienation in Western culture, Fanon deploys a threefold argument: first, as a Black man, second, through empiricism in Antillean culture, and third, through the neurosis of his patients.<sup>344</sup> He cites the crucial moment in Western culture when every Black man realises he is considered not simply different from but inferior to Whites. Fanon fixes this to the White gaze that makes the Black subject strange,<sup>345</sup> and juxtaposes the alienation against history, myth and experience as a profound dialectic. In the chapter 'The Fact of Blackness' he says:

I had it right. It was hate; I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbour across the street or my cousin on my mother's side, but by an entire race. I was up against something unreasoned. The psychoanalysts say that nothing is more traumatising for the young child than his encounters with what is irrational. I would personally say that for a man whose only weapon is reason there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason.<sup>346</sup>

Early in the chapter, Fanon states his mistrust of Europeans because he is conscious of their prejudice towards people of African ancestry.<sup>347</sup>

The evidence was there, unalterable. My blackness was there, dark and unarguable. And it tormented me, pursued me, disturbed me, angered me. Negroes were savages, brutes, illiterates. But in my own case I knew these statements were false.<sup>348</sup>

With *A Soldier's Story*, it is not just the content and structure of the narrative that are of concern with regard to the synchronic mytheme of the 'savage mind' and its implications about the intellectual inferiority of Black people: it is the author's continuum concerning the humanity of the heritage of African people. Countless African-American authors and African and Caribbean writers of drama, fiction and

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<sup>344</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp150-151

<sup>345</sup> Ibid, p109

<sup>346</sup> Ibid, p118

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, pp109-120

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p117

narrative film share a psychological and political consciousness in their *diverse* aims to contest and repudiate the White racist fantasy of the Black savage mind and body. Indeed, what is primarily distinct in the signifying practices of many diaspora authors is their rejection of the myth that Blacks are intellectually inferior. We find this in the work of members of the Black Arts Movement<sup>349</sup> as well as James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, Ben Okri, Chinua Achebe, Derek Walcott and filmmakers such as Spike Lee.

The work of these artists does not confine itself to the dichotomy of the mythic binary vis-à-vis civilised/savage mythemes. They use a linguistic synthesis of Pan-African and English regional vernacular to create a patois that destabilises the mastery of Received Pronunciation in favour of a dialect through African transportation, settlement and racial cross-cultural contact with its signifying practices. In short, foregrounding African heritage can work to dismantle the normalisation of Western customs as superior.

Many Black artists are currently engaged in cultural reclamation to affirm their history, particularly Spike Lee in films such as *Get on the Bus* (1996), with its multifarious portrayals of African-American masculinities. The narrative attempts to demystify the identities of Black men through heterosexual, homosexual and bi-racial characters. Additionally, *Bamboozled* in 2000 tackles the subject of Black historical identity and stereotypes by purging the main character Pierre Delacroix of inculcated racism. Spike Lee's approach is plainly different from the strategies deployed by Charles Fuller concerning internalised racism and White supremacy, yet this difference unites the personal expression of authors and *auteurs*. This also links Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Hall's 'The Spectacle of the 'Other'' and James Baldwin's

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<sup>349</sup> <http://aalbc.com/authors/blackartsmovement.htm> accessed 1.10.2008

discourse in *The Fire Next Time* concerning the *myth* of Western superiority, for example, which argues that Othello is not an intellectual or physical inferior.

In Stuart Hall's *Race: the Floating Signifier*, he provides a profound way of conceptualising race, not simply by means of religion, anthropology and genetics, but in the everyday observances and comments that people make about the non-White 'Other'. I read his hypothesis as part of the connotative secondary signifier that Barthes suggests and as the synchronic mythemes that Lévi-Strauss indicates as myth. In the collective consciousness of social history, fears and prejudices are used to reassure the masses that most minorities are people beneath them.

I have stated that Othellophobia is the fear White characters have of being re/enslaved by Blacks. This functions by demonising the 'Other' in virtually every level of social engagement, where the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious compel guilt-ridden racists to construct a narratology and iconography of Black people as primitive and dangerous. The diachronic reiteration of archetypal characters goes back to the prototype figure of Shakespeare's Othello because that African who became a highly cultured European thrills and threatens the unconscious mind of the spectator. I believe that principally he is not a beast but instead a cultured, intelligent and humane subject. As such, he threatens the weakest man in the play. Iago lacks power and position. He lacks faith and earthly love. He lacks spiritual love and indicates little pride in his nation state or his people.

Through Louis Althusser's explanation of interpellation, namely the ideological state's social subject, who is positioned in the ideological state apparatus and the repressive state apparatus of church, government, army, schools, police and corporate institutions, Charles Fuller functions as a man who is addressed through



institutional racism.<sup>350</sup> Whether he likes it or not he is powerless not to respond to the repressive state apparatus because he may unconsciously be dominated by it or consciously fight against it. I believe as an African-American Charles Fuller has responded to the mytheme of the savage mind legacy in *Othello*. He rejects the myth of the Black male as a beast. Although it is difficult to prove Fuller is influenced by Shakespeare's play, he is motivated to contest the myth of the Black male as a beast and he does this by repositioning a number of the mythemes of fictional drama and everyday life.

By the beginning of the 1980s, Fuller had consumed and rejected the myth of the Black male as a beast because he lived in a country where the myth of the inferiority of Blacks was compounded through the institutional practices of segregation and racial discrimination in education, employment and housing. Additionally, as the bearer of Black skin, he was subjected to a lifetime of racist abuse in the USA, because few Black men escape racial insults. Moreover, Fuller did serve in the US armed forces and, as a result, he was subjected to White men ridiculing him. Two key issues come into effect here: first, racist ideology on the savage 'nature' of Blacks based on distorted facts about religion, anthropology and science; second, the everyday observations concerning how Black people conduct themselves, what they like, how they are seen and crucially how they are inscribed.

Barthes's concepts of primary and secondary signification detail denotation and connotation that are visual, written, and spoken. Lévi-Strauss's diachronic and synchronic system relates to placing the volume of stories about Black males who are inscribed as beasts into a structure that reveals how myth is derived by themes such as the savage body, savage mind, object of desire, and the conflicts that lead

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<sup>350</sup> Storey, John, ed, (1994/2006) *Cultural Theory Reader. Third Edition*, Pearson Prentice Hall, UK, p343-345

to a clash of wills. What goes almost unnoticed in this process is what Stuart Hall is suggesting, which is how observation and language are used as a discursive for reading the non-White 'Other'.

Sergeant Waters has internalised the White racist fantasy about the Black subject. The ideas on which he fixates are habits and customs of Black folk culture, specifically, speech and mythical beliefs concerning African superstitions translated into American customs. Because White Americans castigate Black people for their African superstitions and mystical beliefs, Sergeant Waters adopts those ideas to separate himself from the other Black soldiers. This does not make him a better person as far as his peer group of Black soldiers is concerned, but a person who betrays everything Black men have fought to retain about their identity. I would suggest the characters are constructed in relation to the cultural and political legacy of Booker T. Washington, Marcus Garvey, and DuBois, who were soldiers' contemporary frame of reference in the 1930s and 1940s.

Charles Fuller and Norman Jewison have provided their Black soldiers with key scenes which enable Private C.J. Memphis and Sergeant Waters to externalise their beliefs through emotional conflict. One of the most important scenes is when Waters reveals why he has persecuted C.J. Waters; he tells him it is because he is a disgrace to Black people. He informs C.J. that he is an ignorant, inferior beast barely worth considering as a man. Sergeant Waters has picked him out because he has to be removed from society so free upstanding Black men can achieve a better place in American society.



Fig.65

When Sergeant Waters speaks to C.J., Figures 65-74, his insulting language points out habits and traits he considers too primitive, too savage and too much like a stereotype of a 'Coon'. Throughout the film, he and the White officers are the only characters to refer to negative perceptions of Blacks. The African- American NCOs share a psychological bond of propinquity whereas Sergeant Waters has no one to turn to in his moments of racial torment and guilt.

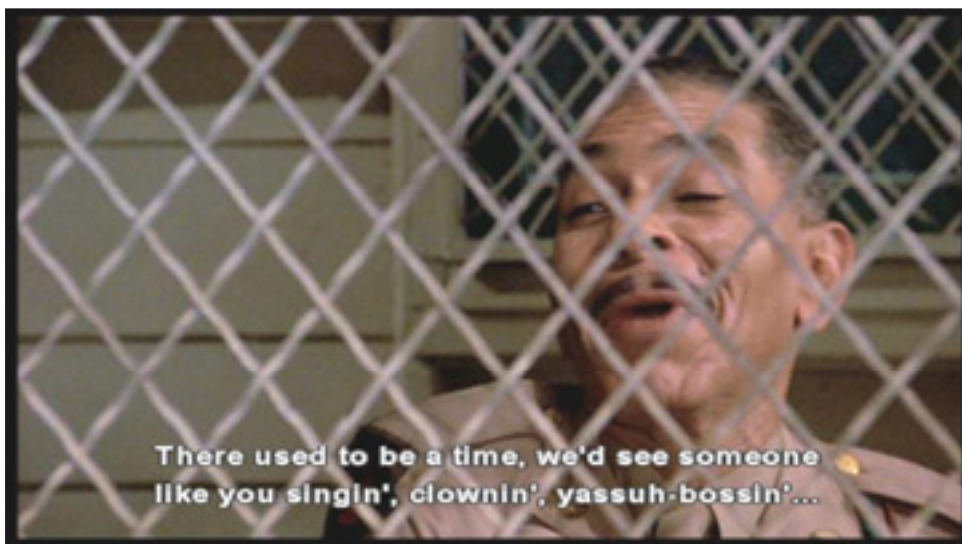


Fig.66



Fig.67



Fig.68



Fig.69





Fig.70



Fig.71

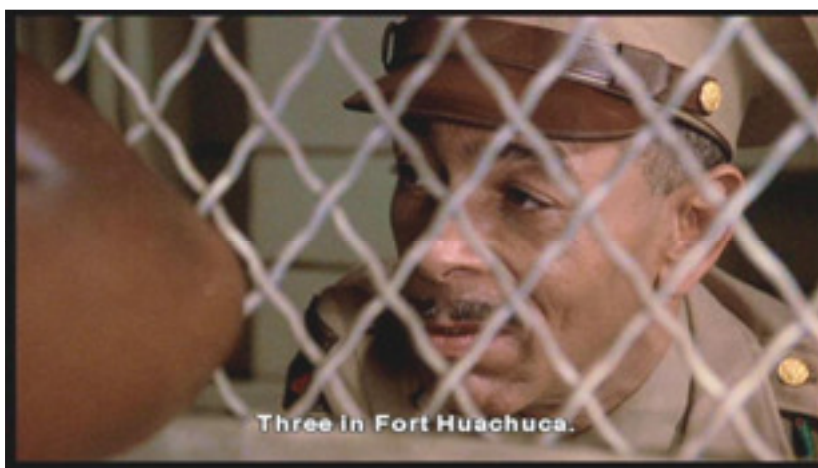


Fig.72



Fig.73



Fig.74

Through transference and inversion, Sergeant Waters takes on the identity and role of the White male character. He believes he is going to be re-enslaved by the brutal Black because he identifies with the hegemonic White male. It is not until C.J. has killed himself that Sergeant Waters recognises that the traits of African-American manhood he detested in C.J. are characteristics common to the majority of Black people. Speech cadences, the love of spontaneous expression in music, athletic prowess and worship unite the men and expel Waters from their care and protection.

Sergeant Waters's inculcated racism compels him to focus beyond religion, anthropology and genetics as claims of racial inferiority. He relies on what Stuart Hall in his 1996 Goldsmith lecture 'Race as a Floating Signifier' refers to as a

discursive field of reference. Waters focuses on the everyday cultural practices and habits as signifiers of racial identity, and those specific customs and traits are used by media institutions to construct racial characteristics. They can range from the love of soul food, basketball, rap music, dress and hairstyles to modes of speech, religious expression of faith or fantasies of intimate engagement. They all perpetuate the connotative signifiers of myth.

A problem arises, however, when Black people do things that are atypical of their imagined racial identity and social customs, for example, when Black men express a keen interest in swimming or skiing, which can be interpreted as White activities. If Black people speak without an accent that is defined as Black or Ebonic – for example, Oprah Winfrey, Colin Powell and James Earl Jones (as Darth Vader in *Star Wars*) – they are not considered to be really ‘black’. In the film *Crash* (2005), a producer on the set calls the light-skinned Black director to one side and tells him that he does not think the actor in the scene they are filming sounds appropriately ‘black’. Terrance Howard, playing the role of the director, says to the producer that everyone on set and the audience watching the film will see that he is Black. The producer threatens to replace him and the director tells him he will re-shoot the scene and get the Black actor to ‘act’ more ‘black’.

Confrontations of this kind reveal the fear among White characters of being re-enslaved by a Black man who is actually not a beast with a savage mind and body, but a Black man who is equally educated, probably just as socially aware and possibly filled with residual anger against his oppressor. Myth as a language draws on these disparities and arguably codifies racial identities from fear and projection.

## CHAPTER FIVE- BROTHER TO BROTHER: THE MYTH OF 'OBJECT OF DESIRE'

This subject exposes an intersection between narrative fiction, White supremacist ideology, speculative racial profiling, and racist fantasy. *Othello* is the central text that dramatises the love of an African Black Moor for an idolised European White female as a Goddess figure. In various debates on race and gender in European and American society, many scholars and critics, such as Angela Davis,<sup>351</sup> Lynne Segal,<sup>352</sup> Michele Wallace,<sup>353</sup> and Patricia Hill Collins,<sup>354</sup> raise different discourses on the fear of Black male rape and the corruption of the White female. In this chapter, I will establish the circularity of interracial desire, namely the way shared desires are experienced because of racial identities.

*Othello* is the key Western drama to explore love between a Black man and a White woman. Since the seventeenth century, authors have examined interracial love and passion, sexual obsession or admiration for the Black male as erotic spectacle, intellectual leader or heroic warrior, which I contend demonstrates Othellophilia. The play and the character exist in the personal unconscious as a prototype and authors have written variations of the theme, such as *'O'* (2001), that have re-inscribed *Othello* in an urban American context.

Othellophilia can also demonstrate a renunciation of the myth of the Black male as beast whereby socially inclusive White authors can reconstitute Blackness according to their historical reading of race. Barbara Hodgdon argues that Desdemona's love for Othello marks a struggle for female liberty from her father and

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<sup>351</sup> Davis, Angela Y, (1982), *Women, Race and Class*, The Women's Press, UK pp188-189, chapter 11 Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist, pp172-201

<sup>352</sup> Op cit, Segal, Lynne, (1990), *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, pp177-178

<sup>353</sup> Op cit, Wallace, Michele, (1990), *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, p23

<sup>354</sup> Op cit, Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004) *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, p65 chapter 3 The Past is ever Present: Recognizing the New Racism, pp53-83



for racial freedom.<sup>355</sup> Consequently, it challenges the myth of rape and White revulsion in terms of the Black mind and body. Additionally, Virginia Mason Vaughan studies attitudes about race and *Othello* from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries and she discerns that Othello's humanity in the script and the actors who have played him have defined him as a 'noble black savage' but also as a triumph of Black manhood over the caricature African savage.<sup>356</sup>

Othellophilia disavows the myth of the Black savage, whereby authors can glorify Black masculinity. Cameron Crowe achieved this with one of the few psychologically complete characters in post-classical film, Rod Tidwell in *Jerry Maguire* (1996); other post-classical authors, such as those who scripted Will Smith's films (*Hancock* (2008), *Pursuit of Happyness* (2006), and *Enemy of the State* (1998)), all of which defy the myth of the Black male as a beast, have done similarly.

In many novels, plays and films that have Black male characters, for example *Jungle Fever* (1991), the 'black' is frequently constructed as someone with a predilection for White females, but the circularity of interracial desire is positioned because the White female also desires the Black male. This has been scripted in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), *Story of a Three-Day Pass* (1967), *Save the Last Dance* (2001), and in *Black and White* (2000), where a rich White teenage girl is sexually fascinated by her Black hip-hop entrepreneur boyfriend and a rich, closeted, White man discovers his desire for Black 'thug' sexual outlaws.

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<sup>355</sup> Barbara Hodgdon 'The Des/Demonized Spectacle' that Desdemona's' p246 in Mason Vaughan, Virginia & Cartwright, eds, (1991), *Othello: New Perspectives*,

<sup>356</sup> Op cit, Mason Vaughan, Virginia, (1994), *Othello: A contextual history*, p70

There are many ways of exploring the 'Object of Desire' synchronic mytheme, particularly with regard to sexual attraction beyond White supremacist ideology of racial restriction and heterosexist regulation. The 'Object of Desire' can be examined in Black men and White women as well as same sex couples, such as Black and White lesbian couples. I am going to focus on Black and White men and women as well as Black and White men together. I will question essentialist expectations that shape the construction of the myth of the Black male beast by considering first whether Blackmen see certain kinds of White men as their 'Object of Desire' and, second, whether the White 'heroic' male identifies the Black sexual 'outlaw' as his 'Object of Desire'.

I will examine the concerns that determine the myth of the Black man's 'Object of Desire' by studying *Brother to Brother*, whose director, Rodney Evans, scripted a failed relationship between a White man who desires a Black man, and a Black man who wants to be desired by a 'heroic' White male. The film is groundbreaking in its attempt to contrast attraction between Black and White men in the current hip-hop age and during the Harlem Renaissance. Evans also refers to the Black Activist era of the 1970s. Because of the racial tensions between White masculinity and Blackmanhood, I want to establish a circularity of interracial desire.

*Brother to Brother* was the first independent feature by an African-American gay filmmaker and that distinguishes it from other American feature films up to that time. To contrast the subject matter of Black gay identity I will refer to *Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1989, UK), *Tongues Untied* (Marlon T. Riggs, 1989/1990, USA), and *Paris Is Burning* (Jenny Livingston, 1990, USA).

### 5.1 *Brother to Brother* (Rodney Evans, 2004, USA): Synopsis

Perry is an art student living alone in 2004 after being banished from his family home after his parents found out he was gay. In a debate, homophobic Black students insult Perry when he raises issues of Black gay activism in Black history. Angered by their bigotry, Perry leaves and Jim, a 'bi-curious' White student, befriends him.

On the streets of Brooklyn, Marcus, Perry's childhood friend, recites one of his latest poems and Bruce Nugent, a writer during the Harlem Renaissance, now aged, stops to listen to Marcus and then shares his most famous poem with the two students. Unknown to Perry, Bruce has seen him before and a moment of admiration and camaraderie is shared by the three men.

Soon a friendship develops between the aged Bruce and young Perry, and Bruce tells Perry about his life as a gay man during the Harlem Renaissance and his friendships with Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman and Zora Neal Hurston; these three were rebels within the Black modernist moment of art and literature, challenging the pious respectability of the Black bourgeoisie. Perry is both fascinated and inspired by Bruce Nugent, which forces him to confess his own pains and frustrations as a Black gay man in the twenty-first century, and the ways in which sexual politics have not changed the political consciousness of the majority of Black America in relation to gay identities.

Perry begins a sexual affair with Jim, hoping it will become an emotional loving relationship, but Jim's lack of racial awareness eventually becomes clear to Perry when Jim treats him as a Black sexual object rather than a smart and loving person. This upsets Perry and Marcus tells him he should have known better because White men have historically humiliated and objectified Black men, and Jim is no exception.

Perry spends most of his time with Bruce, gains courage as a Black gay activist, and presents work in seminars charting the conflicts between Black gay men during the Black Liberation era in the 1960s and the attitudes of the present. This further alienates Perry from the Black students at college.

Bruce takes Perry on a journey of discovery, teaching Perry how Black rebels during the Harlem Renaissance, such as Langston, Zora, Wally and himself, lived a bohemian life of jazz, sex, art and cultural resistance. The group also created an alternative magazine entitled *Fire* to challenge the bourgeois conformity of DuBois and Locke as the major spokesmen of the Black population. Their magazine *Fire* attracted scorn from conservative Blacks but fascinated Whites, who wanted the group to criminalise and erotidse their work to appeal to the White masses. They, however, declined the offer of fame, which would have been at the cost of their integrity.

Perry's paintings are well received at a Soho gallery showing and Marcus courts interested White patrons, but Perry resists being commodified as Black Art. The rise and fall of Jean-Michel Basquiat has become a cautionary life lesson for Perry. Bruce asks Perry to pose for him to restore his skills as a painter and Perry agrees. Perry also ends his affair with Jim, and Black students from college target Perry on the street and 'queer bash' him. Bruce searches for him and finds him in his college dom, locked away from the world. Bruce forces Perry to get up and fight the violence and tyranny of homophobia and racism, so Perry keeps his promise to pose for Bruce. The two men paint each other's portraits, after which Bruce passes away in his sleep. After Bruce's cremation, Perry takes his ashes to the sea and scatters them into the world. Their friendship changes Perry, giving him a historical understanding of how to triumph over heterosexist dominance.

## 5.2: *Brother to Brother*- Signs and meanings

Rodney Evans has written and directed the drama to unfold and reveal the 'discreet persona' of Black gay identity. The actors Anthony Mackie playing Perry, Roger Robinson playing Bruce, Daniel Sunjata playing Langston, Alex Burns playing Jim, and Ray Ford playing Wally contest the stereotype image of "butch" or "camp" gays. They represent ideological images of masculinity: their clothes, manner and characteristics of manly identification are naturalised as 'normal'. As the story develops, however, Perry and Bruce, and then Langston, Young Bruce and Wally become more trusting of each other. When this occurs, their gay identities emerge and they shift into a relaxed mode of expression. Once this is revealed through the *mise-en-scène*, particularly the dialogue and performance, the audience are called upon to use a connotative reading to understand fully the nuances at work in the psychology of the characters and the visual language of the film.



Fig.75

In Figure 75, Perry's voice, gestures, manner and clothes denote he is a 'student', not only because of the books he is carrying but also because of the college setting. His 'discreet persona' conceals anything gay. For a pious Black audience,

however, his defence of James Baldwin on the grounds that, as a gay man, Baldwin was silenced and oppressed by Black homophobic attitudes, makes Perry 'guilty by association' or empathy with a gay person. Consequently, the scene in the seminar room below establishes the battleground.

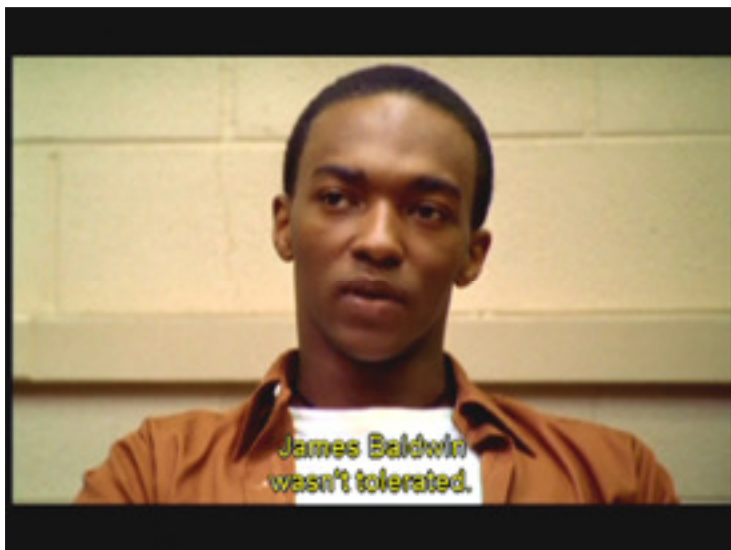


Fig.76



Fig.77

In *Brother to Brother*, Rodney Evans's Black epistemology reveals his awareness of homie-sexual identity politics.<sup>357</sup> This is a paradoxical stance concerning same sex attraction in Black men and their object of desire. In recent hip-hop, homie-sexual Black

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<sup>357</sup> Baker, Paul, (2004), *Fantabulosa: A Dictionary of Polari and Slang*, Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, UK, p146

men can be defined as “straight acting” gays. Many Black youths in hip-hop subculture, however, reject the nomenclature ‘gay’ because they associate the term predominantly with White gays.

Therefore, homie-sexuals,<sup>358</sup> namely “Black men who love Black men”, differ from Black gays outside hip-hop subculture who are attracted to men regardless of their race. Conversely, there has always been an imperative for Black men to disavow the term homosexual because of its oppressive history associated with the excommunication of gays from the community and the family by the Black church.<sup>359</sup> Consequently, “Black men who love Black men” in hip-hop youth subculture speak to each other as “thug lovers” who disavow gay identity because they see themselves as proactive and ‘gays’ as reactive.

Rodney Evans wrote all of the Black characters who desire other men as ‘gay’, because that is an accurate representation of the lives of Bruce Nugent, Wallace Thurman and Langston Hughes. In the cable TV programme, *DL Chronicles*, however, the stories mostly focus on professional “Black men loving Black men”, while maintaining a ‘discreet persona’ as heterosexual. What *Brother to Brother* and the *DL Chronicles* share are issues related to the ‘discreet persona’, namely, the manly performance and identity of Black same-sex male partners.

According to Ronald Jackson’s research, many Black men who understand the cultural mechanism and politics of Black marginalised daily life share a Black consciousness about what defines their masculinity. Kobena Mercer is correct when he says Black men have had to synthesise Western masculinity and the history of

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<sup>358</sup> Boykin, Keith, (2006), *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies, and Denial in Black America*, Carroll & Graf, USA, pp234-235 in chapter 11 ‘Homothugs, Helmets & hip-hop’ pp219-237

<sup>359</sup> Constantine-Simms, Delroy, ed, (2001), *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, Alyson, USA, pp76-77 in section: Homosexuality and the Black Church, ‘Is homosexuality the Greatest taboo?’ pp76-87

the contained manhood of Blacks to build a viable Black masculinity.<sup>360</sup> Subsequently, the term 'queer' is a classification that many Black Boyz, particularly "homo thugs", passionately reject<sup>361</sup> in ghetto life where hyper-masculinity and the Cool Pose facilitate their survival with their "Bone Daddies", as their Black male partners are known.

Keith Boykin's cultural and social study in both of his books on homophobia in Black America<sup>362</sup> has shown that the prejudice African-Americans have towards same-sex partners has been profoundly oppressive.<sup>363</sup> Boykin identifies public speakers and Black activists such as Amiri Baraka, Eldridge Cleaver, Nathan Hare, Robert Staples, Haki Madhubuti, and Molefi Asante as prejudiced intellectuals who polemically rage against homosexuality from a heterosexist rationale.

Unfortunately, homophobia in black America is not confined to the writings and speeches of black intellectuals. In the black community at large, homophobia and heterosexism reach all demographic groups...The views may differ from one group to another, but in all of them homophobia and heterosexism are frequently seen not as prejudices but as survival skills for the black race or the black individual. I mention both homophobia and heterosexism here because both play a role in activities of everyday people, with heterosexism often occurring in ways too subtle to be detected.<sup>364</sup>

Throughout his chapter 'Black homophobia', Boykin contextualises the central concerns African-Americans have about homosexuality based on religious and Afrocentric beliefs in family, community and spiritual traditions, but Boykin's argument seems to address Black America exclusively. Eugene Patron's essay on homosexuality in African culture, however, clearly states that homophobic rhetoric and condemnation are evident in Black communities globally.<sup>365</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Op cit, Mercer, Kobena, (1994), *Welcome to the Jungle*, p136-137

<sup>361</sup> Op cit, Boykin, Keith, (2006), *Beyond the Down Low: Sex, Lies and Denial in Black America*, p234

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., (2006), pp20-21

<sup>363</sup> Boykin, Keith, (1996), *Black and Gay in America: One More River To Cross*, Anchor Books, USA, p170

<sup>364</sup> Ibid, p167

<sup>365</sup> Eugene J. Patron 'Heart of Lavender', p129 in Op cit, Constantine-Simms, Delroy, ed, (2001), *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*



Homophobic prejudice combines a psychological, religious, social and intellectual resistance that refuses to acknowledge the human rights of homosexuals. In her essay 'Homophobia in Black Communities', bell hooks articulated her dismay at the violent hatred many Black folk express towards Black lesbians and gays. Describing having overheard her nieces and nephews cursing and degrading gays, she says:

Their vehement expression of hatred startled and frightened me, even more so when I contemplated the hurt that would have been experienced had our loved ones who were gay heard the words. When we were growing up, we would not have had the nerve to make such comments. We were not allowed to say negative hateful things about the people we knew who were gay. We knew their names, their sexual preference. They were our neighbours, our friends, our family. They were a part of our black community.<sup>366</sup>

This is an extremely important point because it addresses issues that 'Queer cinema' of the 1990s failed to evaluate but 'Queer studies' from the 1990s to the present do in relation to the treatment of and attitudes toward Black men loving Black men, or interracial same sex desires within Black communities. Louise Wallenberg's essay 'New Black Queer Cinema' examines *Looking for Langston*, *Tongues Untied* and *Paris is Burning*. What Black homophobia reveals at its deepest level is the faith heterosexists have in the monolithic construction of stoic hegemonic masculinity. There is widespread belief among socially conditioned men that aggressive, intrepid, unemotional manliness, with its brute strength, accumulation of wealth and domination of women, children and weaker men, is the epitome of masculinity. This construct dates back to imperial Roman conquest, the Ages of Empire, the slave master, twentieth-century industrial moguls and twenty-first-century multinational corporate giants. It is widely believed that only a patriarchal heterosexual stoic man can control and lead such institutions.

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<sup>366</sup>bell hooks, 'homophobia in Black communities', p67 in Op cit, Constantine-Simms, Delroy, ed, (2001), *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*

Nevertheless, David Geffen and Tim Gill<sup>367</sup> are two of the most wealthy and influential gay men in America, among the fifty most powerful lesbian and gay men in the US, according to *Out* magazine in April 2007.<sup>368</sup> Back in 1992, the *raison d'être* of new Queer Cinema might have been to redress the representation of gays, but after 1992, Black gays were seldom visible. Today, this has distinctly changed owing to cable television in the 1990s and the millennium era, particularly with HBO programming, first with *Oz* (1997-2003), followed by *Six Feet Under*, and then *The Wire* (2002-2008).

The diachronic and synchronic paradigm can also be used to demonise gays. The headings can be changed to:

<b>Religious condemnation</b>	<b>Psychological mental illness</b>	<b>Physically weak men</b>	<b>Sex addicts</b>
Forbidden in Scripture	Classified as a mental illness until 1975	Effeminate	Cruising and public sex  Non-monogamous

Combining personal prejudices, moral condemnation, heterosexism and homophobia determines an *a priori* 'character' and pathology projected onto men who desire men. What is vital about this structural system is that it is employed by the oppressor but not the oppressed. The term "gay" is a name that men who desire men have chosen. The heterosexist terms range from bender and mo to fag and sodomite, and with this language heterosexists in fear of their Jungian shadow

<sup>367</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1606679,00.html> Accessed 11.11.2008

<sup>368</sup> <http://out.com/detail.asp?id=22394> Accessed 11.11.2008

project an abominable 'Other'. The 'Clash of Wills' between the hetero vs. the homo often ends in the destruction of the sexual 'Other'.<sup>369</sup>

Through the reiteration of the diachronic stories and synchronic theme,

<b>Religious condemnation</b> Godforsaken	<b>Psychological illness</b> Self-hating	<b>mentally weak</b>	<b>Physically weak men</b> Camp	<b>Sex addicts</b> Promiscuous
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the myth of the immoral sodomite and socially destructive AIDS-carrying sexual outlaw is perpetuated by heterosexist and homophobic projections onto gays. Bigotry of this kind makes patterns of behaviour apparent in certain Black people who have internalised this oppressive paradigm. Delroy Constantine-Simms argues that devout Christian Blacks focus on Biblical law in their reiteration of Leviticus 18:22, which prohibits men from sexual relations with other men, and Leviticus 20:13, which adds the penalty of death to the prohibition.<sup>370</sup> Moreover, some of the synchronic mythemes such as mental illness and sex addiction are employed to castigate Black gays in conjunction with other hermeneutic readings of Scripture to affirm legitimate and 'normal' desires.<sup>371</sup>

Subsequently, the power of the myth is that it is frequently internalised by various interest groups to serve their specific agenda and their personal prejudices. With reference to Joseph Beam's (1986) *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, Essex Hemphill's (1991) *Brother To Brother*, Constantine-Simms's 2001 reader *The Greatest Taboo* and Michael Smith's 1983 *Black Men/White Men*, the diverse collection of Black gay sexual politics reiterates the same issues about human

<sup>369</sup> Russo, Vito, (1981) *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, Harper and Row, USA, pp122-123

<sup>370</sup> Op cit, Constantine-Simms, Delroy (2001) *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, pp79-80

<sup>371</sup> Ibid, pp84-85

rights, humane treatment and sexual liberation from heterosexist control and condemnation.

What is specific to the myth of the Black male beast and the myth of the sexual deviant is how Black folk read gay sexuality as a passive and powerless act, whereby many Blacks inscribe and read gays as weak Black men who have been seduced because of their contact with Whites.<sup>372</sup> Consequently, the public's desire to see heterosexual Black heroism has limited and excluded the portrayal of gay characters because many devout African-American Christians and Muslims believe homosexuality brings down the race and disgraces Black America.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid, Gregory Conerly 'Are you Black First or Are you Queer' pp18-19

<sup>373</sup> Horce Griffin 'Their Own Receive them Not: African American Lesbians and Gays in Black Churches' p110 in op cit, Constantine-Simms, Delroy (2001) *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*

### 5.3: Resisting heterosexist myth in cinema

*Brother to Brother* opens with Perry travelling on the subway and we watch him share a flirtatious look with another young Black man dressed in the style of a student. This opening reveals Perry's deepest longing for a partner who understands the circumstances of Black excommunication from the family and community. Perry is looked at, then he returns a look of desire. The use of lighting and match framing creates a harmonious mirroring of the internal shared desires of the two men, while the shot-reverse shots in Figures 78 and 79 suggest they are in the same position and share the same thoughts.



Fig.78

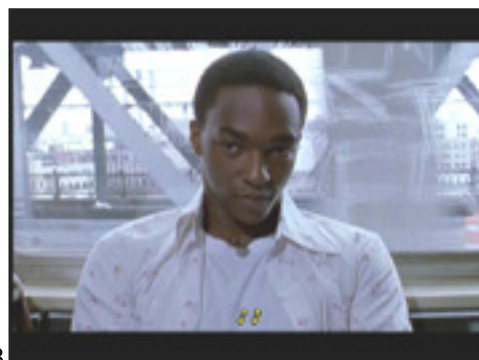


Fig.79

Unobserved by Perry, the ageing Bruce scrutinises their shared glances and eventual gaze and is amused and delighted by the contact between gay men that links his past with their present. It also reminds the audience that Bruce is still alive and keen.



Fig.80

It is the only time we are given a privileged insight into Perry's 'true' object of desire, namely, he wants to love and be loved by another Black. The film wisely does not try to justify his sexual identity; instead, the film parallels the sexual preferences of a range of Black men from the Jazz Age and the hip-hop era of 2004 with its hybrid masculine performance of Blackpolitical identity.

Within one and a half minutes of the film's opening, Perry's waking thoughts take him back to the day he returned to his parents' house for his college books and his father scornfully barred him entry to the family home and ordered him to get out of his sight. A Black gay audience can empathise with this scene and the context of rejection by the head of the family because they relate to the excommunication and loss of community kinship experienced by every Black gay man.

The parallel stories of Perry and young Bruce demonstrate how attitudes against homosexuality within Black communities from the 1920s to 2004 have resisted change. As a result of Black homophobic retaliation, Perry and Bruce are seemingly obliged to seek solace and partnerships with White gays, while Wally enjoys dalliances with "White Negroes" who are seduced by Black subculture whilst seeking existential liberation, as suggested by Norman Mailer.<sup>374</sup> Furthermore, central to self-discovery in some White male rebels is the hedonistic labyrinth offered by Black nightlife and jazz, which is dramatised in *Shadows* (1959).

In this milieu, masculinity and Black manhood were not mediated by the distinctions of Victorian masculinity that built an industrial environment. Martin Summers believes the transformation in modern Black masculinity has developed through a shift from production to consumption. Summers cites the writer Jean Toomer, who observed that:

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<sup>374</sup> 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster' 1957, p214 in Mailer, Norman (1998), *The Time of Our Time*, Abacus, UK

[...] the transition from Victorian culture to a more modern ethos roughly occurred between the 1890s and the 1920s. This shift, largely experienced by the middle class but present in society as a whole, influenced all facets of life, from attitudes towards work and leisure to social conventions concerning gender and sexuality.<sup>375</sup>

This enabled individuals to consume and produce meaning according to what it contributed to the Self, which challenged and “undermined the earlier emphasis placed on the rugged individualism of the marketplace associated with Victorian manhood”.<sup>376</sup> Martin Summers further suggests:

[...] In terms of sexuality, gay men and lesbians were beginning to identify themselves as homosexual; that is, rather than construct their sexual identities in terms of gender roles they assumed in the sex act - or allow themselves to be identified as gender inverters - gay men and lesbians began to identify themselves in relation to their object of desire. In doing so they began to construct “queer” identities and cultures.<sup>377</sup>

This self-defined preferred identity conflated consumerism, lifestyle, and persona not only with mass-produced goods, such as automobiles, fashion, music, art and literature, but through one’s own dwelling. Rent parties produced some of the most joyful gatherings in the history of Black America, spanning class and racial divides, according to Summers.<sup>378</sup>

James Weldon Johnson and the Black journalist A.J. Rogers discuss the massive impact that jazz and its social spaces had on urban White Americans who participated in Harlem nightlife and Jazz’s nightlife around the country. “Indeed jazz culture was far removed from the producer values of Victorianism. Much more than a particular musical form, jazz was a spirit, A.J. Rogers stated.” This spirit was especially intense at speakeasies, juke joints, and bars and particularly at rent parties. This is where poor folks charged maybe 25 cents to get into their home and enjoy jazz from a piano man, drink bootleg booze, eat fried fish and chicken, and dance away the worries and cares of the

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<sup>375</sup> Op cit, Summers, Martin, (2004), *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class & the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, p155

<sup>376</sup> Ibid, p155

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, p156

<sup>378</sup> Ibid, pp177-178

week for the underclass and working class African/Caribbean Americans.<sup>379</sup>

Observations like this are confirmed by the social and personal lifestyles of various gay men. Billy Strayhorn, Duke Ellington's arranger, was a Black self-proclaimed gay man who constructed his identity against the regulations of a dominant Black heterosexist patriarchy. He was very sociable and welcomed artists and bohemians to his home, where he entertained with his lovers.<sup>380</sup> Duke Ellington had no difficulty in accepting Billy as a Black gay man. Strayhorn also lived an open gay bohemian life among Black and White gays. People in the Black intelligentsia and later in the civil rights movement, including Dr Martin Luther King Jr., respected him, clearly knowing that he was gay.<sup>381</sup>

In *Brother to Brother*, Perry is forced to reconsider his object of desire. His ideal love may be Black, but he is surrounded by hostile Black men at college, at his home where his father assaults him, and on the streets where he is identified as a 'punk' by other Black men, a term that means someone cast as the willing sexual recipient of sodomy and therefore not a man. Consequently, he is exiled by Black American communities<sup>382</sup> in Brooklyn and Harlem. This kind of defamatory chastisement is psychologically destructive. Very few Black male intellectuals defended the human rights of Black gay men in the 1990s, with the clear exception of Cornel West.<sup>383</sup> Perry is therefore motivated to consider Jim as a possible partner since Jim masquerades as a White hipster committed to a multiracial hip-hop fraternity.

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid, p174

<sup>380</sup> Hajdu, David, (1997), *Lush Life: A Biography of Billy Strayhorn*, Granta, UK, pp114-115

<sup>381</sup> Ibid, pp224-225

<sup>382</sup> Op cit, Boykin, Keith, (1996), *Black and Gay in America: One More River to Cross*, p57 and chapter 2 'Are Blacks and Gays the Same?' pp30-84

<sup>383</sup> *The Darker Side of Black*, (Isaac Julian, 1994, UK )



First, it is odd that Rodney Evans makes no reference to a Black gay fraternity in Harlem. The anthropologist William G. Hawkeswood spent two years interviewing Black gay men in Harlem and documenting the social and political allegiances that formed a family for Black gays outside the homes and lives of their blood relatives if their gay identities and sexual preference offended their African/Caribbean American families.<sup>384</sup> Hawkeswood was allowed into the personal lives of Black gay men who discussed how they reconstituted families across age and class divides by adopting each other in order to survive after being ostracised by Black America.<sup>385</sup> Hawkeswood identifies how the early years of the Black gay underground developed and saw that Black gays in the 1960s created a subculture out of the personal aspects of their everyday lives, thus politicising their experiences into a Black gay collective, which later grew in strength from the 1970s to the 1990s to form the New York gays scene.<sup>386</sup>

This strategy of Black gay community reliance was confirmed some years later by Leon E. Pettiway's studies. In *Honey Honey Miss Thang: being black, gay and on the streets*, he made a detailed investigation of the lives of five Black transsexuals addicted to drugs and hustling on the street to support their drug dependency.<sup>387</sup> Their impoverished lives in urban cities exemplified the ways in which the five transsexuals became dependent on each other. Pettiway's studies also problematised the notion that all Black gays share the same object of desire for the tough Black guy or the privileged White man. Charley Shively's essay 'Beyond the Binary: Race and Sex'

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<sup>384</sup> Hawkeswood, William G. (1996), *One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem*, University of California Press, USA, pp22-23

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, p37

<sup>386</sup> Ibid, pp123-124

<sup>387</sup> Pettiway, Leon E., (1996), *Honey Honey Miss Thang: Being Black, Gay, and on the Streets*, Temple University Press, USA, ppXXViii-XXX

established that White and Black men achieve emotional and sexual fulfilment with each other.<sup>388</sup>

Second, Evans's film makes no mention of how the above issues have helped men to construct their gay identities in the hip-hop era. The politicisation of Black gay identities was presented in *Tongues Untied* in 1989, and through Black gay identity preference, shown in *Paris is Burning*, where Black gays joined safe shelter 'Houses', that is to say, alternative support shelters turned into makeshift Black gay communes, such as the 'House of Chanel'. *Paris is Burning* documents how Black gay men live out their personal preferences and fantasies of social acceptance, to be their idealised selves as female and male types, from high fashion 'girls' to military men, college students, executives, street bangee girls and boys. Their life stories suggest many of the ways in which they are marginalised as Black and gay in heterosexist Black America and patriarchal democratic White society. Central to this is their disenfranchised status, their gender status and their class status. Under these social circumstances, it is not surprising they challenged their social oppression by bending the codes of gender, race and class, because they lived in a consumer society in the 1980s where all desires could be traded.

Although *Paris is Burning* shows how popular culture in film, television and fashion created White male and female icons that Black gays imitated through masquerade, it also reveals some of the deepest frustrations about being a Black man who is gay. In the film, a deep sense of being rejected and abused by the status quo underlines the mimes that psychologically empower Black men, such as college student, corporate man, and soldier. I believe there is a confluence concerning the 'Object of Desire' through drag and masquerade. The Black and Latino gay men in

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<sup>388</sup> Op cit, Michael J. Smith ed (1983), *Black Men, White Men* p143

*Paris is Burning* parodying White male and female privilege arguably reveal their Jungian Ego persona; the intersection between the persona, shadow, anima, and animus can be considered in this context, as I will illustrate shortly.

In *Brother to Brother*, Rodney Evans uses a number of film strategies to differentiate his film from Hollywood and post-classical cinema, which Yearwood discusses in *Black Film as a Signifying Practice*<sup>389</sup> Evans places Perry in centre frame as the main character and throughout the film his costume, the lighting, his space in the frame and performance do not decentre him as a figure of identification for the audience; we follow his journey and the people he meets help to displace his internal psychological angst externally through the mise-en-scène. Moreover, Evans refuses to ridicule gays, as represented in Spike Lee's *School Daze* (1988) through a performative mocking chorus with the men in the College Fraternity performing the song and dance number 'Gamma Fag!' Instead, Evans works against Black sexist bigotry by presenting Langston devoid of camp.

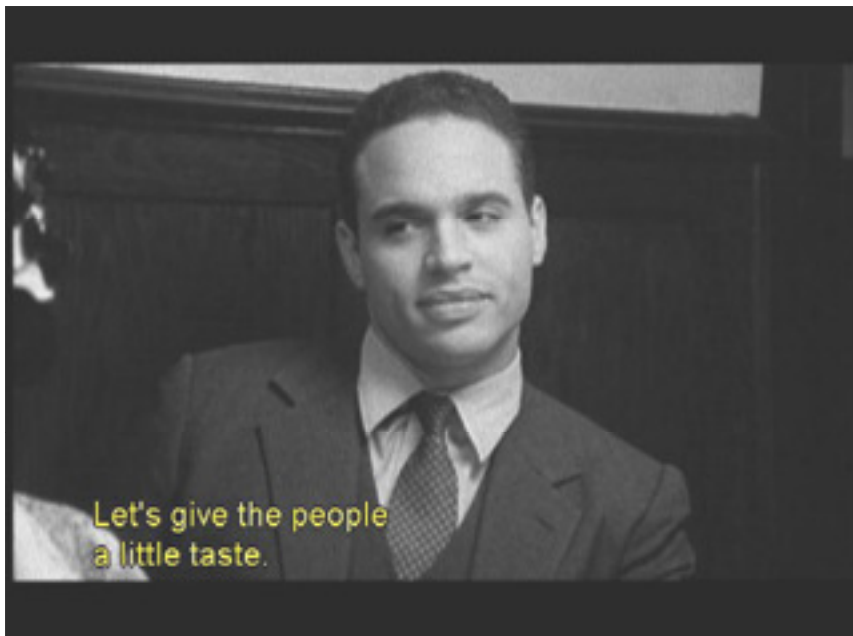


Fig.81

<sup>389</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone L. (2000), *Black Film as a Signifying Practice: Cinema, Narration and the African-American Tradition*, pp8-9

Above, the Langston Hughes character embodies the urban masculine chic of the 1920s. This masculinity enabled the spectator to form an empathetic bond with Langston. It also opened up identification with Bruce and Perry, whose psyches the audience are asked to understand. 'New Queer Cinema' did not achieve this for a diverse ethnic audience seeking visibility and pleasure, because race was largely absent from the films that followed after 1992. B. Ruby Rich grouped a range of films together over the 1989-92 period as New Queer Cinema,<sup>390</sup> the momentum of which seemed promising but did not fully materialise. That is most certainly not the fault of her critical reading but it was possibly premature to forge a movement out of disparate films in that three-year period. The 1989-92 films dealt with 'queer' relationships up to a point, but few of the films after that focused on Black, Hispanic and Latino identities. Nor did the New Queer films strive to demystify racial gay stereotypes, although *Go Fish* (1994) and *Watermelon Woman* (1997) did make inroads in examining Black lesbian desire.

Furthermore, with the domination by mainstream cinema of narrative realism and its approximation of everyday life compounding concepts of normality through the manipulation of mise-en-scène, Evans chose to provoke questions rather than impose meaning by contrasting historical periods. This occurs in scenes that shift between Bruce's memories of the 1920s and Perry's sublimated Black activism in the 1960s when he shows his classmates the documentary of the Black gay struggle and Black Nationalist militancy. Evans uses the agency of Black empowerment in the two eras to problematise the dogma of homophobia in this millennium. It not only challenges the characters in the scenes, it addresses the spectator and audience. Evans makes us ask questions about Black history, sexual politics and our myths about homosexuality and its history.

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<sup>390</sup> B. Ruby Rich, 'New Queer Cinema', pp16-17, in Aaron, Michele, (2004), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, Edinburgh University Press, UK

One of the most important narrative strategies in the film that also works to explain the characters is the way the *mise-en-scène* stages the psychological turmoil Perry is going through by using the uncertainty of whether Bruce is an agitprop phantom figure or fictional rather than biographical Bruce Nugent. The story takes place in 2004, which would have made Mr Nugent ninety-eight; therefore, does Evans take artistic licence with Bruce's age, or is Bruce present to exemplify the fractured psyche of Perry seeking answers to questions none of his peers can answer?

In most of their meetings, Bruce takes Perry into an imagined historical past that helps Perry gain a knowledge of his sexual identity now as a developing artist searching to find a voice Black America will listen to through his artistic expression as a painter. His struggles map and match those of the Renaissance men of the 1920s and it is clearly no accident that Perry's fear as a Black man is the isolation some of the gay artists experienced from the Black bourgeoisie who ridiculed their work in the Jazz Age.

Evans parallels this through similarity in narrative plotting. Wallace Thurman is offered White patronage if he panders to a White readership of Black depravity and he rejects it, and Perry is offered a gallery and a curator who will promote him if he will adapt his work to suit an audience outside a Black minority. Whereas the location of the office in the scenes during the 1920s sets the environment of White male power, the gallery in the present time is set in a space of White aesthetic authority. Both White men have the power to change the lives of Wallace and Perry, who however take the principled high ground and distance themselves from these White male figures.

In *Brother to Brother*, Perry's object of desire seems to be a self-defined gay lover, a man who is strong enough to defend himself and support Perry against a world of prejudice. When Perry and Jim break up and Perry tells Jim about the kind of man he wants, it is clear that they are not right for each other despite their physical attraction. Their problem is that they do not discuss their desire for each other, nor do they examine why they are attracted to a racial 'Other'.

Evans may have written the relationship this way to highlight the current lack of debate concerning interracial desires between Blacks and Whites and gay men. Because Evans juxtaposes the social dialogues about racial fascination during the 1920s concerning Black masculinity and the sexual, artistic and social relationships of White men with Blacks during the Harlem Renaissance, which Martin Summers traces in his biographical studies of Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, Bruce Nugent, and Countee Cullen,<sup>391</sup> this indicates that Evans is aware of the issues.

Jim appears to possess racial awareness and Perry is drawn to him, but Jim has no instinctual or intellectual understanding of what life is like for a Black gay man as the object of desire of the "White Negro". Norman Mailer discussed the fascination Whites have for Blacks in terms of man's knowledge of his atomic annihilation. He himself was aware of the atrocities of WW2 and the horror of the concentration camps, and was a man trapped by an either/or dichotomy: "To be a square in a totalitarian state where compromise erodes a man's guts, his intellect and his sexual identity. Or a rebel Hipster compelled to encourage the psychopath in oneself, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, which is without a past or a

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<sup>391</sup> Op cit, Summers, Martin, (2004), *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class & the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*, p173

future”.<sup>392</sup> Mailer states “it is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries”.<sup>393</sup> Mailer’s reading of the Negro implies a monolithic Black hedonistic identity that totally fails to acknowledge the devout Christian lifestyles of conservative African-Americans. This lack of awareness provoked Baldwin’s critical response to Mailer’s essay.<sup>394</sup>

Furthermore, Cornel West’s essay ‘The New Cultural Politics of Difference’ states that the influence of difference and multiculturalism transformed White popular culture in the West.<sup>395</sup> He cites issues involving post-colonial struggles for liberation in Africa, further insurgence in India in 1947 against Britain, in Vietnam in the 1950s against France and later on the USA, and in Algeria and France with regard to the decolonisation of mind and country. Cornel West’s overview is that White supremacist colonial control fosters a deep understanding between the oppressor and the oppressed based on dominance and subservience. In such a relationship, the oppressed always learn more about the ‘master’s’ psychology according to how the master keeps people powerless and what he tries to force people to become. In such a relationship, frequently based on sexual and racial dominance, the way one is forced to act exposes the oppressor’s conscious and unconscious needs.

In *Brother to Brother*, Jim lacks this insight regarding his “bi-curious” desire for Perry. Jim wants him because he is attractive, restrained and discreet. Perry is not a Black homosexual exhibitionist because he is aware of the risks of violent retaliation;

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<sup>392</sup> Mailer, Norman, (1957), ‘The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster’ p213 in

Op cit, Mailer, Norman, (1998), *The Time of our Time*

<sup>393</sup> Ibid, p214

<sup>394</sup> Op cit, Baldwin, James, (1985), *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985*, ‘The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy’, p292

<sup>395</sup> Cornel West, (1990) ‘The New Cultural Politic of Difference’ pp208-209 in Simon During, ed, (1993) *The Cultural Studies Reader*, Routledge, UK

despite his self-control, he is still 'queer bashed' by homophobic Blacks. One of the lessons learned in the post-Panther, post-gay liberation era is that the object of desire dynamic does not have to be an exploitative relationship, and Rodney Evans attempts to examine this interracial relationship and its personal preferences. Bruce tells Perry about a time when Black and White men worked and played together in the 1920s. In the film, Evans contrasts the 'Object of Desire' and the 'Clash of Wills' most effectively in the flashback scenes to the 1920s (Figure 82 below) when Wallace Thurman is making love to a White man who is overwhelmed by Thurman's sexual prowess and loses control of himself through an orgasmic catharsis.



Fig.82

Nothing in this scene suggests Thurman is the exploited object of desire to the White male. Later on in the film when the White photographer Carl Van Vechten is taking photographs of Thurman and his lover, the spirit of adventure and engagement marks their affair. Thurman chooses with whom he wants to go to bed – a White gay man – and he prefers to be the more dominant lover. His White lover



unashamedly expresses his joy in their sexual relationship, and Bruce Nugent, hiding under the bed, delights in the joy of their shared sexual freedom. This mutual desire or preference of Black gay men seeking White lovers is frequently neglected in Queer theory; the 1993 *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* by Abelove and colleagues did not examine the subject at all. Ten years later, Louise Wallenberg<sup>396</sup> did discuss the subject but that was twelve years after B. Ruby Rich's key article.

Interracial relationships are major factors that disrupt the essentialism of Black gay politics and White queer discourse because the idea that polar opposites dominate lesbian and gay social experiences is not accurate. It could be argued that *Brother to Brother* does not examine the preferences of interracial desires or the camaraderie of Black-centred support networks for gay men. Failure to do so could oversimplify the complexities of preferential desires at work in the Harlem Renaissance sequences and the contemporary scenes where Perry and Jim struggle to maintain a relationship, because they do not explore their attraction to each other as Black and White men who are not restricted to 'hetero-normative' regimes.

In the erotic scenes during the flashback sequences involving Bruce Nugent or Wally Thurman, there is a shared sense of joy and desire between them and their White lovers: for example, young Bruce cruising the subway, sitting on the sofa kissing two male admirers, or 'cottaging', shown in the scene below.

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<sup>396</sup> Louise Wallenberg, *New Black Queer Cinema*, p129 in Op cit, Aaron, Michele, ed, (2004), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*



Fig.83

In the seduction scene between Perry and Jim in the stark environment of Perry's dom, Figures 84 and 85 however, their anxieties do not narrate the repressed desires they feel when they finally make love.



Fig.84



Fig.85

After the liaison, Jim is clearly unsettled, having followed his instincts as a bi-curious White American male, but the relationship could have told us much more if they had explored their attraction to each other as gays seeking affirmation as men oppressed by heterosexism and homophobia. If Perry and Jim had explored their attraction, they might have questioned racial myths rooted in their collective unconscious concerning Black and gay stereotypes: in short, the myth of homosexual corruption and African primitivism. Reading this film as agitprop points to effective strategies in Black queer filmmaking, because it provokes the audience to become conscious of cross-cultural criticism from the 1920s to the present.

These issues formed the basis for Black sexual politics from the early 1980s and through the 1990s. Boykin's explanation of racism among heterosexual and homosexual men in White America is central to an understanding of the objectives many Black gay artists and filmmakers aimed at overturning in visual arts; key among these were how they were represented in film and treated in the media.

*Tongues United* picked up on these complex issues and further explored the attraction and desires Black and White gays share. Rodney Evans has established

some of the new concerns for Black and Latino gay films at the start of this century. Social changes have affected the lives of all gay men and there are many ways that Black and White gay men as 'outlaws' have made their lives together when their need for love defies the boundaries set by Black sexual politics and White racism. African-American bigotry formed a mythic homosexual beast but Evans's humanist portrait contests it because he re-inscribed their masculinity with agency and intellect. His approach to filmmaking is to conflate sexual politics with cultural history and current debates in sexual politics.

It would be useful to consider the subject of interracial desire, and the sexual and emotional intersections that exist in the circularity of interracial desires because they relate to the mythemes in synchronic structure.

#### 5.4: The circularity of interracial desire

I define the circularity of interracial desire as the shared and overlapping attractions between Black and White people specifically as a result of colonial and post-colonial relations, which opens up a space for an emotional, erotic and intellectual affinity. This manifests a search for humane affirmation and racial egalitarian liberty to dispel the savage.

This means the Black male has to find in his object of desire a humane being who eradicates the fatal White female whose lies and accusations of rape brought about the death of Black men. The White female has to find a Black man whose enslavement and disenfranchisement has not reduced him to sexual revenge as a victimising pathological criminal. The White male has to find a Black woman who can overcome the history of sexual violence and psychological brutality against Black women; she has to be able to forgive the White male, which may be the most difficult transition of all. Each man and woman striving to share a circuitry of interracial desires has to meet a humane partner because sex is unlikely to heal their spirit. It is through intelligence and mutual respect that each will find their freedom in the other.

In today's global society, the empathetic response to Black culture marks a history of racial abuse, the denial of the equality of Black people, and a tenacious resistance to acknowledging the historical civilisation of Blacks.<sup>397</sup> We can now, however, cite key events that demonstrate the disavowal by ordinary people of racism and racist propaganda practices, such as the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the USA, which marks a historic testament to the changing character of Americans and their increasing shift away from the inculcated racism that dominated the twentieth century.

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<sup>397</sup> Op cit, Miles, Robert, & Brown, Malcolm, (1989/2003), *Racism*, Second Edition, pp50-51

Most countries with a colonial and imperial history, such as Europe and the USA, have had close contact and intimate relations with people of African heritage, and there has remained a deep fascination with Black people despite all the atrocities inflicted on Blacks by Europe and America. These have been documented by Peter Fryer in *Staying Power: the History of Black People in Britain*, Winthrop Jordan in *White over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro*,<sup>398</sup> and historians in *American Negro Slavery*,<sup>399</sup> and BBC4's (2007) *Racism: A History*, narrated by academics from Africa, America, Europe and the UK. Central to this fascination is the Black body According to Ronald Jackson:

I am simply contending... that popular media agencies participate in designing bodies, particularly Black bodies, that are already constructed, and this subconscious and sometimes purposeful superimposition is a systematic endeavour to construct images of cultural Otherness that reflect the scripting agency's own xenophobic tendencies.<sup>399</sup>

Furthermore, Gary Gay and Willie Baber's 1987 reader *Expressively Black: The Cultural Basis of Ethnic Identity* explains the spiritual expressivity of African-Americans in arts, craft, dance, music, literature and African folk culture.<sup>400</sup> This has been translated into the American customs seen in Black religious and secular practices that have influenced blues, gospel, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, and hip-hop. Patricia Hill Collins argues that White America's fascination with hip-hop is demonstrated in its consumption of hip-hop identity politics, namely issues of disenfranchisement, fashion and Ebonics as exemplified in global youth culture, whereas White societies can access and purchase what they like about their historically divided culture.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Weinstein, Allen, Gatell, Frank O, & Sarasohn, David, eds, (1979), *American Negro Slavery: A Modern Reader*, Part II: Slaves and Masters, p76 and pp76-82

<sup>399</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, pp53-54

<sup>400</sup> Gay, Gary and Baber, Willie L. (1987), *Expressively Black: The Cultural Basis of Ethnic Identity*, Praeger, USA, pp6-7

<sup>401</sup> Op cit, Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004), *Black Sexual Politics* pp30-31

With regard to the character of Black men, Norman Mailer made a number of assertions in his essay "The White Negro", yet it is his honest expression of homosocial admiration that distinguishes the essay. Mailer felt compelled to identify Black expressions of manhood as traits that the post-war White American "hipsters" admired and desired as a sign of cool and a mark of intense sexual character.<sup>402</sup>

In such places as Greenwich Village a ménage-à-trois was completed - the bohemian and the juvenile delinquent came face to face with the Negro, and the hipster was a fact of American life. [...] And in the wedding of the white and the black it was the Negro who brought the cultural dowry. [...] So there was a new breed of adventurers, urban adventurers who drifted out at night looking for action with a black man's code to fit their facts. The hipster had absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for all practical purposes could be considered a white Negro.<sup>403</sup>

In the chapter 'The Man of Color and the White Woman', Frantz Fanon tells the story of Jean Veneuse, a Black man, and Andrée Marielle, a White woman. Jean loves Andrée but he has to adopt a certain frame of mind to build up the courage to ask her relatives to grant him permission to marry her and not judge him as inferior because he is Black. He consults a close White friend and he is reminded that since he has lived in France for most of his life and gained a French cultural and intellectual understanding of life, he is no longer Black. He is far removed from his motherland because he has become a son of France, so to speak. Consequently, he must demand Andrée's hand in marriage and make it clear he is not the savage the family might imagine because, although he may look black, he is actually just very brown.<sup>404</sup>

Throughout the chapter, Fanon is sardonic and the reader can detect his irony as he explains the "abandonment-neurotic" characteristic of Jean Veneuse.

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<sup>402</sup> Norman Mailer 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster', p213 in Mailer, Norman, (1999), *The Time of our Time*

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, pp213-214

<sup>404</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin White Mask*, p69

Nevertheless, what is implicit is Fanon's collusion with Jean. Fanon is aware that the cost of acculturation often turns out to be alienation of one's Black heritage from its psychological impulses, particularly in its emotional pull towards Black expressivity, and the Black man's stoic and intellectual aspiration for White acceptance and its endorsement of sexual union with a White female goddess to affirm his civilisation.

Channel Four's excellent documentary *Forbidden Fruit* (2003), featuring many sociologists, psychologists and historians, including the eminent art historian and writer Prof. David Dabydeen, strove to explain the fascination of Black and White interracial desire from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. The programme focused on plantation slavery in the Caribbean, colonial control of people in Africa and India, and Black people in Britain from the 1700s up to 2003, in addition to a study of interracial couples on a college campus in Connecticut. One of the key considerations they examined was circumstances that facilitate mutual sexual attraction despite all the myths concerning the alleged savage nature of Blacks and the barbaric treatment by Whites of Black bodies. Evaluating all the obscure and familiar evidence the series brought to light, one concludes that desire cannot be policed.

The Georgians, Victorians and Edwardians policed Black men and White women to prevent sexual union but they could not restrain themselves from having sexual relations with Black women. This also applied to European-Americans during the same period in the USA. Furthermore, White male privilege did not give men the capacity to reason why White women desired Black men. In today's society, many Black and White heterosexuals still cannot explain that attraction, taking into consideration the racial politics between Whites and the designated racial 'Other'.

I would suggest, however, that the irrational act of racism itself masks the desires of White sexual repression. Moreover, in spite of the history of racial abuse,



there are Black people who desire sexual gratification and emotional comfort with White people not only to dispel the anguish of racial subjugation but also to heal the memory of their loss of freedom and relinquish their residual anger. I believe an explanation for this is the seductive impulse of forbidden love and the excitement of taboo sexual pleasures. Having said that, I believe it is unwise to overlook the fact that many Whites simply are not attracted to the Black body. Moreover, countless Black men and women are not attracted to Whites in any way because they represent the monstrous White male and the mendacious White female, each of whom exists as a symbol of death to disenfranchised Blacks suffering residual anger and racist trauma.

Throughout the series *Forbidden Fruit*, no one cited Frantz Fanon's work, although many of his findings underpinned the commentary, such as the power and privilege of the White master on the plantation and in the post-colonial climate, the desire of White women and their fantasies about Black men, the acquiescence of Black women to the White master, and the desire by Blackmen for the White female Goddess figure. What *Forbidden Fruit* added to Fanon's work is a consideration of the relationships between Black men and women. In surveys and interviews young Black men said that Black women today are irascible and unfairly judgemental towards them because of their social status and potential as providers; consequently, the Black men date White women. Several young Caribbean Black British women said they can only date within their race and they had no desire for White men, whereas an African woman said young Black men were sexually aggressive in their initial approach and she therefore preferred White men.

What is conspicuously absent in the area of research covered in *Forbidden Fruit* and underdeveloped in Fanon's studies is same-sex interracial desires. Fanon

explains how the White male desires the Black female, how the Black male desires the White female, and the Black female's desire for the White male. Fanon cannot fully accept, however, how the Black male might desire the former White master or why the White male may yearn to embrace his former demon as a humane heroic figure.

I discern two key factors in this reversal of power. First, that sexual gratification is not the only way to explain Black men as an object of desire for White men; nor can we reliably imagine that the White female Goddess lies at the heart and mind of the Black male, as Herton,<sup>405</sup> Cleaver,<sup>406</sup> and Fanon<sup>407</sup> suggest. Second, if we consider *Othello* and various other narratives wherein the White male masquerades as a Black man, such as *Black Like Me* (1964), it points towards the deeper desires of the White male.

I posit *Othello* as a central text because the play states its object of desire not through Othello's faith and love for Desdemona, nor through the convoluted motives of Iago in plotting Othello's downfall and Desdemona's death. I believe interracial desire also exists in constructing a Black body out of the body of a White male when one plays Othello, whereby the European male has to find the humanity of a Black man out of his own being. Shakespeare did not simply invent a Black male: he presented all his actors with the opportunity to be a Black man and find love and compassion for Othello the Moor, who was the descendant of former conquering Moors who had enslaved White men.

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<sup>405</sup> Op cit, Herton, Calvin, (1970) *Sex and Racism*, p62

<sup>406</sup> Op cit, Cleaver, Eldridge, (1968), *Soul on Ice*, p161

<sup>407</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, p63

The character and the play confronted the Jacobean audience with some of their greatest suspicions about Black Moors and the savagery of Africans and it challenged them through the fateful love story. *Othello* has continued to ask generations of audiences to question dominant myths about race. The public's compassion for Othello grows out of their understanding of his human weakness. This is achieved by cast and directors' multifarious representations of Black masculinity, which are based on seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century perceptions of race and Black manhood.

In Wells and Neill's *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello*, it is noteworthy that the most controversial portrayals of Othello were in the nineteenth century, the age of European empire and American imperial expansion. The latter's institutional racism was intact from 1800 to 1861, and then after 1896 with the Plessy vs. Ferguson "separate but equal" ruling. Consequently, the sight of a White man in blackface intimately touching the white-skinned Desdemona and then eventually killing her was enough to incite men in the audience to leap to her rescue on stage.

The French novelist Stendhal recorded an extraordinary event during an American performance in 1822: an American soldier who was on guard duty inside the Baltimore theatre, seeing Othello... was about to kill Desdemona', intervened to protect her: "It will never be said that in my presence a confounded Negro has killed a White woman!" he shouted, and then fired his gun... breaking the arm of the actor playing Othello.<sup>408</sup>

The soldier's actions point to the power of inculcated racism when the mere sight of a man in blackface overshadows cognitive reason. It also indicates the influence Othello's character has on an audience. Conversely, in (A5.S2.L336-5.2.L370) the death of Othello and the words of condemnation by Lodovico to Iago, move the audience deeply. Othello's incited sexual jealousy, provoked by Iago's professional jealousy and, I

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<sup>408</sup> Op cit, Wells, Stanley & Neill, Michael, (2006), *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello*, p8

believe, his repressed homosexual jealousy, exposes the objects of desire of each of them, namely Othello's sexual 'Other', the White Goddess, Iago's former Black conqueror.

Black people of African heritage have fascinated people in Western culture from the earliest period. In July to October 2008, the Nieuwe Kerk gallery in Amsterdam had an exhibition entitled 'Black is Beautiful'<sup>409</sup> containing paintings from 1300 to 2008 that celebrated Dutch fascination with the Black subject.<sup>410</sup> Because we are saturated with the pathological narrative of the savagery of Blacks, it barely seems possible that there is an alternative narrative but, of course, there is.

Since the Harlem Renaissance, White America and Europe have continued their erotic fascination with Black people and Black culture. In Richard Powell's 1997 *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century*, he documents the marginal practices of artists and writers at the end of the 1800s and throughout the twentieth century. He maps the patronage and support of the privileged White elite of America during the Harlem Renaissance and up to the 1980s New Wave period, when the passion of Whites for the Black 'mystique' was shown in gallery art, performance art and video art by Jean Michel Basquiat, Keith Haring, Andy Warhol. Jean Paul Goude's<sup>411</sup> work with Grace Jones in male drag blurred the boundaries of masculine/feminine.

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<sup>409</sup> <http://www.codart.nl/exhibitions/details/1286/> Accessed 10.11.2008

<sup>410</sup> <http://www.blackisbeautifulamsterdam.nl/index.aspx?Chapterid=96> Accessed 10.11.2008

<sup>411</sup> <http://uk.youtube.com/watch?v=0a7tykcV1IE&NR=1> Accessed 10.11.2008



Fig.86

In Figure 86 of Grace Jones, Jean Paul Goude succeeded in making the Black body a conceptual aesthetic product to be idolised. Robert Mapplethorpe's fascination with and desire for the Black male in his photographs, particularly his infamous image of 'man in a polyester suit', explored a similar terrain, but the sight of the 'monstrous Black penis' made the Black body strange by dehumanising the man. In Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien's extended essay in *Unwrapping Masculinity* (1988) they discuss how the ideas behind the image are crucial because we are seeing ourselves through a postmodern White gaze that effectively removes the jungle and plantation setting yet restages the myth of the brainless primitive body.<sup>412</sup>

In Bonnie Greer's BBC 4 documentary *The Black Image in Western Art*, she asked Richard Dyer, David Dabydeen, Stuart Hall, Jean Paul Gaultier and Jean Paul Goude what Black meant to them today and what, if any, interracial fascinations or desires they had on a professional or personal level. Gaultier and Goude eloquently

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<sup>412</sup> Kobena Mercer and Isaac Julien, 'Imaging the Black Man's Sex' pp144-145 in Chapman, Rowena and Rutherford, Jonathan, (1988), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*; Lawrence and Wishart, UK

said that, as White men, they had always been interested in Black culture because it spoke about their perception of their own identities as men. To them, the Black female body is an inspiration because it extends beyond the confines of colonial narration; that is to say, as men in the twentieth century, they inherited a history of the Black mystique and savage myth. Both aspects of these narratives forced them to redefine their notions of beauty beyond the ideal of the White.

David Dabydeen told Bonnie Greer the painters William Hogarth and Sir Joshua Reynolds had welcomed the chance to paint the Black male figure and capture the dignity of Blacks, which they did on canvases such as Reynolds's 'Portrait of Olaudah Equiano', William Hogarth's 'Marriage à la Mode, Frame Four' (1745), and Thomas Gainsborough's 'Portrait of Ignatius Sancho' (1768).<sup>413</sup>

The combined issues from *Forbidden Fruit* and *The Black Image in Western Art* bridge my overall argument. First, the Black and White body respectively are inscribed as sinful and sacred. Richard Dyer clarifies the point that the White body is transcended by the spirit whereas the Black body is doomed by its earthly lascivious needs.<sup>414</sup> The diachronic reiteration of this idea created the myth of the savage long before the invention of narrative film, but Hollywood's investment in that legacy has perpetuated the myth. The circuitry of interracial desires cannot be effected if sexual gratification degrades people: there must be clear signs of humane care in order to dispel the savage inhuman being.

Furthermore, the circularity of interracial desire between Black and White gay men has a history from the Harlem Renaissance to the current period that is frequently omitted from post-classical cinema. The social and political cooperation that brought together thousands of Black and White gays in building a gay culture in

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<sup>413</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/africans\\_in\\_art\\_gallery\\_07.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/africans_in_art_gallery_07.shtml) Accessed 12.11.2008

<sup>414</sup> Dyer, Richard, (1997), *White*, Routledge, UK, pp28-29 chapter 1 'The Matter of Whiteness', pp1-40

America is testament to that. In *Before Stonewall* (1984) and *After Stonewall* (2005), the presence and participation of Black and White gays mark a struggle for gay rights, which is evidenced in both films through a shift in the factions towards cooperation and coalition with Gay Pride and the Federation of Gay Games.<sup>415</sup>

In all the essays and articles in *Black Men/White Men*, the dominant theme is the mistrust of White gays by Black gays. The mistrust is rooted in the White racist desire for Black men as sex objects,<sup>416</sup> rather than in nurturing love and equality, because Black gay's lives have been affected by persecution and discrimination. Joe DeMarco said that there are many ways in which White gay men see Black gaymen purely as sex objects who lack intelligence. He argues that White gays perceive Black gays as a-historical beings completely unaware of the role social history has played in shaping Blacks, gays or cultural politics. DeMarco expresses this as a Black gay man who is denied access to gay social spaces through ID-carding in bars, clubs and bathhouses. Additionally, he explains that he and all of his Black gay 'brothers' are never made welcome socially by White gays unless they want the Black men to be sexually dominant and fulfil their fetishistic macro-phallic fantasies of primitive and savage sex. DeMarco closes his essay by discussing how Blacks were unwelcome in White neighbourhoods and how White gays in the 1980s were almost paralysed with fear at the thought of going into Black neighbourhoods.<sup>417</sup>

Black gays also stressed that if they were going to form relationships with White gay men, they needed partnerships of respect and affirmations of their humanity.<sup>418</sup> The editor Michael J. Smith, founder of Black and White Men Together (BWMT), stated that as a White gay man who prefers and desires Black men, he had to

<sup>415</sup> <http://www.gaygames.com/en/> Accessed 20.12.2008

<sup>416</sup> Thom Beane 'Racism from a Black Perspective' in *Black Men/ White Men*, pp58-59 in Smith, Michael J. ed, (1983), *Black Men, White Men*, Gay Sunshine Press, USA

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, Joe DeMarco, 'Gay Racism' in op cit, Smith, Michael J, (1983), *Black Men, White Men*, Gay, p110

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, pp114-115

repudiate almost everything he had learned about being an American male because it was bound up with racist ideology that empowered Whites. If, however, White gay men want to achieve happiness and peace with Black men, they have to renounce racist practices. He specifically points toward the attitudes held by White gay men and their treatment of Black gay men, and the racist practice in gay subculture – for example, seeking sexual gratification and nothing else and maintaining economic and political dominance over Blacks.<sup>419</sup>

During an interview with Thom Beame, Smith also spoke out against all forms of discrimination against Black gay men in the gay subculture of employment in bars, the racist practices of the gay press, and the network of social interaction.<sup>420</sup> Thom Beame asked Michael Smith a question relating to his hope and struggle for better social relations and equity between Black and White gay men:

And what do you say to those people who accuse you of living in a dream world? “I say they’re probably right. [...] I don’t have much time for angry people who won’t channel their anger constructively. And believe me, ever since I bit all this off, I’ve gotten it from all sides.” From Blacks and White? “Sure. Some activists seem more interested in expressing their superior knowledge of racism than with sharing their superior knowledge with others. Indeed some of the most divisive people have been Whites who’ve suddenly ‘got religion’ and hurl damnation on those who haven’t.”<sup>421</sup>

When Thom Beame asked Smith about his views as the founder of BWMT and as an interracialist, Michael said his personal and political aims and objectives were sincere in striving for unity and equality. He refused to defend his attraction to Black gay men because it was the psychosexual character of his humanity: in short, he prefers Black men just as other men prefer White men. Additionally, the inclusion of short stories in his book opened up a space for Black men to declare their desire

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid, Thom Beame ‘Interview: BWMT Founder- Mike Smith’ in op cit, *Black Men, White Men*, p189

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, pp188-189

<sup>421</sup> Ibid, pp191



for White men, such as in Gabe Sims' "*A Fine White Boy*", which recounts the meeting and sexual attraction between Black and White gay men in a segregated town in Texas and the love that follows.

Examples of an intersection of desires that works are the essays in *Black Men/White Men*, the essays in *The Greatest Taboo*, and the masquerade of Black and Hispanic gays in *Paris is Burning*, *Looking for Langston* and *Brother to Brother*. An overlap occurs in sexual desire and personal identity politics; therefore, we cannot unequivocally define Black gay men according to Black sexual politics, that is to say an exclusive Black ideology of shared beliefs.

Moreover, the essays in *Black Men/White Men* about racial discrimination between Black and White gays and their attraction to and desire for a loving or a sexual relationship started a dialogue in 1981 to 1983, when the material was being considered for publication by Michael J. Smith. This dialogue grew out of the unequal treatment and discrimination that Smith witnessed and Black gay men experience. In Gregory Conerly's essay 'Are you Black First or Are You Queer?', he notes that Black gays form communities where they can find allies and acceptance. He believes rejection by Black communities may keep Black gays out,<sup>422</sup> but Conerly and other Black cultural critics, such as Robert Staples, refuse to understand that many Black men desire White men,<sup>423</sup> this desire arising because heterosexist oppression creates a need for humane affirmation.

We therefore have a circularity of interracial desire between White and Black heterosexuals and gays in everyday life and this has now been translated into TV dramas such as *Oz*, and *Sex and the City*. Furthermore, in television drama from the late 1990s to the present, White men have also expressed homosocial and

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<sup>422</sup> Op cit, Constantine-Simms, Delroy (2001) *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, p18

<sup>423</sup> Op cit, Staples, Robert, (1982), *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society*, pp91-92

repressed desires for Black men, as dramatised in the long-running series *Homicide: Life on the Streets* (1993-1999) between the White character Baylis, a police detective, and his partner Pemberton, a Black higher-ranking officer. Thus, interracial desire between men has become more familiar to us because of the shifting realities of gay life and the exploration of the subject in, for example, the British film, *The Crying Game* (1992) and specifically in the most famous gay interracial love story on American TV drama in the HBO series and *Six Feet Under*, 2001-2005.

Let us now return to Rodney Evans film *Brother to Brother* and further consider the characters self awareness about their desires, the legacy of racial discourse in gay history, or whether the circularity of interracial desire underlines their perception of the racial Other as the object of desire.

### 5.5: Unconscious desires in *Brother to Brother*

*Brother to Brother* and *Looking for Langston* attempt to deal with a White characters drawn to and fascinated by interracial desire according to their consumption and experience of Black culture, expression, and sexualities. However, a tension exists because of the covert approach in *Looking for Langston* where interracial attraction is played against “Black men loving Black men”. The film simultaneously shows the slippage between Black-on-Black desire and Black and White sexual fantasy.



Fig.87 *Looking for Langston* (1989) This sequence takes on a dreamlike quality with slow motion cinematography and a ethereal atmosphere.

Fig.88 *Brother to Brother* (2004). This scene is recounted to Perry by Bruce and through their imagination the audience witnesses subjective memory.



Fig.88

Below, Fig.89, Jim employs subterfuge to flirt and confess his feelings. Jim is aware of White racist history and has to show Perry he does not perceive him through racist fantasy.

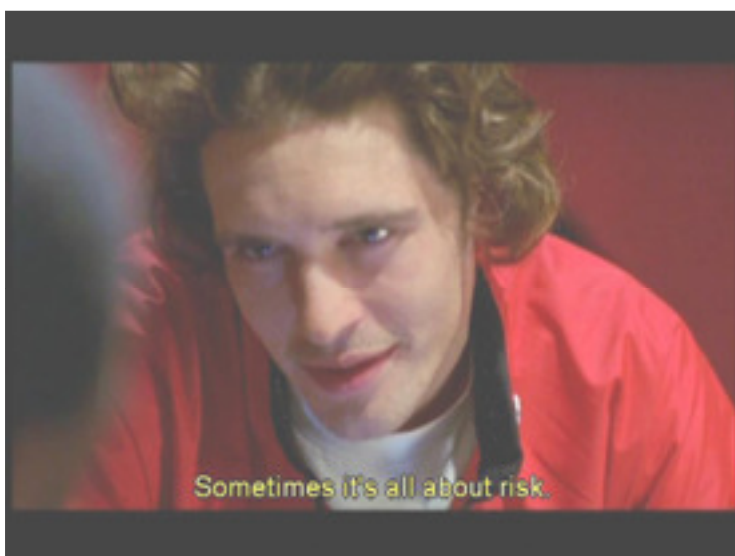


Fig.89

White and Black male desire is also played out in the parallel narrative of the Jazz Age and the hip-hop era where both signify how, but not necessarily why, so many White Americans search for pleasure and freedom in Black communities. The film does not theorise the attraction of interracial desire because it is not a documentary but it does reverse the paradigm of the 'White female goddess', replacing her with an oscillating Black hero and Latin lover dynamic in Fig.90

The replacement for the White female as a goddess figure can be a homosocial White male as a valiant romantic. He can be a bisexual bohemian intellectual, a compliant and loving gay, or a 'queer' brave activist. I believe the quality that must be apparent for the Black men's object of desire is that he is an ideal and an idol, possessing the quality the Black male lacks, such as federal and corporate power that him allows him personal freedom and social advantages. The Black male as the object of White male desire is arguably a passionate, emotionally expressive and culturally astute artist that can liberate the White male from racist guilt.



Fig.90

Above, Bruce Nugent as a younger man with two White Italian admirers in the 1920s. Here Evans has written and directed the actors to show the characters as self-determined rather than victimised weak queers.

What *Brother to Brother* also explores is Black gay men who are not stereotypical in their persona, which defies mainstream independent film effectively and allows Perry to be gay, thereby overturning the monolithic myth of an essential Black character. Perry's best friend Marcus also contests the stereotype homophobic Black aggressor by maintaining his protective friendship with Perry. *Brother to Brother* refuses to over-determine Perry as effeminate, although he occasionally displays those signifiers, signalling an ambiguous sexual identity in the active/passive myth. Nor does Perry inhabit the persona of the Black gay man on the gay scene where his life orbits an array of 'queer' types, which leaves open a number of readings of Perry. He can be read as an isolated and lonely gay man, or as a private person searching for an idyllic monogamous partnership and safe home, having lost that due to his expulsion by his family.

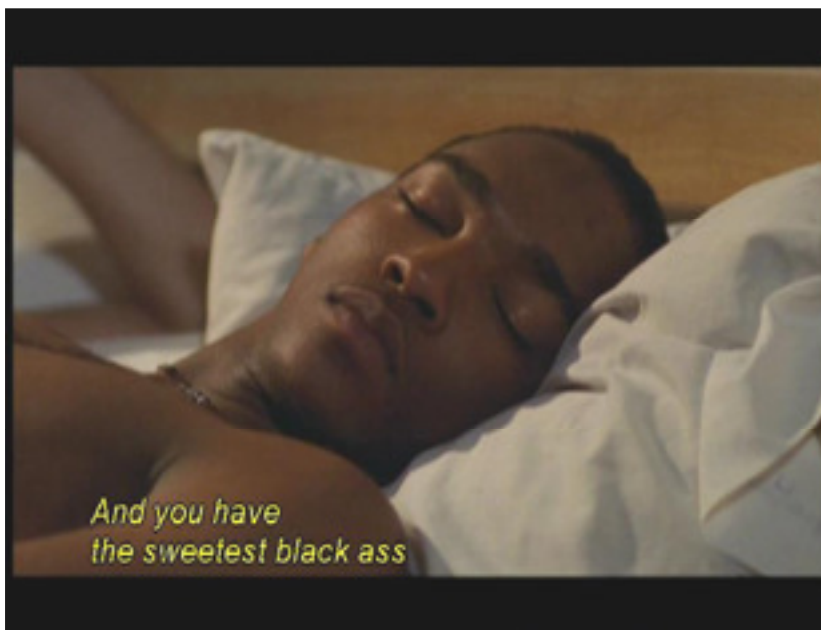


Fig.91

In this scene, Figures 91 and 92, Evans understands how carnal desire works in the experiences of Black and White gay men because he has experienced it, as he tells us in the DVD documentary for *Brother to Brother*.



Fig.92

In the above scene, Jim's sexual confession leads to their break-up. The scene is based on personal events in Evans' life, which he refers to on the DVD documentary.



Fig.93

In Fig.92, Evans shows that their relationship lies in carnal desire because Jim's needs are not emotionally grounded in honest love; therefore, Perry leaves him.

The circularity of interracial desire can be traced early in the film firstly because Perry is the 'Object of Desire' and Jim is the only White student in the

seminar. Secondly, Jim is the only man in the session to use the words of James Baldwin to express his voice and *raison d'être* as a White male challenging the boundaries of bourgeois liberalism. Evans has given Jim a role greater than the average White friend in the 'buddy movies': his scenes show him flirting with Perry when they speak outside the college building. Jim employs Black vernacular as the Hip White 'dude' when he calls out to Perry using terms such as "Yo" and "Bro". It may imply he is a modern White Negro but Jim is not lacks the emotional expressivity displayed by many African American men in the hip-hop era.



Fig.94

Their eye contact also shows his masked desires, especially in the library scene:



Fig.95





Fig.96



Fig.97

In Figures 95-97, Jim is flirting with Perry in their verbal exchange and in his subtle yet obvious sexual innuendo where Jim refers to the size of his feet. Further, throughout most of the film, Jim's costume of hooded jerseys, baggy jeans, logo T-shirts and the skateboard work to establish that he is a White 'dude' who is also 'into' Black culture through his choice of study and the social spaces he frequents, such as Black bars playing trip hop and jazz. Jim, however, has almost no understanding of the Black gay struggle and this disables their relationship. It may seem that Rodney Evans fails to explore the attraction of Black men to White gay men as a continuum of

social experience. However, by exploring the possibility of an intimate sexual relationship between Perry and Jim, Evans *is* examining the subject, if not through historical exposition, certainly by dramatic characterisation and story plot.

The contrast between the scenes of Black men in the Jazz Age enjoying newly-found sexual freedom with White men, and Perry's reticence towards Jim, underlines certain anxieties about the relationships between Black and White men today compared with the sexual empowerment Black men gained during the 1920s.



Fig.98

Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman and Bruce Nugent enjoy the company of Black and White bohemian hetero/bi/homosexuals in the Jazz Age.

Martin Summers offers a thoughtful discourse on Black men shifting away from Victorian masculinity and toward a modernist self-defined Black masculine sexual identity unhinged from the regimes of rugged industrial manhood. This shift underlines the importance of the inter-dependence of Black gay men on White gay men at that time.

Throughout Martin Summers' research, he cites the difficulty Black gays faced in dealing with Black heterosexual ideology in relation to Nugent, Thurman, and Hughes and from this I read the anxieties Black gays felt about courting other Black men. The stigma and taboo of Black gay life within Black communities forced many Black gays to find affirmation in the gay subculture with White men. This was the reality of James Baldwin's love life with his European partners.<sup>424</sup> Baldwin also explored the subject of the love and friendship of Black men with White men and women in *Another Country*. Baldwin's life and work also show us some of the ways sanctuary is sought in interracial gay relationships that not only confound essentialist ideas but also celebrate resistance to racial propaganda.

Furthermore, the film reminds us that the collective unconscious defined by Jung should be approached in terms of environmental cultural specificity. The universal archetype points to the ways homosexual identities and practices are policed and resisted across racial and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, the notion of a Black collective consciousness seems reasonable in relation to the discrimination practices of White supremacy that repudiates the humanity of Africans. Paradigms of the 'Object of Desire' cannot just be considered in terms of the fear Whites have of Black power or the fear Blacks have of White supremacy; there are mutual attractions and desires that defy racial dogma.

Eldridge Cleaver adamantly refuses to accept interracial desire between Black and White men. He states his regard for Mailer's Hipster White Negroes, his desire for White women as the ultimate prize of the White male, and the way in which the White female Goddess figure affirms the humanity and power of a heterosexual Black man, but he refuses to acknowledge the needs of White and Black men. One of Cleaver's

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<sup>424</sup> Op cit, Campbell, James, (1991), *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin*, pp60-61

major problems is that he could not recognise that he was socially conditioned by heterosexist self-proclaimed masculine mastery. Consequently, many of his statements are unconscionable.

[...] it seems that many Negro homosexuals, acquiescing in this racial death-wish, are outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by the White man. The cross that they have to bare is that, already bending over and touching their toes for White men, the fruits of their miscegenation is not the half-White offspring of their dreams but an increase in the unwinding of their nerves- though they redoubled their efforts and intake of the White man's sperm.<sup>425</sup>

Moreover, based on his statements, Cleaver could not comprehend Black masculinity beyond the sex role defined by hegemonic patriarchal masculinity. Cleaver's denunciation of gays suggests he was conditioned by the dialectical binary of heterosexual active phallic supremacy vs. homosexual passive inferiority. Paradoxically, having suffered under racist ideology and understood its dehumanising effects, he imposed similar oppression onto Black gay men when he conjured up perverse ideas about gays. Cleaver read sexual preference based on the self-proclaimed superiority of inhumane heterosexist exploitation. Cleaver's judgement on the subject of homosexuality is riddled with prejudice because he confuses sexual pleasure with the limited sex role and masculinity set down in Judeo-Christianity.<sup>426</sup> Cleaver mistakenly believes the act of anal sex disqualifies a man's claim to masculinity; however, he believes that the rape of Black women and the sexual domination and control of White women is proof of the power and liberation of Black men.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Op cit, Cleaver, Eldridge, (1968) *Soul On Ice*, p102

<sup>426</sup> <http://www.judeochristianity.com/principles.htm>

<sup>427</sup> Op cit, Cleaver, Eldridge, (1968) *Soul On Ice*, pp160-161

Cleaver moves on to disparage James Baldwin as someone lower than an Uncle Tom, and an intellectual sycophant. Cleaver asserts that this kind of man “becomes a White man in a black body”.<sup>428</sup> From this he further claims:

The black homosexual, when his twist has a racial nexus, is an extreme embodiment of this contradiction. The White man has deprived him of his masculinity, castrated him in the centre of his burning scull and when he submits to this change and takes the White man for his lover as well as Big Daddy, he focuses on “Whiteness” all the love in his pent up soul and turns the razor edge of hatred against “blackness”- upon himself, what he is, and all those who look like him, remind him of himself. [...] The racial death-wish is manifested as the driving force in James Baldwin.<sup>429</sup>

Cleaver alleges that James Baldwin is not a man. He takes issues with Baldwin’s critique of Norman Mailer’s *White Negro* essay, which Cleaver sees as a calling to radical protest for White bohemians fighting for social change starting with themselves and moving on to the corrosive White power structure of America. He also accuses Baldwin of despising Richard Wright’s masculinity.<sup>430</sup> He builds up condemnation of Baldwin when he analyses the non-heterosexual Black characters, especially Rufus Scott in the novel *Another Country*:

Rufus Scott, a pathetic wretch who indulged in the White man’s pastime of committing suicide, who let the White bisexual homosexual fuck him in the ass, and who took a Southern Jezebel for his woman, with all that those tortured relationships imply, was the epitome of a Black eunuch who has completely submitted to the White man.<sup>431</sup>

Rodney Evans takes this criticism and translates it into the confrontation scene between Baldwin and Cleaver when they almost come to blows.

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid, p103

<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p103

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, p109

<sup>431</sup> Ibid, p107

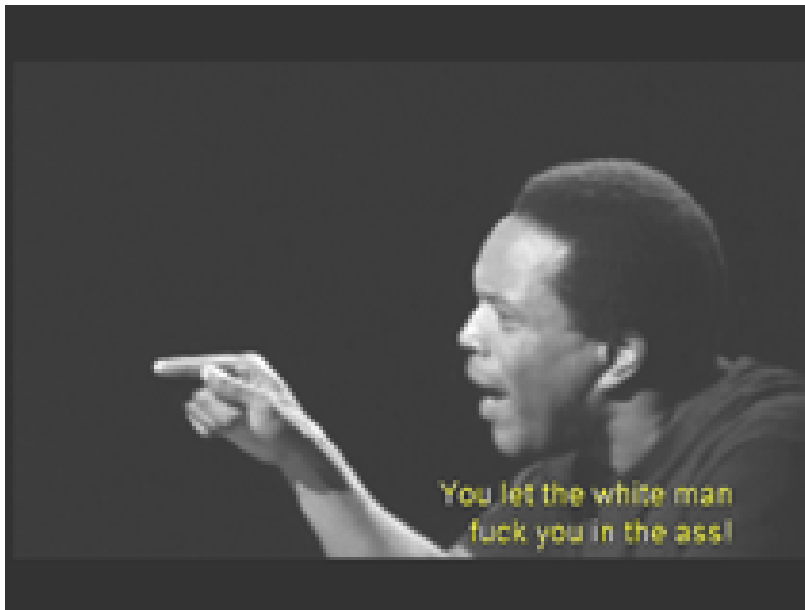


Fig.99

Evans inscribes Cleaver as an agitprop figure who speaks on behalf of the race, specifically African American men, in his condemnation of Baldwin.

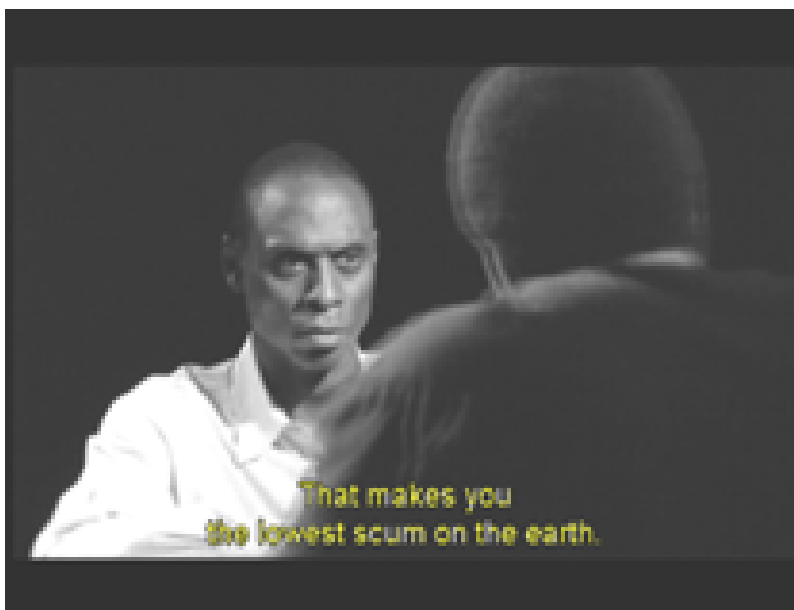


Fig.100

Cleaver's theories about Black gay men are replete with fantasy and speculation. They also bear a distinct similarity to White supremacist allegations of the depravity of 'blacks', from their 'innate' African savagery to their current representation in American media as threats to social stability.

Oversimplification of this kind often fails to understand the evolution of the Black gay psyche. Robert Staples' research on homosexuality resists seeing Black gays as African American men because he validates masculinity based on heterosexual norms. He puts forward his research as social research based on personal interviews and questionnaires but we are alerted to his bias in the second paragraph of the chapter when he talks about homosexuality as a problem. He proceeds to read gay identity as a failure to achieve the masculine role and in his conclusion, he talks about gay identity as a deviation of normal masculinity.<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Op cit, Staples, Robert, (1982), *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society*, p87 and p97

## 5.6: Black 'Queer' film politics

*Brother to Brother* revisits the polemic of Black gay identity explored in *Looking for Langston*. Both films have parallel narratives of Harlem in the 1920s and contemporary gay cultural criticism. The major difference is that Rodney Evans's film is a character drama rather than a documentary film. *Brother to Brother*, however, does employ poetry to explore historical and contemporary debate on Black epistemology. Consequently, it is one of the few gay films to examine the psychological, emotional and social experience of a central character as the journey of a Black gay man into the labyrinth of masculinities.

Furthermore, the audio-visual language of *Brother to Brother* deploys a Black gay political continuum of confrontation with patriarchal heterosexist masculinity by exposing the myth of Black monolithic masculinity. In *The American Black Male: His Status and his Future*, Manning Marable argues:

In the mind of White America the Black man has continued to represent an overall persona, Black men were only a step above the animals—possessing awesome physical power but lacking in intellectual ability. [...] The Black male represented a potential political threat to the entire system of slavery. And third, but by no means last, the Black male symbolised a lusty sexual potency that threatened White women.<sup>433</sup>

This argument is echoed by Paul Hoch but he discusses it in terms of the Jungian shadow. He cites arguments throughout European history that refer to the Black as a sexual animal capable of unclean sexual practices such as sodomy, and Hoch explains that the perceived bestial nature of Blacks existed in the projected fantasies of White men. Hoch then makes the point that, in the Deep South, many men

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<sup>433</sup> Manning Marable's 'The Black Male: Searching Beyond Stereotype' in Majors, Richard G., & Gordon Jacob U., eds, (1994), *The American Black Male: His Present Status and his Future*, Nelson-Hall Publishers USA, p71



secretly fantasised the desire to be Black men, if only on a Saturday night, so that they could perform sex unfettered.<sup>434</sup>

This desire and projection suggests not only a deep-rooted desire for sexual abandon, exonerated from Judaeo-Christian original sin: the frustrations and fears of sexual experimentation and preferences also point to repressed desires. From the Gay Liberation Movement to Act UP confrontation, lesbians and gays in the twentieth century caused heterosexual institutions and their members in all walks of life to rethink their 'normative' ideology.

Furthermore, the arguments put forward by Daniel T. Contreras concerning race and identity opened up the possibility of radical political characters chastising and provoking the smug and self-righteous heterosexual status quo and complaisant bourgeois White gays.<sup>435</sup> To a certain extent, Will Smith as Paul in Fred Schepisi's *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993), based on the true story of David Hampton, a con man who bluffed his way into Manhattan's high society homes by pretending to be the son of Sidney Poitier, fulfils the expectations of a Queer hero and the New Queer Cinema momentum. Because the story is told, however, from the perspective of a married couple, in particular Ouisa Kittredge, Paul, the Black gay antagonist, is not in control of his destiny or the narrative trajectory. He is disruptive but he does not destabilise the upper-class family, even if he does force Ouisa to question her views about life.

The play is written by John Guare and to a great extent Paul fulfils the mythic archetype of Othello far more distinctly than any of the characters in *Brother to Brother* because he wants to be cultured, and admired by White men and women

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<sup>434</sup> Op cit, Hoch, Paul, (1979), *White Hero Black Beast: Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity*, pp54-55

<sup>435</sup> Daniel T. Contreras, 'New Queer Cinema: Spectacle, Race, Utopia', p119, in op cit, Aaron, Michele, ed, (2004), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*

and loved by White gay men. He does pose a real threat to White men because once he has seduced them, he re-enslaves them sexually, so that some of them kill themselves whereas others are psychologically destroyed, which is consistent with my definition of Othellophobia.

Queer film is arguably aimed at rewriting codes for lesbian and gay identities, thereby liberating 'Queers' from the hegemonic myth of gays as weak facsimiles of men. This objective might have profoundly overturned the iconography in post-classical cinema, allowing the 'Queer' fraternity a vision and voice of their own making. The absence of African-American characters and Black filmmakers in 1990s New Queer Cinema soon contested independent liberation for Black lesbians and gays.

It is here that *Brother to Brother* works as a continuum with another key film, *Tongues Untied*, that pre-empted the classification of 'New Queer Cinema' by B. Ruby Rich in 1992. Louise Wallenberg correctly argues that *Looking for Langston* and *Tongues Untied*, both distributed in 1989, work to establish a number of issues concerning the marginality and identity of Black gay men which are frequently overlooked in gay films.<sup>436</sup> In *Boys in the Band* (1970), Bernard is one of the few Black gay men provided with any psychological personal motive or identity. It was eagerly anticipated that New Queer Cinema in the 1990s would change that but in fact it was mainly concerned with White gay and queer subjectivities.

Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (1990) and Isaac Julien's *Young Soul Rebels* (1991) were the last films to explore the sexuality and experience of people of colour in the UK and USA before B. Ruby Rich's article. After 1992, Black gays were conspicuously absent from Queer cinema discourse. In common with other

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid, Louise Wallenberg, 'New Black Queer Cinema' p129 in op cit, Aaron, Michele, ed, (2004), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*

independent films, Rodney Evans's *Brother to Brother* took over two years to make owing to funding difficulties and the loss of cast members. Evans also mediated the difficult stage of screening the film to hostile homophobic Black audiences in 2004 and learned to mediate discussions after the screenings. In the interview on the DVD, Evans takes the spectator through his experiences of making the film, highlighting a number of points.

First, as a Black gay man and documentary filmmaker, he says the courage and artistry of Bruce Nugent inspired him. Second, challenging myths concerning Black gay identity across two time periods allowed for a problematisation of essentialism. Third, he chose the Harlem Renaissance and its Black gay underground because it effectively paralleled his life in the twenty-first century. Finally, the transformative power of the friendship between an older man and a younger man trying to find himself was the major context of the drama. The dual narrative allowed the past to impact on the present so that Perry would not only learn about himself but would also be provided with an historical context.

Rodney Evans's script and direction are of great help here because all his characters are searching for affirmation of their human rights, not simply their sexual liberation. Though comparative theory, the 'Clash of Wills' mytheme signifies 'respectable' hetero-normative hegemony vs. disreputable homosexual 'abnormality', of course, this is not the only conclusion to be drawn. When Perry tells Jim and Bruce that he is searching for love and support, the audience are asked to empathise with him through visual narration. Evans extends the shot durations and limits the edits to allow the performance emotionally to address the audience. Bruce feels emotionally drawn to Perry and he is also shot in longer takes to allow us to see his confession to an older man and allow the interiority of his thoughts to be dramatically externalised. In the

scene, his feelings are validated because he is not ridiculed by disapproving heterosexual condemnation. Furthermore, because Bruce, Langston, Wally and Zora are given agency to speak on their own behalf rather than being spoken for, the parallel narrative homophobic assaults by the Gangstas in 2004 and the Black bourgeoisie in the 1920s do not silence or destroy them. When Langston, Wally, Bruce and Zora are together, the *mise-en-scène* creates an atmosphere of propinquity whereby their lifestyle allows us a point of view rather than a mocking spectacle to uphold phallogentric hegemony and disparage its alternatives.

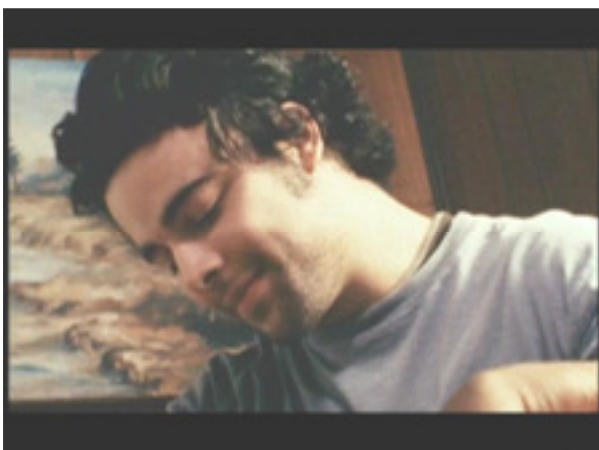


Fig.101

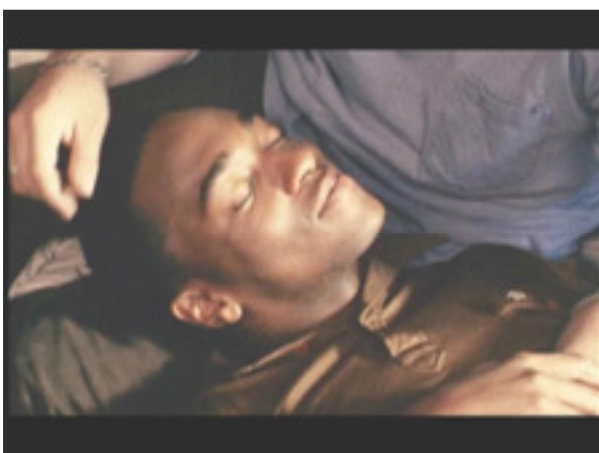


Fig.102

This interracial Black and Latino (AKA Blatino) partnership expresses a ideal racial coupling in New York City at present and it is celebrated in the erotic/porn films of Enrique Cruz in the 'homey-sexual' hip-hop gay underground.

Just as dominant cinema once constructed images of savage black types, Evans constructs multifarious images of gays from the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries. Instead of using the White female as a goddess who supposedly excites 'all' men, Evans shows us how Black and White men can be the object of desire across gay ethnic identities. Evans's most accomplished feat, however, is to normalise a range of gay identities as personal human experiences, and that is what New Queer Cinema did not quite achieve for Black gay representation. *Brother to Brother* also marks a distinct way forward, because it did not take a defensive position that required Evans and the gay characters to justify their humanity, and many heterosexual filmmakers often take that approach when they invent unconvincing queer characters, such as Annie Proulx's Jack Twist and Ennis Del Mar in *Brokeback Mountain* (2005).

Where *Brother to Brothers* successfully contests the myth of the black beast it is tackling what I see as the 'Clash of Wills'. On the one hand, there is the fear White men have of being re-enslaved by avenging Black men with residual anger and repressed castration trauma. On the other hand, there is fear among Black men of emasculation by White men with the racist fantasy, economic control and class status that have historically kept Black men in a subordinate and subservient position. Added to this is the erosion of the boundaries between 'bi-curious' and repressed gay men, who are popularly discussed as men on the 'down low' who seek acceptance and affirmation outside the race owing to the oppressive homophobia of Black people.

My central concerns in this chapter have been to consider alternatives to the myth of the Black male's obsession with the White female goddess figure. The mytheme of 'black' predilection for White women is deeply ingrained in the enslavement history of Africans in Western society. It also dates back to the

Moorish conquest of the Iberian peninsula in 711AD, as well as the Black Moor and the White noble woman famously dramatised in Shakespeare's *Othello*. The play dared to suggest that while there is truth in the idea that Black men desired White women, Desdemona actually desired a Black man.

I wanted to take Shakespeare's bold idea of White fascination and desire for the racial 'Other' and consider the other sexual desire for homoerotic love and passion between men. What the subject suggests is that mythemes increase not only in accordance with myth, where the story is retold in a varying hegemonic narratology. I believe sexual preference alters myths and ideological racial subjects contest them. I posit that this is evident through the circularity of interracial desires. Rodney Evans's authorship, that is to say, his scripting and his Black epistemology of gay life in contemporary America, disclaims a happy conclusion for the lovers. It therefore begs the question: is he making a social comment?

Alan Ball, the White American gay filmmaker successfully dramatised an interracial couple with David and Keith in the role of White 'hero' and Black 'outlaw' in *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), which has arguably presented the most psychologically and emotionally developed dramatised interracial gay couple. As an African-American gay character, Keith defined his humanity through his love for his White male hero. David's character, on the other hand, struggled to overcome his guilt-ridden ideals of White hegemonic masculinity through his idolisation of Keith, which enabled him to defy homophobic dogmas and maintain a lifelong love for Keith, the perceived 'outlaw'. Their relationship was iconoclastic and interrogated the myth of the Black male beast and the assumption concerning the preference among Black men for a White female Goddess.

Isaac Julien also explored the subject when he dramatised the desires of Black and White gay men in Britain in *Young Soul Rebels* in 1991. Because the focus of my thesis is on the myth of the Black male as a beast, I did not study *Watermelon Woman*. Cheryl Dunye's 1996 film, however, concerns the interracial desires between a Black and a White lesbian couple trying to make their relationship work, and it also parallels two historical eras and considers the way sexual preference defies racial segregation.

I believe the flawed heroic humanity of Othello revealed his self-doubt as a Black man in White society. He becomes conscious that his Blackness limits him and then he loses his reason and destroys what he once regarded as his ideal. He plots to have Cassio killed because he believes Cassio has betrayed him, and unjustly murders Desdemona. After that moment they are no longer white and ideal. Othello believes Desdemona has sexually lied and emasculated him and he imagines that Cassio has metaphorically castrated him for his desire of the White female goddess figure. Although very few productions explore the deepest fears that Othello might have experienced, I believe mythemes of the 'Object of Desire' underline profound fears of love because objectification and fetishism are symbols of destruction that can only be resolved if we demystify them. Because Jim and Perry in *Brother to Brother* refuse to question their fantasy, their brief affair tells them nothing insightful about themselves. This may actually be the tragedy Rodney Evans wanted to show: in short, the pleasures of racial fantasy and the fear of racial honesty in America today.

Let us now consider how the 'Clash of Wills' is dramatised and how post-classical filmmakers examine masculinity and power and how they contest hegemonic dominance over Black men.

## CHAPTER SIX- COLLATERAL (Michael Mann, 2002) OVERTURNING THE FOUR PARADIGMS

I will now focus on the 'The Clash of Wills'. I want to test if the construction of the myth of the Black male beast, divided into four principal synchronic mythemes ('Savage Body', 'Savage Mind', 'Object of Desire' and 'Clash of Wills') can be employed to interpret the Ego persona and the shadow. Alternatively, is it more credible to translate the myth of the Black male beast through Lévi-Strauss's structural system? If so, how are we to account for variances in film genre and can variance still explain diachronic and synchronic myth? Conversely, is myth a narratology and iconography, as Roland Barthes suggests, because it functions as a language?

By considering Michael Mann's *Collateral* (2004) as an atypical neo-noir thriller, I want to show how White masculinity vs. Black manhood can be blurred in post-classical American cinema. Additionally, it is useful to consider how a White American filmmaker can proactively disavow Hollywood's hegemonic authorship and the myth of the Black male beast. To test the ways in which post-classical cinema forges, i.e. invents, and 'forges', i.e. falsifies, the representation of Black manhood I will refer to Stuart Hall's *Race: the Floating Signifier* and Jackson's *Scripting the Black masculine body*, and use them to consider the Self in the 'stages of life' (Ego persona, shadow, anima and animus), and gender discourse concerning progressive masculinities.

I will provide close textual analysis and employ White and Cones's psychological study of the Black psyche and also discuss how film authorship differentiates Black manhood from African-American masculinity.



### 6.1: *Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004, USA) Synopsis

Vincent is a top hitman who is in L.A. to assassinate five people. At the airport he is given a briefcase with the full details of whom he has to kill. Max is a taxi driver who lives alone. He picks up Annie, a District Attorney, and they begin talking and he tells her that he plans to set up his own limousine company. Sensing his sincerity and understanding, she tells him she is preparing her opening address for an important case the following day. Unguardedly, she confesses her fears that people sitting in judgement will see that she is unprepared and not professional enough. This truthful exchange establishes a bond between them and she gives him her business card when she gets out of his cab.

Vincent gets in Max's cab afterwards and very quickly realises Max is a well-organised and efficient cab driver. Vincent offers him double his nightly rate to drive him around the city while he carries out his 'work' throughout the evening and Max's agrees. After the first stop, a dead body crashes onto the roof of his cab and when Vincent appears Max realises he has killed him. Through coercion Vincent gets Max to cooperate with him, first by hiding the body in the boot of the car and then driving him to his other 'appointments' to fulfil his contracts.

Police detective Fanning realises a murder has taken place and proceeds to find out what has happened. Max is harassed by his boss and Vincent tells him he is Albert Riccardo, assistant U.S Attorney, and threatens to work on Max's behalf to sue him because he wants Max to pay for the damage to the cab and Vincent/Riccardo tells the Boss that is extortion because the Cab company has collision insurance. After Vincent and Max have insulted the Boss, Max is impressed with Vincent's sinister charm and Vincent ties Max's hands to the steering wheel while he heads off on his second hit.

Alone, Max tries to attract attention and he does but the group of four men rob him and attempt to leave. Vincent returns and they try to rob him as well and he kills all of them. Vincent warns Max that attracting attention will get other people killed. Vincent intimidates Max into taking him to a jazz club and he kills the third man in front of Max, which deeply upsets him.

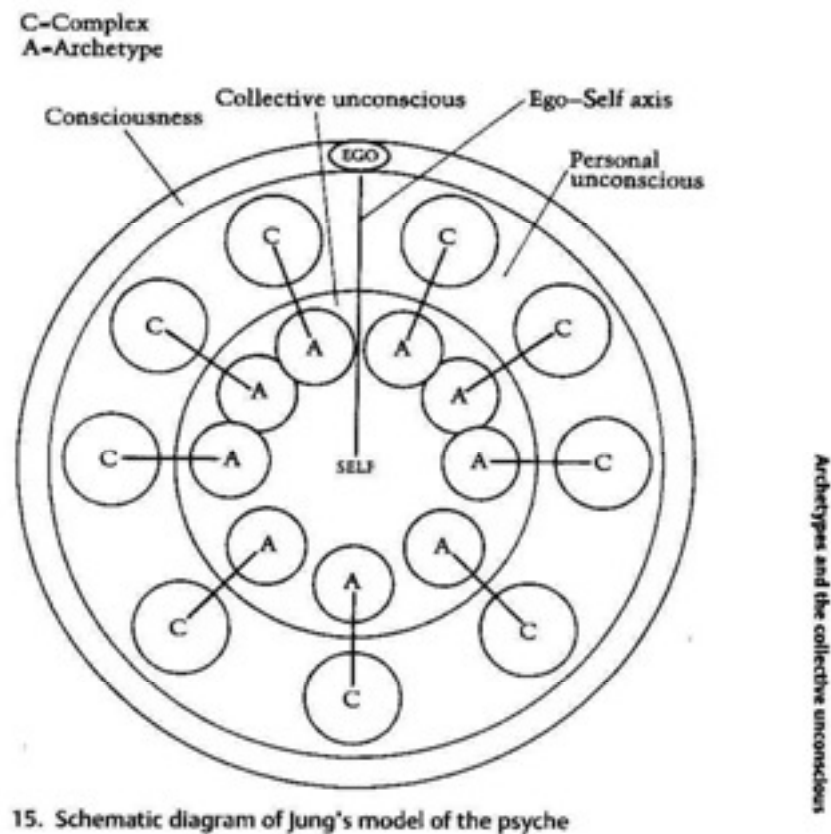
Max gets a call that his mother is very distressed that he has not been to see her in hospital as he usually does and Vincent tells him they are going. When Vincent meets his mother he charms her and belittles Max as his mother scolds him. Max grabs Vincent's briefcase, runs out of the hospital and throws it into the traffic. Vincent forces him to get the information again from his contact, the 'Head Man'. The police know that witnesses to a big drugs case are being killed off and they cooperate with the FBI, who have the 'Head Man' under surveillance when Max arrives at the club, where he masquerades as Vincent, to get the information back.

The FBI now follow Max and Vincent in the cab to a Korean club where Vincent kills his fourth man. The detective grabs Max to find out what is happening but Vincent shoots him dead when they exit the club and takes Max hostage once again. Max is terrified now and crashes the cab to put a stop to the mayhem but Vincent escapes and Max discovers Annie is next on the list of people to be killed. Max is questioned by a patrolman but he overpowers him, ties him up and dashes off to save Annie.

Max steals a mobile phone and calls and warns Annie. Standing outside her office building in the lonely city at night he can see her inside the building, and Vincent in an office below her. Annie calls the police but Vincent cuts the power and they are plunged into darkness. Vincent attempts to kill Annie but Max shoots him, grabs Annie and they escape out of the office and into the subway where Vincent tries to kill them but Max shoots him dead and saves Annie.

## 6.2: 'The Clash of Wills'

I discern the Clash of Wills as a conflict between the collective unconscious, the personal unconscious and the Ego consciousness as mapped out in Anthony Stevens' s diagram of Jung's tripartite schema ( see below).



One of the key factors in the 'Clash of Wills' is a psychological and ideological formation of narrative cinema itself. It involves the configuration of mandatory heterosexual patriarchy, White hegemonic narrative privilege, control and the domination of religious, sexual and racial subjects. Classical narrative film as examined by Bordwell and Thompson,<sup>437</sup> Susan Hayward,<sup>438</sup> Gladstone Yearwood,<sup>439</sup> and

<sup>437</sup> Op cit, Bordwell, David & Thompson, Kristin, (1993), *Film Art*, pp64-69 and pp64-84

<sup>438</sup> Op cit, Hayward, Susan, (2000), *Cinema Studies: Key Concepts*, pp64-67

<sup>439</sup> Op cit, Yearwood, Gladstone, (2000), *Black film as a Signifying Practice*, pp162-163 and pp161-170

James Snead<sup>440</sup> all confirm that stories derive from the ideological world we live in and the experiences we have within that social environment.

In the irrational mind, the 'Clash of Wills' represents the construction of the Black male in film as a beast through hegemonic authorship and it arguably unconsciously relates to Othellophobia and Othellophilia. That is to say, *Othello* as an archetype of racial conflict and Othello as a prototype of Black humanity in whom Shakespeare rejected the shadow figure. At the same time Othello is a symbol of threat to White Christian supremacists who imagine that as a converted Christian Othello cannot be trusted. Moreover, as a Black man he is allegedly an uncivilised subhuman, and a sexually rapacious beast capable of transforming the State through the seduction of the White female Goddess and the miscegenation that will ensue.

Central to the aforementioned idea is the position of knowledge and myth. In the collective unconscious the myth of the Black man as a savage beast exists in exegetical readings of the 'Curse of Ham'. In the personal conscious lies the knowledge of the Islamic Moors' conquest of Christian men and women. In the conscious mind the memory and experience of segregation, racial prejudice and institutional racism are evident. Miles and Brown argue that from antiquity to the seventeenth century the Islamic 'Other' has often been perceived by Europeans as an aggressive enemy.<sup>441</sup>

I believe an inclusive way of understanding the 'Clash of Wills' is to place ideas about Black skin in antiquity and the medieval period in the collective unconscious, locate the age of enslavement in the personal unconscious, and position the era of segregation in the conscious mind. This formation might help to explain the unconscious projection that Jung discusses in relation to the struggle

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<sup>440</sup> Snead, James, (1993), *White screens, black images: Hollywood from the dark side*, Routledge, pp134-135 and pp131-149

<sup>441</sup> Op cit, Miles, Robert, and Brown, Malcolm, (2003), *Racism* p28

between persona and the shadow.<sup>442</sup> The 'Clash of Wills' also works as a strategy that demonstrates the way classical Hollywood narrative over-determines the lives of the 'black' characters through hegemonic authorship.

A 'Clash of Wills' synchronic can test whether hegemonic authors allow Black men to define their own destinies and live their lives freely in Hollywood narrative films. Beginning with narrative film in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the coming of sound with *The Jazz Singer* (1927), and then the post-classical period with *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *Easy Rider* (1969) and *Midnight Cowboy* (1967), classical narrative and the counterculture youth rebellion queried the cost of free will. Few mainstream films allowed 'blacks' to define their own lives and usurp power from Whites. Blacks were defined by Bogle's five classifications, but I believe Black identity is rooted in unconscious archetypal ancient and historical myth, as well as our modern collective consciousness, that is to say, the many contradictory ways that Black people are imagined and their bodies inscribed in postmodern society.<sup>443</sup>

In Gary Null's (1993) *Black Hollywood: From 1970 to Today*, his inclusion of films starring and co-starring Black actors demonstrate hegemonic authorship whereby the Black characters are denied power. Oddly, Null fails to consider *Shadows* (1959) and *Watermelon Man* (1970), in which the central character Jeff, played by Godfrey Cambridge, is placed in a series of social positions that reiterate other Black people's journey towards liberation. Van Peebles, however, reverses two of the traditional narrative strategies. Jeff/Cambridge masquerades as White in the first act and then he turns into a Black man. In a horror film this could signify a curse or abjection, for example, in *Aliens* (1986) the White male and female that turn Black are doomed to lose their humanity.

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<sup>442</sup> Carl Jung, "The Shadow", Aion, CW9ii pars. 13-19 op cit, in Storr, Anthony, (1998), *The Essential Jung*, p91

<sup>443</sup> Op cit Snead, James, (1993), *White screens/ black images: Hollywood from the dark side*, Routledge, p142

Jeff, however, is not destroyed because he turned Black; he is liberated because he rejects White American values in favour of Black activism. This never happened in mainstream narrative film with the exception of Cassavetes's *Shadows* in which Hugh the African-American eldest brother and his two mulatto siblings defy the narrative tradition of the tragic mulatto jezebel that passes for White. In Figure 103 we are shown the alienated mulatto female without a home or community and the Black male doomed to subordinate servitude in 1950s White America as brother and sister.



Fig.103

Above, Lelia is rejected by her White American boyfriend when he realises she is not White, but Cassavetes give her brother a voice and the power to throw the boyfriend out and later hold him accountable for his racism.



Fig.104

In Figure 104 Lelia is profoundly hurt by her boyfriend's racism and her big brother, Hugh, consoles her. Through his sustained support she is able to recover and this is a key element that defies the 'Clash of Wills' because Cassavetes's authorship disavows the hegemonic tradition.



Fig.105

In Figure 105, the three siblings remind us that their mother is Black and their fathers are Black and White, which resulted in their being abandoned. Hugh the Black man in the family takes on the role of surrogate father. Lelia occasionally plays a maternal role and Ben the existential Beat. In a sense, the true 'White Negro' that Norman Mailer failed to examine becomes the true new age American as a dual heritage subject like so many other Europeans who married outside their race when they made their home in South America and the USA.

I believe it is a mistake to date characters such as these to a specific era. If we consider them across time then their character type can be read through a priori, deductive reasoning. The actors and Cassavetes brought these characters to life through improvisation,<sup>444</sup> which is a process that benefits from free association and critical interrogation of archetypes. In the diegesis, other characters read the siblings according to their bourgeois or existential perception of identity: namely their dominant knowledge of White Christian culture and society, and their perception of Negro traditions in America and the shadowy identity of Mulattoes as outsiders striving for racial affirmation.

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<sup>444</sup> Carney, Ray, (1994), *The Films of John Cassavetes* Cambridge University Press, USA, pp36-37



### 6.3: The dominant antihero in action cinema

At the start of *Collateral* Vincent appears out of the crowd and comes into focus. He is given a presence in the centre of the frame, and a voice, and he embodies a self-determination that defines masculine dominance and strength because he is not unsure of anything, nor is he subordinate to anyone.



Fig.106



Fig.107

In the coming together of Vincent the hitman and the Courier, Mann shoots everyone else out of focus to draw our attention toward both men. This filmic approach suggests what is important and what is present. When they bump into

each other on purpose, everything is played in terms of persona, i.e. not who they really are but how they prefer to present themselves to the world.

In the director's commentary, Michael Mann eloquently explains his motives and choices in rewriting the script, setting the film in Los Angeles, instead of New York where the conflict centred on the Russian Mafia as originally written by Stuart Beattie. Mann talks us through the process of working with the actors to achieve a sense of truth in the performances and exploring their psychological approaches in the construction of their characters.

This approach to film narrative and character also overturns the classical system of hegemonic authorship. This is a formula of screenwriting that is championed by Syd Field's 1984 *Screenplay*. It proposes that character is written according to the pre-existing criteria of post-classical cinema and cultural indoctrination. Uncritical reproduction of cultural policy normalises intolerance, however, which means Christian capitalist archetype narratives on race, gender, and class are recycled and seldom critiqued, thereby allowing bigotry to concretise myth.

The limitations of the aforementioned paradigm became apparent in the 1980s when the formulaic bi-racial buddy movie stereotyped race and compounded the myth of White male dominance, as seen in films such as *48 Hrs* (1982), *Beverly Hills Cops* (1984), *Lethal Weapon* (1987) and *Die Hard* (1988). Ed Guerrero explains that the Black male is prevented from terrorising White American citizens because he is placed in the protective custody of a White male authority figure so that he can be restrained.<sup>445</sup>

In *Collateral*, when we meet Max, he is clearly a working-class man, a cab driver, who takes his work seriously: he cleans the inside of the car and puts in

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<sup>445</sup> Op cit, Guerrero, Ed, (1993), *Framing Blackness: the African American Image in Film*, pp130-131

place all that he needs to give himself professional focus for the nightshift and peace of mind. He displays his licence, puts his island image behind the windscreen, and he has his supper snack packed.

When he speaks to Annie the D.A. he clearly shows that he is professionally in charge and knows his job. What makes their exchange so different from other first meetings between Black couples is that he does not make a pass at her, suggesting that he is the man of her dreams, or that he can satisfy her needs. Instead, they speak about work. He tells her how his plans for his own limousine company will change his life. Implicit in his ambition is his elevation to a higher-class status that would give him more confidence to speak to her as a potential suitor.

In White and Cones's explanation of 'The African American Male: Masculine Alternatives and Psychological Challenges', they state:

As Black males move through the developmental periods of childhood, they are faced with four major psychological and social challenges: constructing an identity and defining themselves as persons; developing and maintaining close relationships with others; coping with racism; and discovering adaptive possibilities within the African American way of being.<sup>446</sup>

In Athena D. Mutua's essay 'Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities' she also argues that, in the twenty-first century, Black men who are culturally aware of African-American social politics, namely how government and institutions treat Blacks with the racist collusion of White supremacist citizens, mark Black people's collective unconsciousness. Central to progressive Black masculinities "are, at the minimum, pro-black and antiracist as well as profeminist and antisexist"<sup>447</sup> policies.

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<sup>446</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph, L and Cones, James, H. (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, p131

<sup>447</sup> Op cit, Mutua, Athena D. ed, (2006), *Progressive Black Masculinities*, p7

The core of her thesis amounts to a humanist and universal inclusive approach to life. What is relevant to *Collateral* are the ways Max unconsciously adopts pro-black and antiracist as well as profeminist philosophy in his rescue of Annie and his survival.

Max is not the action film stereotype (angry, racist, heterosexual) that typifies the Black sidekick such as Mitch/Samuel L. Jackson in *Long Kiss Goodnight* (1995) or Jimmy Jump/Laurence Fishburne in Abel Ferrara's *King of New York* (1990) whose pathological display of violence goes beyond reason. The same applies to the obtuse Black sidekick we find such as Nordberg/O.J. Simpson in the *Naked Gun* series; and the inconsequential Black sidekick that we are presented with in Juba/Djimon Hounsou in *Gladiator* (2000) and Draba/Woody Stroode in *Spartacus*, (1960). They do not have any power and cannot control the narrative whether they live or die. This is arguably a legacy from *Othello*, where the Black character is personable and fascinating but cannot control his destiny. What Shakespeare does in *Othello* however is to give Othello the self-determination to take his life and join his wrongfully accused Desdemona in the Christian afterlife. This act of love that triumphs over death aligns it with *Romeo and Juliet* (1594/95).

In *Collateral*, Annie tells Max that even though she is a qualified professional she still has anxieties concerning the way she is looked at, and the way she is judged as a professional. When she confesses that she sometimes is stuck for words and sometimes her professional tools of the trade slip out of her hands, this is a very personal confession because she is telling him of her inner fear of White America. When Max gives her the postcard he uses for meditating and stress alleviation after listening to her story he is giving her a piece of his dream. In Figure 108, shot on Sony High Def 900, we are able to see the play of emotion on Annie's face and throughout the scene when she listens to his dream, and when he listens

to her we can see that she is moved by Max's sincerity and his sensitive observations about persona and her experience.

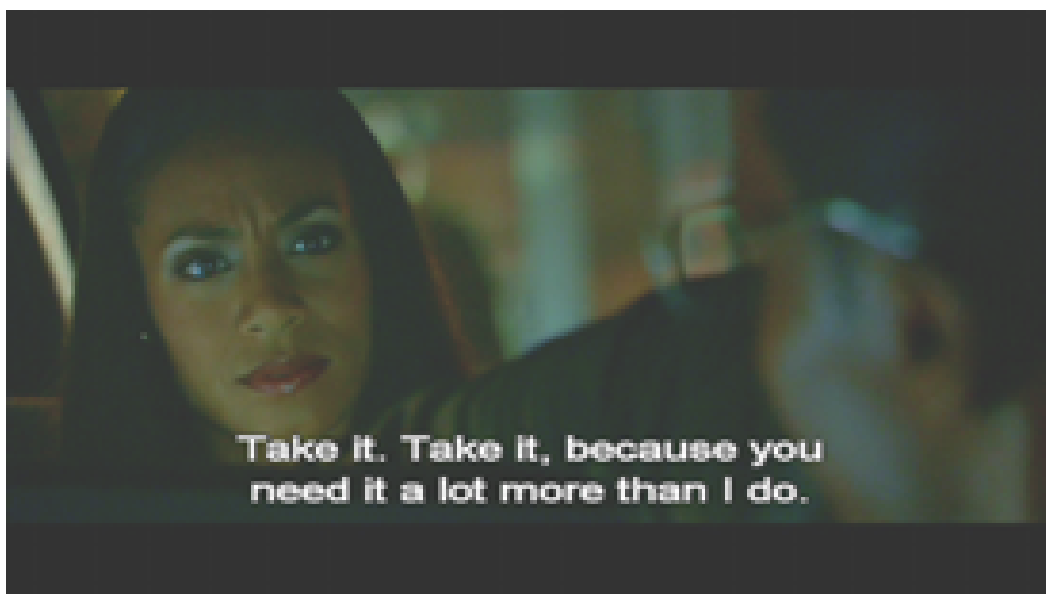


Fig.108

When Vincent gets into the cab and they begin talking, as the client he holds the upper hand but he is not initially in a position to order Max around as Cates/Nolte does in *48 Hrs*, or Riggs/Gibson does to Murtaugh/Glover in *Lethal Weapon*. Vincent presents as a person of charm and persuasion.



Fig.109

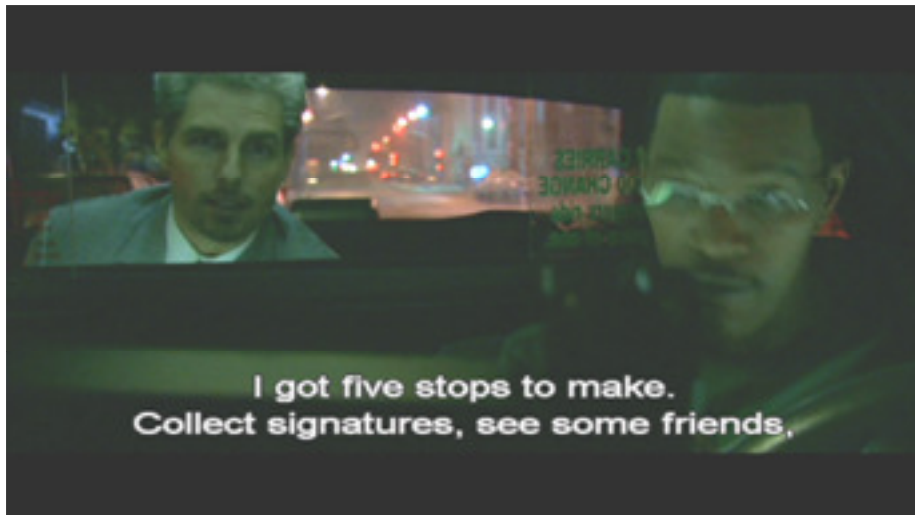


Fig.110

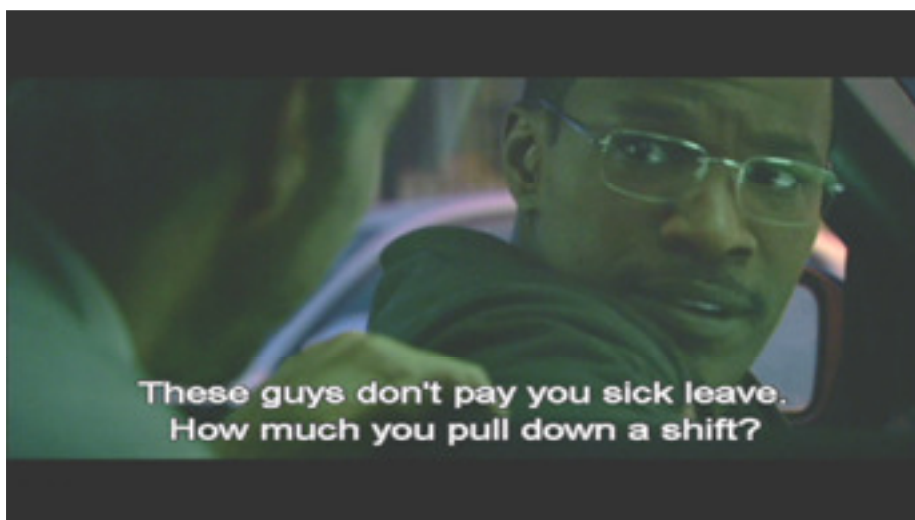


Fig.111



Fig.112

Vincent's manner and his art of persuasion are used to cajole Max into doing what he wants. When Jung speaks of the ego employing the persona to act on the

Self's behalf, hide fear and project weakness onto the shadow,<sup>448</sup> the screenwriter Stuart Beattie and Michael Mann resist the temptation to use Max as the evil shadow 'Other' of Vincent.

In the frame compositions, Vincent dominates the shot even though he is behind Max; however, he is calling the shots and steering the direction in which the story proceeds. Iago also motivates the story and plot despite the fact that the play is called *Othello*. Vincent is also a tempting image of masculine power, and a Faustian figure. We do not know how far he has sold himself for the knowledge and power he now has but, since he has been bought, he believes that all men can be bought. In relation to myth and legend, Vincent takes on the persona of an alienated man who is barren, which differentiates him from Max. Throughout the sequence, the deployment of the green interior lights works atmospherically to imply the hellish nightmare in which Max becomes trapped.

In *Collateral*, before the second act where Max realises Vincent is a murderer, their costumes work as signifiers of their social status. Max is casually dressed in jeans, a T-shirt, a sloppy cardigan and trainers. Vincent is wearing a tailored suit, white shirt and tie, and leather shoes. Their costumes allow the audience to inscribe them as they please. Michael Mann allows the mise-en-scène to serve the scene and inform the audience's conscious and unconscious minds. This proves to be very effective when one realises that at no time does he use language to refer to the racial identities of Max, Vincent or Annie in a defamatory way.

This is a salient character shift away from the bi-racial 'buddy film'. *48 Hrs* (1982), *Beverly Hills Cop II* (1987), *Deep Cover* (1992), *Die Hard: With a Vengeance* (1995) all employ racial slurs to demean the subordinated Black males. In

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<sup>448</sup> Carl Jung, "The Shadow", Aion, CW9ii pars. 13-19 in opcit, Storr, Anthony, (1998), *The Essential Jung*, p91

*Collateral*, however, there is no racial slur against Black folk and there is an echo of *Casablanca* (1942), in which Rick's best friend is Sam, the African-American piano player who is accorded dignity and trust by Rick. The problem is that Sam functions as a powerless guardian who willingly takes care of Rick but has no life of his own. This inequitable relationship is restaged in the 1988 *Die Hard* film with John McClane/Willis and Al Powell/VelJohnson. Al's concern is focused on maintaining John's state of mind and keeping him alive. He is virtually the androgynous Mammy who has to keep the White child under control while neglecting her own offspring.

For a modern Black audience this might test their patience, because they want Black character/s to have some agency and emotional investment in the narrative. For the author who has inherited the belief that 'blacks' nurturing Whites from the cradle to the grave is a natural act of Christian responsibility because it stretches back to the Plantocracy and the 'natural' order of things, equality is a hard adjustment to make. For White supremacists there is nothing wrong with stories that demonstrate 'blacks' subordination in White society. The narrative only becomes unsettling when Blacks refuse to abide by these traditions or actively reject them as the character Sofia/Oprah does in the *Color Purple* (1985). A 'White lady' asks if Sophia wants to be her maid and Sofia replies "Hell, no!" which results in her being castigated by the White townsfolk and she punches the 'White lady's husband who insults her for talking back to his wife. Eventually Sophia is knocked out with the butt of a gun by the sheriff and imprisoned.

I saw the *Color Purple* in New York when it opened in 1985 and that specific scene incited the most violent reaction I had ever witnessed up to that time in a cinema. The African-American audience threw hotdogs, popcorn and coke cans at



the screen as they raised a chorus of profanity towards the White female character playing the wife. If it had been a play, the drama would have stopped. A torrent of rage and many racial words of hatred were uttered against White women who had historically caused Black men and women to be abused, assaulted, raped and lynched. This incident made me aware of the meaning of spectatorship and resistance as no essay or article I had read as a film student had managed to do.

In *Collateral*, the screenwriter Beattie and Mann constructed the script to negotiate the terms of masculine control without racially degrading non-whites. That is unusual, because hegemonic authorship seldom considers those concerns. Quentin Tarantino's 1994 *Pulp Fiction*, for example, presents a bi-racial pairing and a narrative that is profoundly unacceptable to Afrocentric insurgence as documented in the anthology of essays in *Brotherman*.<sup>449</sup> Black cultural critic Armond White's review of the film argues that Tarantino's narrative structure and visual style are unimpressive at best. "Pulp Fiction itself is a misleading title: it should simply be renamed *Trash*. It keeps within the shallow, thoughtless boundaries of cheap fiction... but ugly, mean truth gets revealed".<sup>450</sup>

In 1990, Afrocentric activists such as Haki Madhubuti announced their vision for promoting the race, particularly under the circumstances of increased police violence against Black men and White America's racism, exemplified by the Yusef Hawkins murder in 1989.<sup>451</sup> In his chapter 'The Twelve Secrets of Life', Madhubuti argues against the pathological myth of Black masculinity portrayed in mainstream

<sup>449</sup> Boyd, Herb & Allen, Robert, L. (1995), *Brotherman: The Odyssey of Black Men in America: An Anthology* One World Books/Ballantine, USA

<sup>450</sup> White, Armond, (1995) *The Resistance: Ten Years of Pop Culture That Shocked the World*, The Overlook Press, USA p439 and pp439-443

<sup>451</sup> <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DE5DD153AF936A1575BC0A96F948260> Accessed 1.12.2008

film.<sup>452</sup> He believes that through the active and meditative process of reclaiming African ways of living, before enslavement and in the post-colonial era, Black men can regain a life-affirming psychology. Whites and Cones concurred in their 1999 text *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America* that pathways to reclamation of African traditional masculine identity are valuable, and in 2003 bell hooks combined cultural theory and gender studies in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* when she discussed Black men and gender equality. None of these concerns are remotely evident in *Pulp Fiction*, because the director seems to take pleasure in presenting 'blacks' as obtuse, criminal, sexual predators and punishing them through violent male rape and 'accidental' death played for laughs.

A great deal of the displeasure *Pulp Fiction* generates for an Afrocentric and Black activist audience derives from the constant use of the word 'Nigger', and the pathological portrayal of Black manhood by Samuel L. Jackson as Jules and the degraded portrait of Black masculinity by Vig Rhames as a gangster raped by the 'redneck' characters. The rape scene oscillates between distressing and repugnant. It is repugnant, because it demonstrates Tarantino's archetypal racist fantasies of 'blacks' in *Pulp Fiction* and in *Jackie Brown* (1997). Tarantino's refusal to allow Black men any self-determination relates to Joel Kovel's explanation of the way the White supremacist strives to disempower and subjugate Black men through disenfranchisement, and actual and symbolic castration in American society.<sup>453</sup>

Filmmaking gives Whitesupremacists the power to humiliate Blacks through the perpetuation of archetypes of evil in the collective unconscious. It also opens up a space to pathologise Blacks with the aid of verisimilitude in narrative fiction. In

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<sup>452</sup> Madhubuti, Haki R. (1990), *Black Men Obsolete, Single and Dangerous: African American Family in Transition*, pp157-158

<sup>453</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, pp72-73 in chapter 4 The Fantasies of Race, pp51-92

2006 Ronald Jackson argued this point in *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, and Peniel Joseph in *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* referenced the tradition of White America's oppression of Blacks through news media and government institutions such as the police and the justice system. Peniel Joseph asserts that the Black Activists' legacy was rejecting racist myth and creating Black epistemology that White America refuses to acknowledge.<sup>454</sup> Moreover, Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, Michael Eric Dyson in *Open Mike: Reflections on Philosophy, Race, Sex, Culture and Religion* and many other Black cultural critics have cited propagandist media institutions that demonstrated their racial prejudices during the O.J. Simpson trial which divided America into racial camps by compounding the subhuman 'nature' or 'savage' caricature of 'blacks'.<sup>455</sup>

Athena Mutua opposes media racism based on the growing belief and practice of progressive Black masculinity. This "...recognizes that White supremacy is not just a belief system or an ideology but a structural system in which the ideology of white supremacy is deeply written into the conscious and the unconscious patterns of people's behaviour and into the very systems, institutions, and structures of American society".<sup>456</sup> Michael Mann, however, works against this, in clear opposition to Tarantino's hegemonic authorship. *Collateral* avoids Tarantino's hyperbole and hysteria about White male dominance and the sense of loss of power that is dramatised in *Falling Down* (1993), in which an unemployed and

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<sup>454</sup> Joseph Peniel, (2006) *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, Henry Holt & Co, USA, pp302-303

<sup>455</sup> Ishmael Reed 'Passing the Buck: The Media, Black Men, O.J., and the Million Man March' p50-51 in Carbado, Devon, W. ed, (1999), *Black Men on Race, Gender and Sexuality*, New York University Press, USA

<sup>456</sup> Op cit, Mutua, Athena D. ed, (2006), *Progressive Black Masculinities*, p7

disempowered White male takes out his frustrations against racial groups and minorities he believes are his enemy.

Vincent ostensibly has all the power he needs but his life is so empty he has nothing to live for whereas Max is interested in Annie and desires a life with her. He has ambitions to establish his own company and he is clearly prepared to keep his mother in his life. The two are contrasted sharply when we learn that Vincent, the dominant White male symbol of power, is a murderer and lawless sociopath, which is a stereotype of Black caricatures in Blaxploitation. Max is a hard-working, law-abiding citizen, archetypal characteristics of White middle-class masculinity. This reverses the racial paradigm Hollywood prefers to perpetuate. It also points toward the narrative legacy of the powerless White male characters that believe they have been wronged by the status quo, as we see in *Othello* with Iago. In fact, the pairing of the malcontent White male and the energetic and seductive Black male is one of the mythemes in the bi-racial buddy movie, from *The Defiant Ones* (1958), *Blue Collar* (1978), and *Gardens of Stone* (1987) to *Men In Black* (1997), *Four Brothers* (2005) and *Hancock* (2008).

Let us now turn our attention to some of the other ways in which the 'Clash of Wills' thematically covers racial conflict in narrative film and characterisation by referring to the matrix I mapped out earlier, and consider if those themes are evident in *Collateral*.

#### 6.4: The 'Clash of Wills' - Civilisation vs. Savagery

In the Matrix that I mapped out, I identified several key structural paradigms as shown below.

<b>Clash of Wills</b>
Civilisation vs. Savagery
'Black beast' figure battles with White male 'heroic' figure who dominates 'the beast' Result: failure to transcend into a self-determined man, as seen in <i>Mandingo</i> , 1975
White male strives to tame and control Black male but the Black male defeats him and triumphs over hegemonic masculinity as seen in <i>Deep Cover</i> 1992 and <i>Collateral</i> 2004
Hegemonic masculinity overturned by humanist Black manhood in <i>Jerry Maguire</i> 1996 and <i>Ali</i> 2000

Michael Mann and the cast used the script to build the characters based on what Jung defines as the personal unconscious, which also relates to their collective consciousness of racial identity politics. Let us therefore consider if the characters demonstrate the 'Clash of Wills' by examining some key scenes.

In crime films, westerns, war films, horror films, science fiction and epics we are usually presented with a savage 'Other' that threatens the security of the civilised nation with bleak destruction and savagery. We see this in *American Gangster* (2007), when a government agent is told that the mass importation of drugs from Vietnam to the USA is the brainchild of an African-American drugs overlord. The FBI agent refuses to believe that a 'black' is capable of threatening the health and safety of White America.

Hollywood and independent film in the post-classical era have had to deal with racism in post-WWII society because it is part of our popular consciousness

and social experience. By using the narratology of the Black male as a beast based on archetypes in the collective unconscious, and myths about wild Blacks and their violent threat to Whites in the collective conscious, hegemonic White supremacists can present 'blacks' as needing to be controlled and tamed. In *American Gangster* (2007), the cityscape is frequently filled with Black people and the absence of White America suggests Blacks have taken over.



Fig.113

In the image above, not only do we see only Black people on the streets, we also see that Frank/Washington is the leader of the gang and he is so far uncontrolled by any White authority figure. When he and Detective Roberts/Crow meet, he will tame and control Frank and triumphantly bring him to order. In *Collateral*, at a crucial moment in the film, Vincent tells Max that he has to go and visit his mother in the hospital.

The sequence that follows and the plotting of the characters' motivation reveal Vincent's need for a Mother: he tries to draw Ida's love away from Max and the two men symbolically become sibling rivals. Vincent is reminded of what he has not got and therefore tries to take it. What is connotative of the scene is that White men took Black men's Mothers from them and turned them into their Mammies

during the Plantocracy. Beattie, Mann, Jamie Foxx and Irma P. Hall work against that tradition.

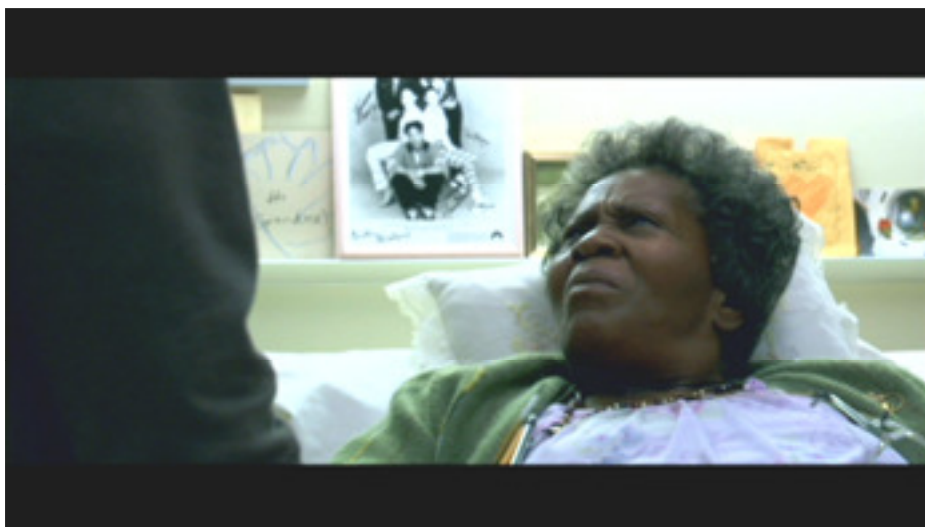


Fig.114



Fig.115

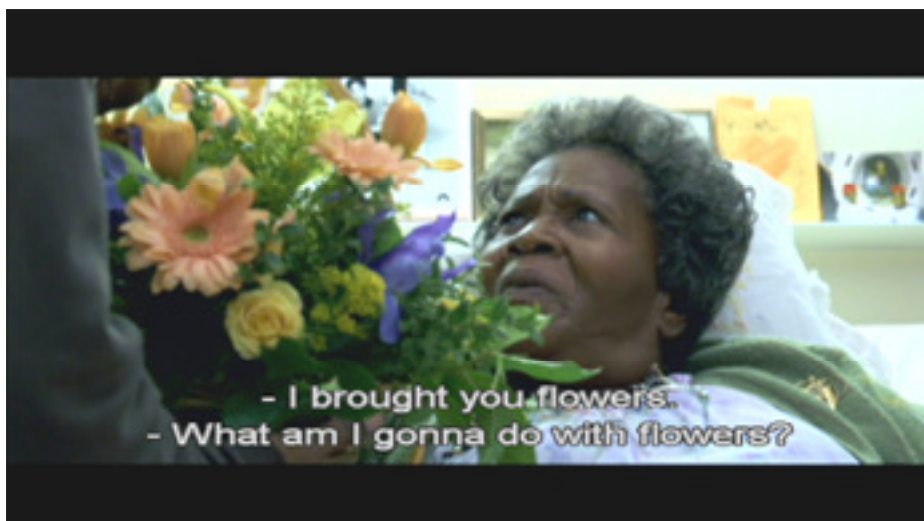


Fig.116

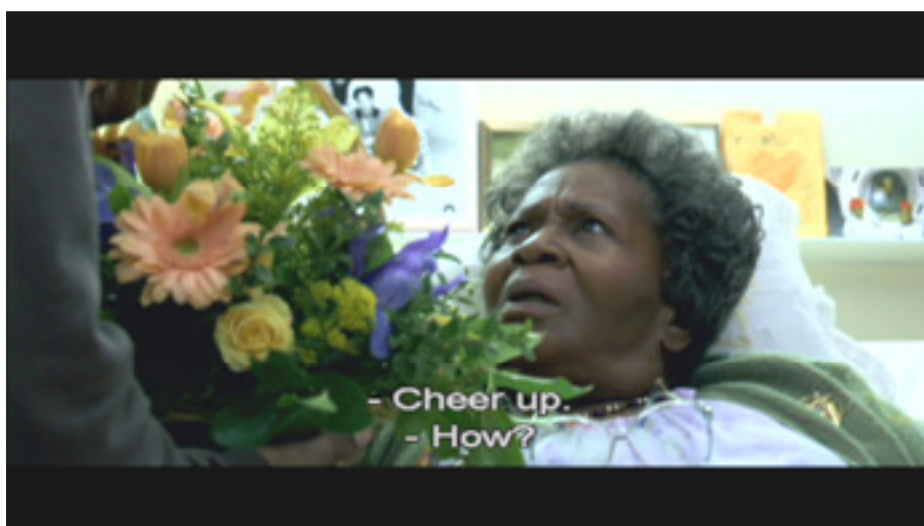


Fig.117

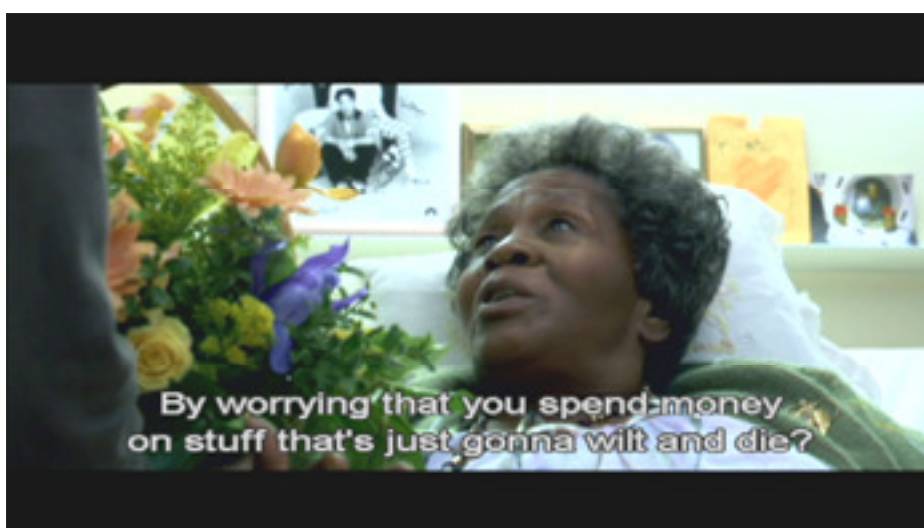


Fig.118





Fig.119



Fig.120

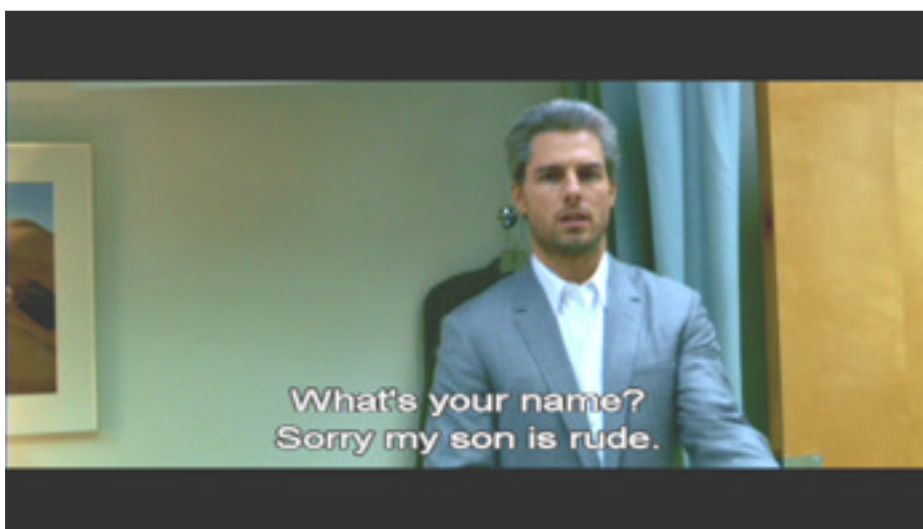


Fig.121

In this sequence of shot-reverse-shots a tension grows between Max and Vincent.



Fig.122

Vincent knows that he has charmed Ida and he smugly chastises Max.

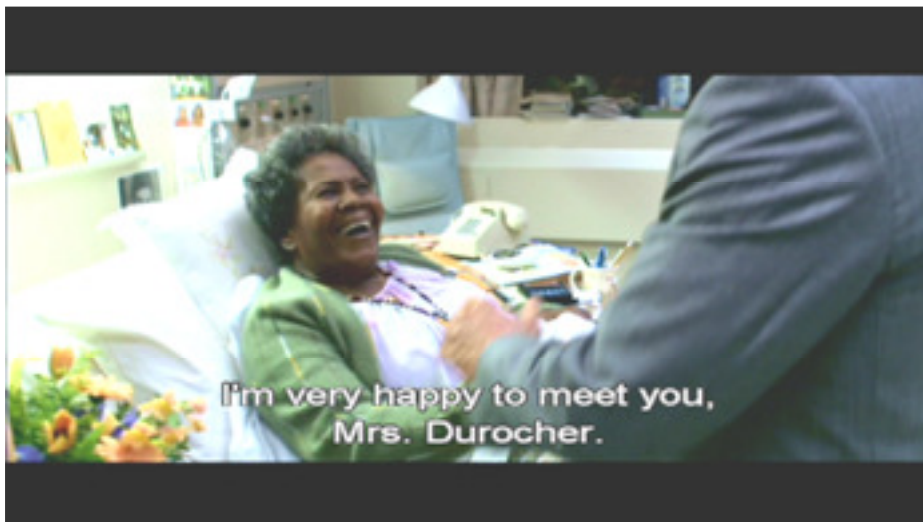


Fig.123

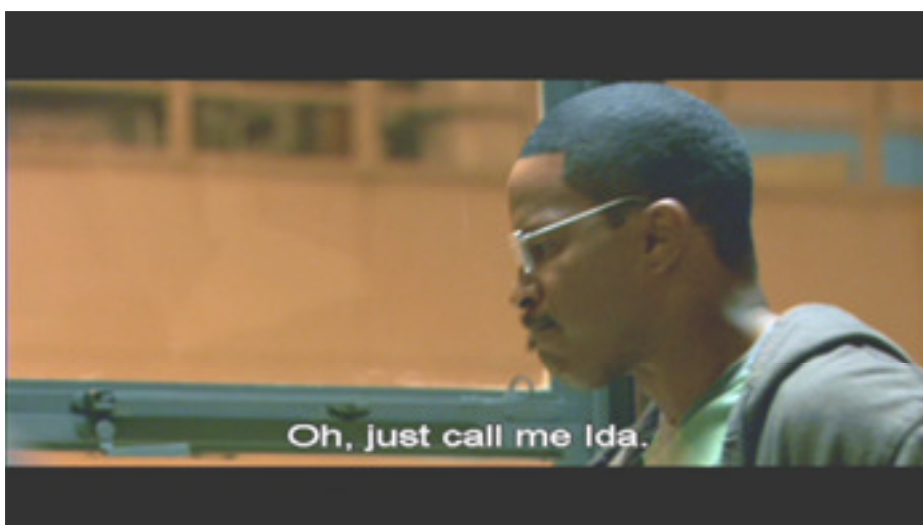


Fig.124

The fact that Ida takes a shine to Vincent provokes and hurts Max.



Fig.125

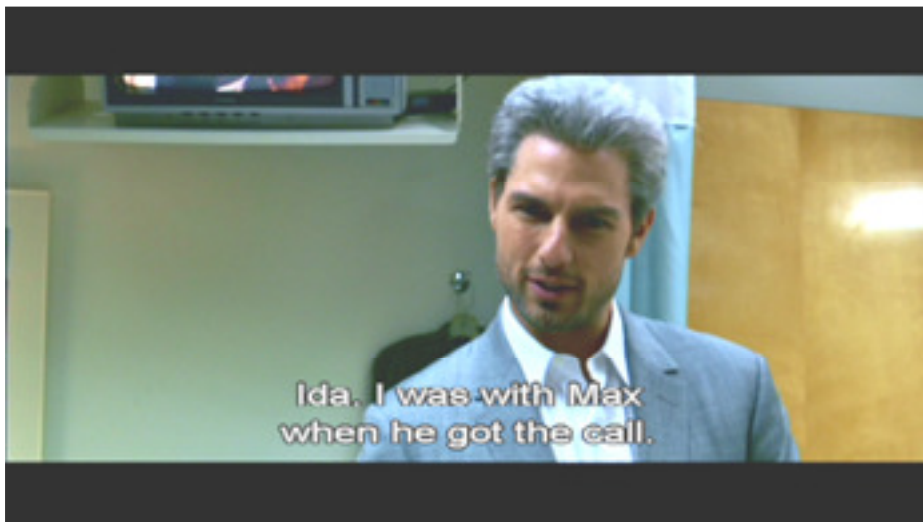


Fig.126

Vincent smoothly enchants Ida, and she is captivated, since he tells her that he is one of Max's friends. She confesses that she is glad Max has found someone who appears upright and prosperous. When he says she must be proud of Max she boasts that he has come a long way to succeed and Vincent realises that Max has lied to his Mother. Max is embarrassed and defensive and Vincent is self-satisfied. This key moment in the scene arguably relates to our primal jealousy when a parent praises another child but not us. Additionally, it is clear that White male mastery can undermine Black men's struggle for success.

When Ida tells Vincent that she worries about Max because he is stubborn, cautious and has a somewhat passive personality; she says in Figure 127,

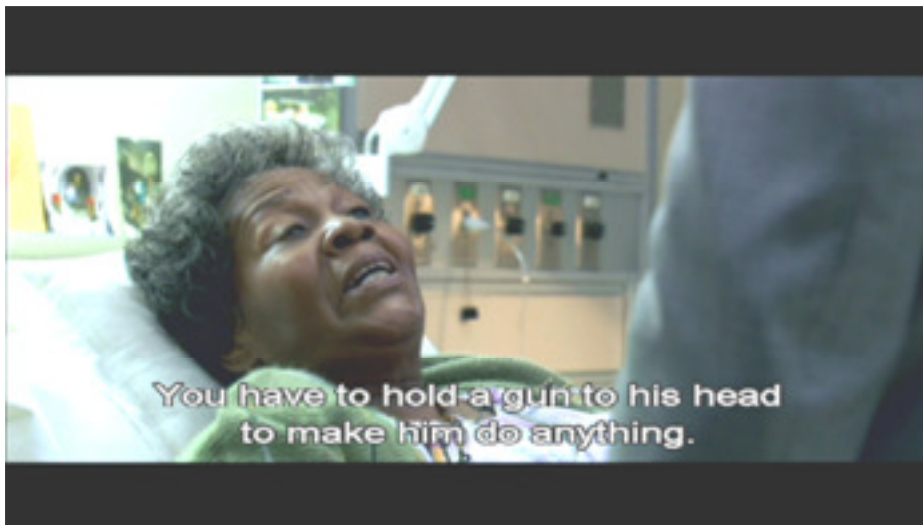


Fig.127

Vincent of course is doing precisely that to shake him out of his fears but at the same time keep him compliant. This annoys Max and he speaks up for himself to break away from his Mother's dominance and from Vincent's manipulation.



Fig.128

After Max implies that his Mother is infantilising him he makes a dash for freedom and this moment alerts us to the Jungian myth of the hero's journey and the 'Battle for Deliverance from the Mother',<sup>457</sup> namely, to be reborn as a man having

<sup>457</sup> Jung, Carl G. (1989/2003), *Aspects of the Masculine*, Routledge, UK, pp10-11 chapter 1 Hero pp1-25



defeated the monstrous dragon figure like the nihilistic dominative racist who “openly seeks to keep the black man down, and is willing to use force to further his ends”.<sup>458</sup> Defeating such a figure in everyday reality symbolises the extraordinary forces that the energetic Black male has to overcome because the hegemonic male represents the federal and patriarchal law of the father, bequeathed by the American founding fathers and the mythic status of the colonial and imperial rule.



Fig.129

Max takes Vincent's briefcase, runs out of the hospital with Vincent chasing him and then throws it into traffic and destroys the contents. Rather than beat him up or kill him, Vincent sets him a task. Max has to go and meet an even more deadly adversary and retrieve the lost information. This task symbolically works to map out the hero's journey, having to face ever-increasing dangers, triumph over adversity, and emerge as the conqueror.<sup>459</sup> Because Max is plunged into the underworld, which represents the savagery that civilisation is trying to expunge, the narrative suggests that, after the day's business is over, and 'decent people' go home to their families, the city brings out predatory night people that threaten our safety.

<sup>458</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, p54

<sup>459</sup> Op cit, Jung, Carl G. (1989/2003), *Aspects of the Masculine*, pp13-14 chapter 1 Hero pp1-25

### 6.5: 'Black beast' figure battles with the dominant White 'heroic' male figure

Where *Collateral* demonstrates itself as an exemplary text is in the sequence where Vincent forces Max to masquerade as him. He has to meet Felix/Javier Bardem, the client who hired Vincent and provided him with the profiles and details of the three men and Annie, whom he wants killed. Two key critical positions can be read in this scene: Richard Majors's polemic theory on the "Cool Pose" and White and Cones's analysis of 'An Opposing View: The Black Construction of Social Reality'.

What arguably makes the 'Clash of Wills' a specific paradigm is that it contrasts a weak-willed or powerless Black male with a dominant White man. The test of wills demonstrates the symbolic transformation of the Black male into a 'man' by the standards of hegemonic masculinity rather than White supremacists' misreading of African tribal manhood that fails to combine physical strength with economic domination and political power. When Max masquerades as Vincent, he does two things simultaneously: first he imagines White masculinity, and then he performs it as a Black man.

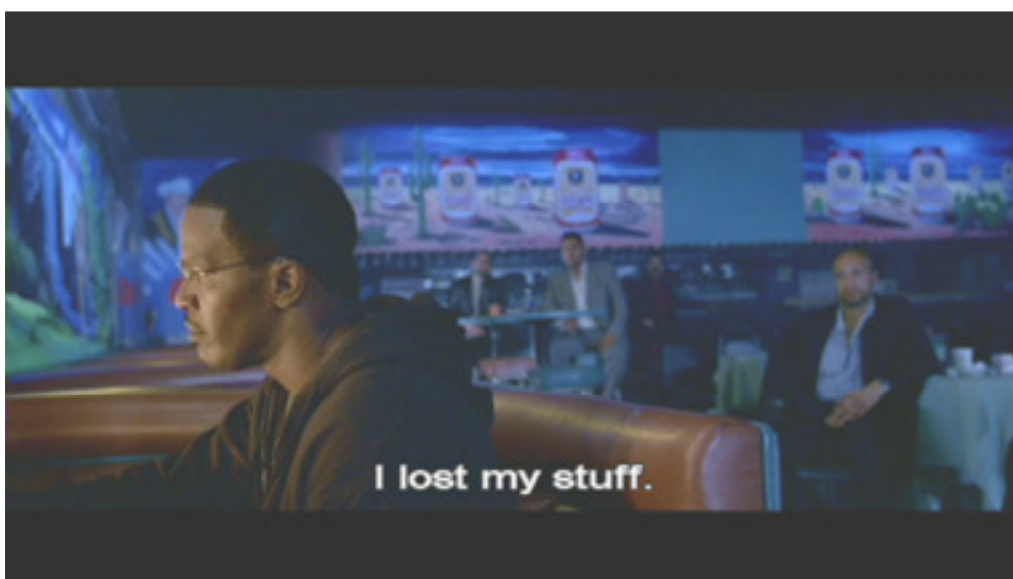


Fig.130

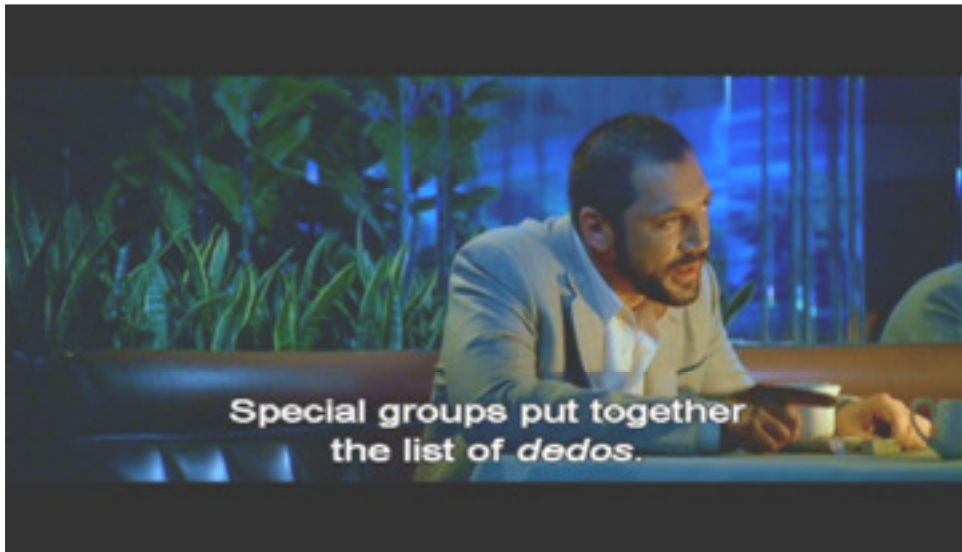


Fig.131



Fig.132



Fig.133

Max apologises because pretending to be Vincent is clearly playing havoc with his nerves. After Felix lectures him on the role and duty of Santa Claus and his Black helper Peter who are supposed to take care of the naughty boys and girls Max realises that Felix's bodyguards pose a threat; all they are waiting for is the go ahead from Felix and he will be shot down. Max therefore redoubles his effort and says,



Fig.134

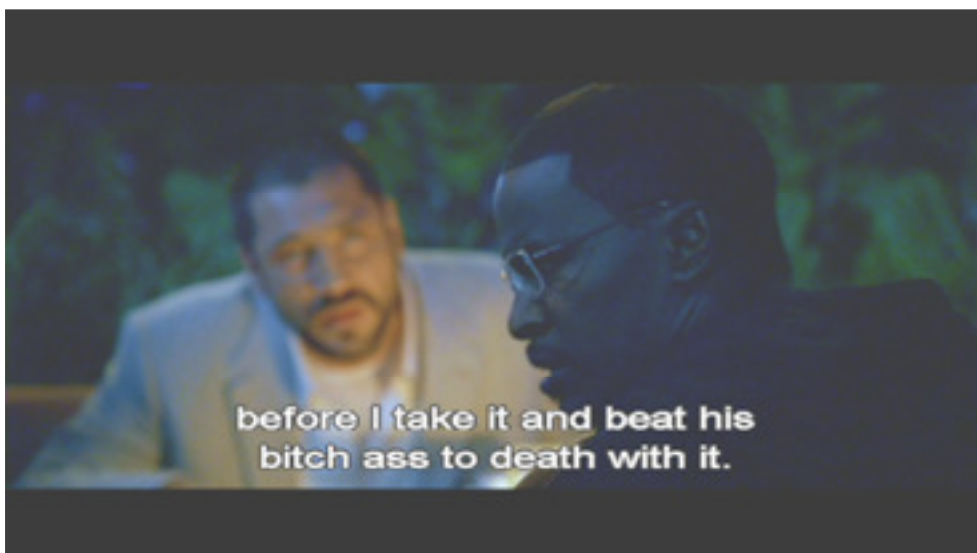


Fig.135

Max is able to do this because Black people spend most of their lives watching White Americans in everyday life telling them what to do and watching them through televisual media.



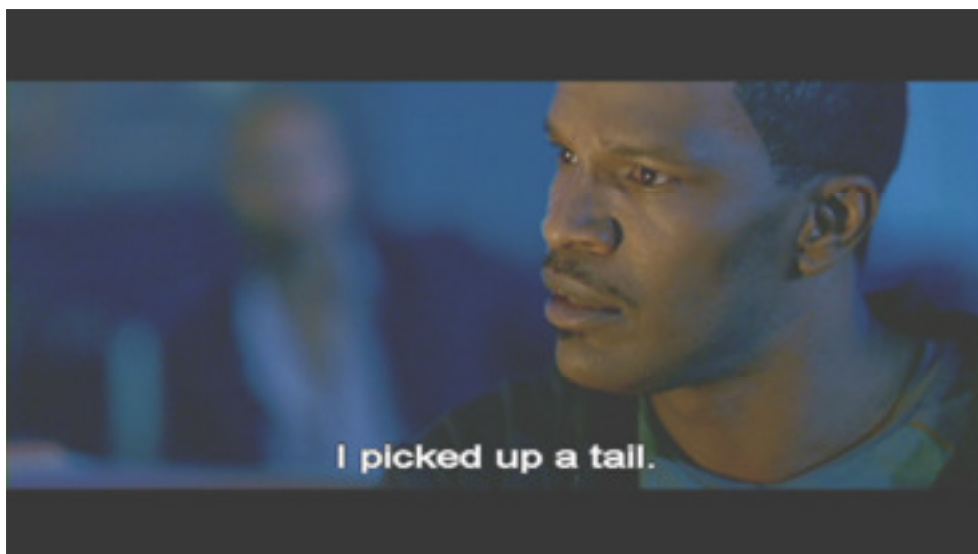


Fig.136



Fig.137



Fig.138

White America's lifestyle has saturated most of Black America's existential choices, and this is examined in *Paris is Burning*. The glamour and privilege that television and film present to disenfranchised and alienated Black men often represent what they lack: namely power and freedom. I believe Max is aware of everything that is missing from his life, particularly women, money and power. As he confronts Felix in the club scene, he gains strength masquerading as Vincent because he is a reticent and procrastinating person. That might have been played as the stereotypical lazy Negro in the classical era, as seen in *Stepin-fetchit*,

White and Cones state that Black men have always had to find ways in American society of adapting to social changes and maintaining a sense of their Black humanity. They identify Improvisation, Resilience, Connectedness to Others, the Value of Direct Experience, and Spirituality as several strategies of survival and prosperity.<sup>460</sup> At the core of all of these specificities lies a basic principle. Black men must accept their African atavistic American cultural evolution whereby their ancestral heritage is reclaimed because it is left unmediated by White America. This is not a primitive throwback to pagan African customs, but instead a manifestation of spiritual and cultural practice that Clyde W. Ford believes is desirable in achieving the reunification of African identity with American Black subjectivity.<sup>461</sup> In short, through myth and symbolic metaphor, Black people have to accept and love their African Self despite the defamatory narratology about Africa written and spoken by White supremacists.<sup>462</sup>

Max understands the power that White American men have because he is a servant to them and they ignore him. They get in and out of his cab discussing

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<sup>460</sup> Op cit, White, Joseph, L and Cones, James, H. (1999), *Black Men Emerging: Facing the Past and Seizing a Future in America*, pp49-51 and pp47-64

<sup>461</sup> Op cit, Ford, Clyde W. (2000), *The Hero with an African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa*, p14

<sup>462</sup> Op cit, Kovel, Joel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, pp182-183 in chapter 8 The Psychohistory of Racism in the United States, pp177-230

money, women, deals, one-upmanship, leisure and privilege and they have no interest in him. Countless working-class men understand this class divide, according to Michael Kimmel. He argues that minority subjectivity, namely being without social privileges such as White skin, class status or heterosexual agency, often connotes social invisibility. He goes on to say that if a person is non-White other factors affect their visibility in mainstream society.<sup>463</sup>

Moreover, when Max knows he has conned Felix into believing he is Vincent, Max strikes a blow against Vincent by cutting his fee as compensation to Felix.

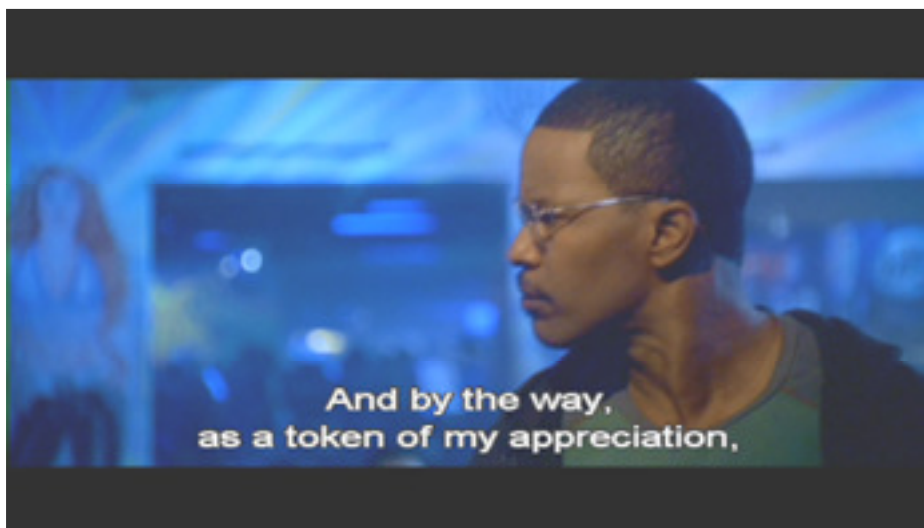


Fig.139

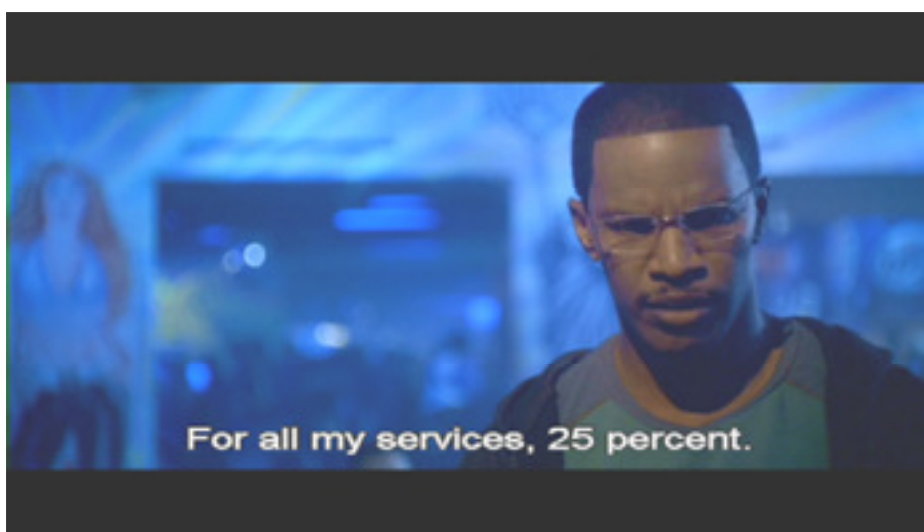


Fig.140

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<sup>463</sup> Michael Kimmel 'Toward a Pedagogy of the Oppressor' p67 in op cit, Mutua, Athena D. ed, (2006), *Progressive Black Masculinities*, p67



Fig.141

In 1992, the idea of the “Cool Pose” gained immediate attention in Black American popular culture. That is to say, Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson identified that most African-Americans view the White American male with great suspicion because of the history of their oppressive and degrading treatment of Black people in the USA<sup>464</sup> Majors and Mancini Billson took a critical and cultural overview and concluded that most Blacks do not trust Whites.<sup>465</sup> This is because the economic power dynamic is so disproportionate it robs Blacks of the opportunity to compete on an equal and level playing field at all levels of American society.

Under those conditions, Black men adopt a strategy of compensation and survival. They play up and act out hyper-masculinity with Black pride, bravado, and ebullience demonstrated in sports and the music industry. Black men's display of physical strength and sexual power underline their African-American expressive style, which differs distinctly from conservative White American masculinity.<sup>466</sup> The key difference is a combined aggression and swagger rooted in UNIA's Black pride, the Black Power ethos and Afrocentric reclamation.

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<sup>464</sup> Majors, Richard, and Mancini Billson, Janet, (1993), *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, A Touchstone Book, USA, pp11-12

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., pp41-42

<sup>466</sup> Ibid., pp28-30

Added to this, is the masculine charm of Black men in R&B and R&R and the combination of existential Black consciousness manifest in Black men's survival despite their history of disenfranchisement. These life lessons brought about the "cool pose". It demonstrated that White American men do have economic and federal power they lack charisma. The Black man suggested he was indomitable and no White man could rival him as a 'player' or hustler.<sup>467</sup> This is principally contrasted and played out between the corporate office and the urban streets where American men hustle and score. Max taps into this capitalist masculinity to gain the adversary's confidence and then show him that today the Black man is playing to win.

Max's character does not fulfil the myth of the Black male as a beast because he cares about people and tries to keep them out of harm's way. Through the active construction of character by drawing on reality rather than the scriptwriter's White male speculative imago, the actors and the director Michael Mann reject the beast and demonstrate that post-classical cinema has the responsibility for actively rejecting Black and White racist stereotypes. By making Vincent conscious of his actions, Mann disavows any claims that suggest Vincent is not mentally responsible for what he has done. By making Max an indecisive male who is tested and finds his strength as an African-American, he demonstrates the hero's journey toward the masculine self-determination that Ronald Jackson has argued for throughout his studies.<sup>468</sup>

The last act of the film where Max is compelled to rescue Annie brings together the mythemes of the 'Clash of Wills' and therefore I want to examine that sequence and further consider what it tells us about the conflict for control between Black and White masculine dominance in film.

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<sup>467</sup> Op cit, Majors, Richard, & Mancini Billson, (1993), *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, pp28-29 chapter 3 Cool Pose and Masculinity pp27-36

<sup>468</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006), *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, pp140-141 and pp127-141

## 6.6: Hegemonic masculinity overturned

Thousands of films have placed Black and White males in conflict where the struggle of self-determination is the battle to the death or subjugation of the men in combat. In classical and post-classical American cinema, Black men usually lose in the war between the races. *Collateral* stands apart from the diachronic surplus of ideological myth. That is to say, the perpetual reiteration of that narrative and paradigm is overturned in the battle for a humane civilisation vs. pathological savagery, where love defeats hate. Othello lost this battle with Iago.

Furthermore, the tradition in post-classical cinema where the Black male wins against the power and forces of the criminal White male is also adjusted in *Collateral*. In Sidney Poitier's *No Way Out* (1950), *Brewster's Millions* (1985) starring Richard Prior, *Ricochet* (1991), *Deep Cover* (1992), *Bad Boys* (1995), with Denzel Washington, Laurence Fishburne and Will Smith respectively, they each face White male adversaries in the last act of the film. They eventually triumph with the aid of a partner who is sometimes White, i.e. "the Canadians" in *Hurricane* (1999), but the 'back-up' is usually Black, as in *Shaft* (1971), *Super Fly* (1972), *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) and Spike Lee's *She Hate Me* (2005). In *Watermelon Man* (1970) Jeff/Cambridge does overthrow White hegemonic power but Melvin Van Peebles refused to shoot the ending where Jeff wakes up White, having had a nightmare.

During the 1980s Fred Williamson wrote, directed, starred in and produced several films such as *The Messenger* (1986) and *Fox Trap* (1986) where he triumphed against White male mastery and power. What makes *Collateral* distinctive, however, is that it was financed, produced and written by White men. It is a story about the death of White male mastery and the rebirth of the Black male as a hero untamished by a life of crime, sexual depravity or pagan nihilism.

Max is an honest working-class man far removed from a life of crime. He defies the ways race is perceived because he is seemingly typical but untypical at the same time. Michael Mann and Jamie Foxx build the character as if they are familiar with Stuart Hall's reading of Race as a Floating Signifier in today's society where Hall argues that it functions beyond the historical regimes of classification.

Stuart Hall sets up an important paradigm by suggesting that the systems of racial classification that use pseudo-science and genetics have historically proven untenable.<sup>469</sup> Consequently, we have to look outside those arenas of expert opinion on the 'nature of race'. Jackson shares many of Hall's arguments on racial belief systems<sup>470</sup> and visible signs of 'colour, hair and bone'<sup>471</sup> that project myths onto the Black body. Hall and Ronald Jackson's central link is their analysis of written, spoken and perceived White attitudes and prejudices that typify race more like a language, which relates to Barthes's argument that "language is myth".

Stuart Hall identifies the three systems used to define Black people: religion, anthropology and science. He does not state that they serve to perpetuate *myth* but one can see the ways they do because the synchronic system that reiterates racist themes can be read as the Jungian shadow. Hall says religion was a first attempt at racial classification, where first contact between differing racial groups led to attempts to make sense of the racial 'Other'. Throughout *Collateral*, the scriptwriter and the director appear to be conscious of the various readings and scriptings of the racial 'Other'. Refusing to recreate racial hegemony allows the audience to rethink their perceptions concerning race because Max is forced to adapt to and survive Vincent's corrupt worldview.

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<sup>469</sup> *Race a Floating Signifier Lecture* Goldsmiths College, (DVD 19:25-20:15 minutes)

<sup>470</sup> Op cit, Jackson, Ronald, (2006) *Scripting Black Masculine Body*, pp14-15

<sup>471</sup> Sundquist, Eric, J. (1996), 'The Conservation of Races' p39 in *The Oxford Du Bois Reader*, Oxford University Press, USA,

Stuart Hall goes on to argue that scientists who claim to hold the answers to racial classification through genetic codes are also unreliable because they have used the codes to make unsupportable claims and fix specific characteristics onto African-Americans in relation to their intelligence and their race.<sup>472</sup> Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's 1994 *Bell Curve* generated significant controversy because they alleged Blacks had an inferior intelligence to Whites. Kovel provides a persuasive psychoanalytical argument on the "dominative racist" and the "aversive racist" concerning such allegations, whereas Fanon's psychiatric study of Negrophobic men and women underlines the racial trauma that White supremacists imagine would threaten their mastery.<sup>473</sup> Vincent's ideas about human nature and the order of the world show that he is knowledgeable but he fails to understand how Max can defy his ideas of humanity because he is used to killing people rather than living with them, and that prevents him from understanding people, rather than seeing them as a mass of indistinguishable drones awaiting execution.

Patricia Hill Collins argues that White America tends to homogenise Blacks into a mass embodying the same customs and interests.<sup>474</sup> This approach to social studies generalises the specific interests, talents and beliefs Black people have. It also fails to consider religious, political, philosophical, and intellectual diversity among diaspora Black folk. Vincent's entire attitude to life, particularly when he kills the Jazzman, acts as a denial of compassion. On the DVD commentary, Michael Mann says that the scene of the murder and Max's compassion is the moment that Vincent is compelled to search his alienated existence. The problem however is that Vincent does not stop killing but becomes more pathological.

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<sup>472</sup> BBC 4, (2007), *History of Racism*, Part 2. This episode examines the history eugenics and gene codes

<sup>473</sup> Op cit, Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (1986), p155-156

<sup>474</sup> Op cit, Hill Collins, Patricia, (2004), *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*, pp14-15



In the last act of *Collateral* Max risks his life to save Annie 'the woman in peril'. He breaks into her office building by shooting out the street doors,. As he does so, the audience become aware that he has never handled firearms as he fumbles about with the gun, covers his face when he shoots the glass doors and makes his way in. Annie is trapped in the darkened office, crawling on her hands and knees to get away from Vincent, who is trying to kill her. Max warns him to drop the gun but Vincent arrogantly asks what he is going to do about it, and Max shoots and injures him. In the chaos Max grabs Annie and they get out of the building. She is desperate to know what happened.

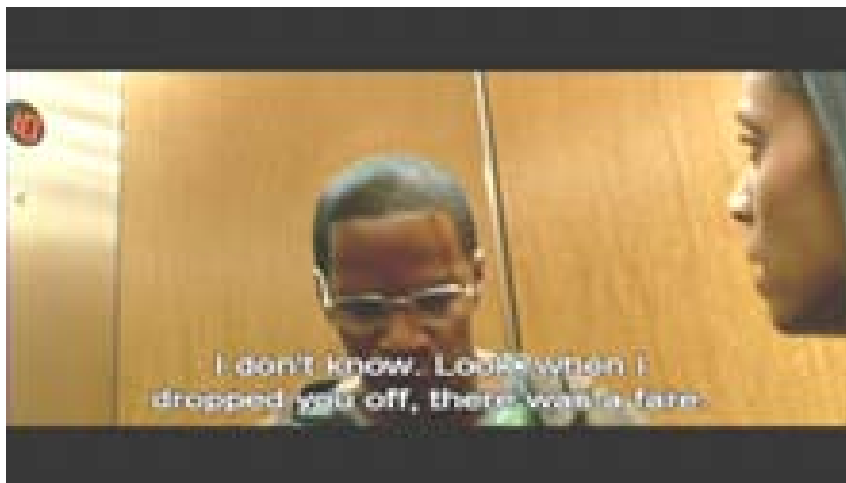


Fig.142

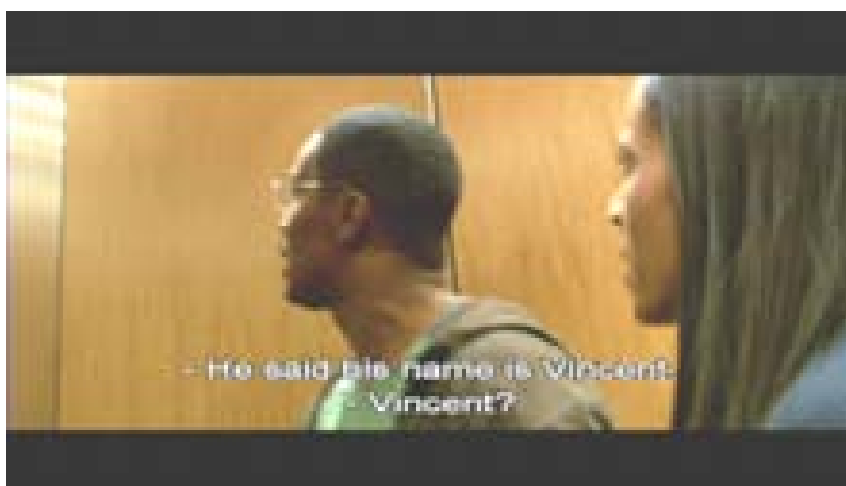


Fig.143

Max's inability to explain everything that has happened makes their situation believable to an audience who are compelled to identify with them because they are innocent.

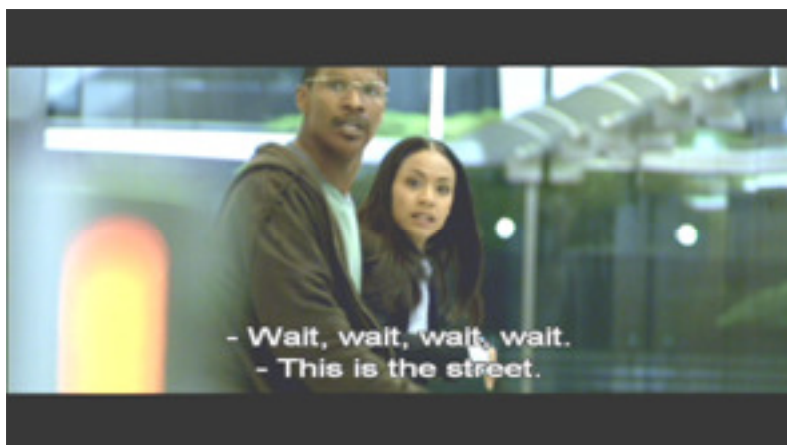


Fig.144



Fig.145

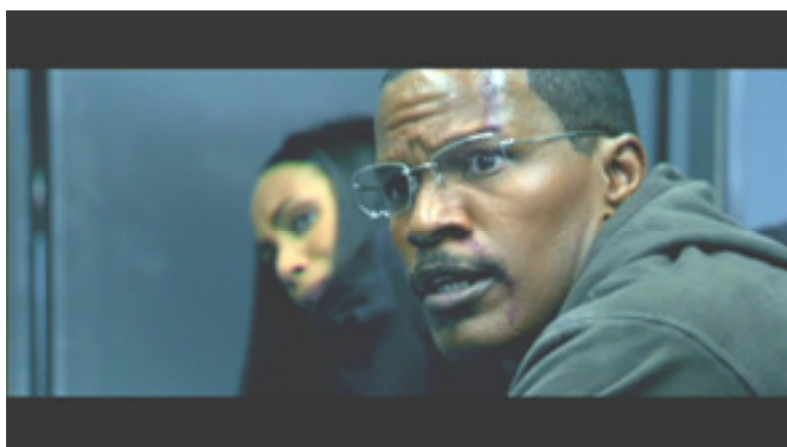


Fig.146

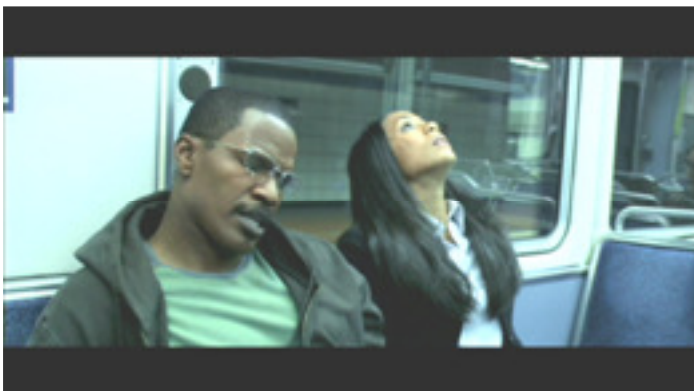


Fig.147

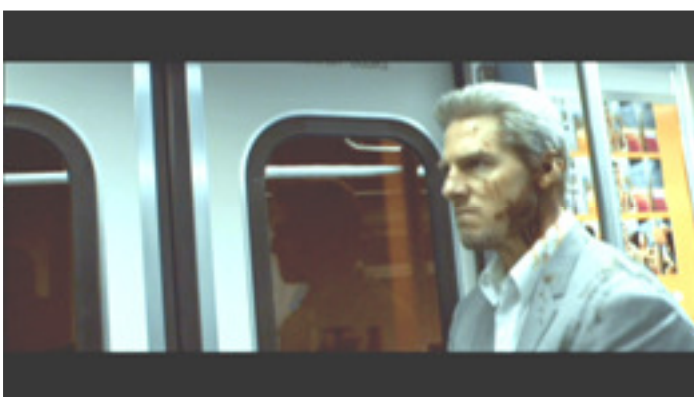


Fig.148

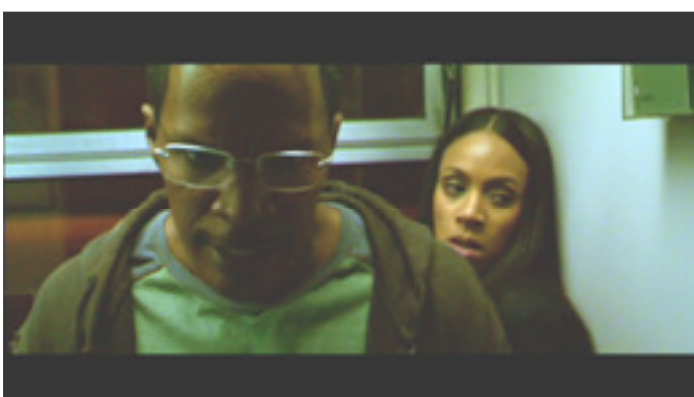


Fig.149

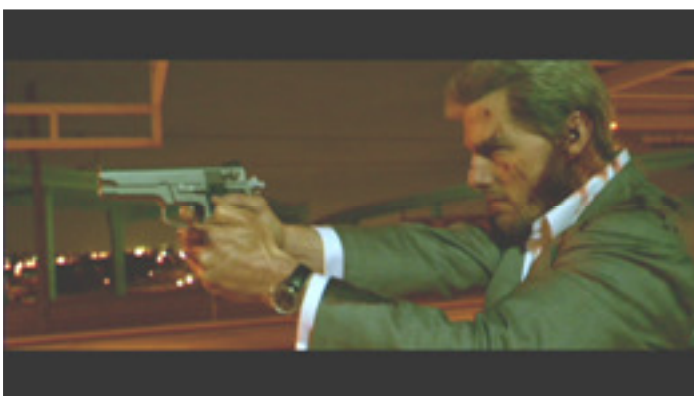


Fig.150

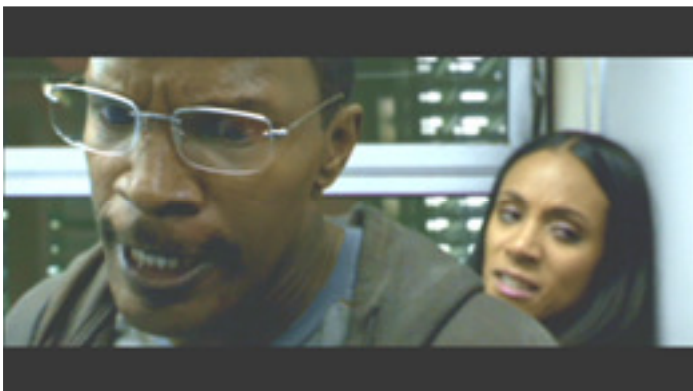


Fig.151

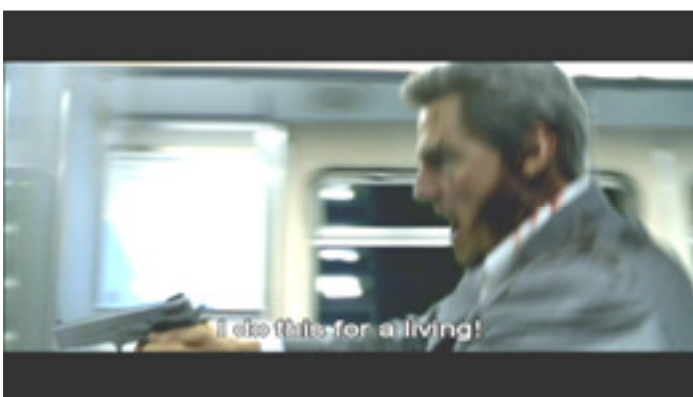


Fig.152

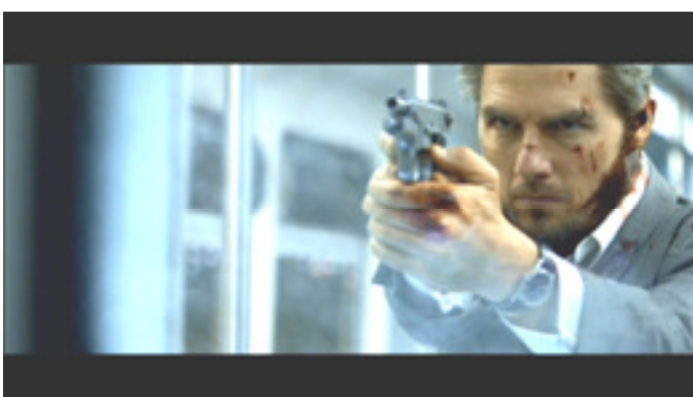


Fig.153

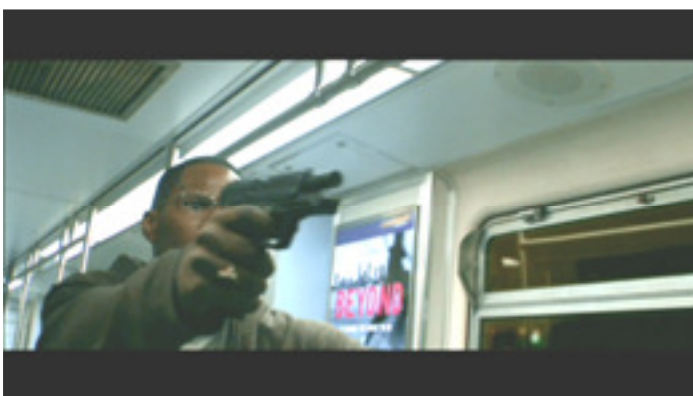


Fig.154

In this sequence of shots, Figures 142 to 152, the audience can still identify with Max and Annie because they are the ones who are hunted. The connotative readings of Black men being chased by White men with firearms echo the slave capture in Africa. The chase and capture extend to the antebellum period of runaway slaves hunted by a posse or bounty hunters and into the modern era of police chases that sometimes result in incidents like the Rodney King police assault in 1991.

When Max shoots Vincent, he still demonstrates that he has not learned to be a professional killer whose attitude and male bravado empower him. Max is clearly out of his familiar role and safety zone as a cab driver. He is, however, imbued with human survival instincts. He refuses to allow Vincent to rob him of his life and kill Annie because he has been paid to do so. At the beginning of Act Two, Max asks Vincent what the first victim had done to him that forced him to kill him. Vincent tells Max that he never met him before and knew nothing about him. Max is shocked and Vincent says: in Figures 155 and 156.

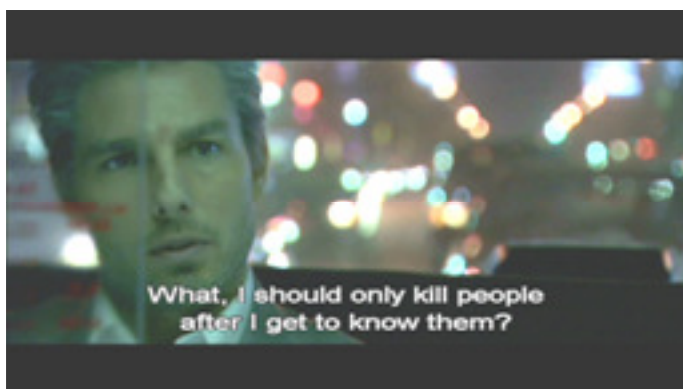


Fig.155

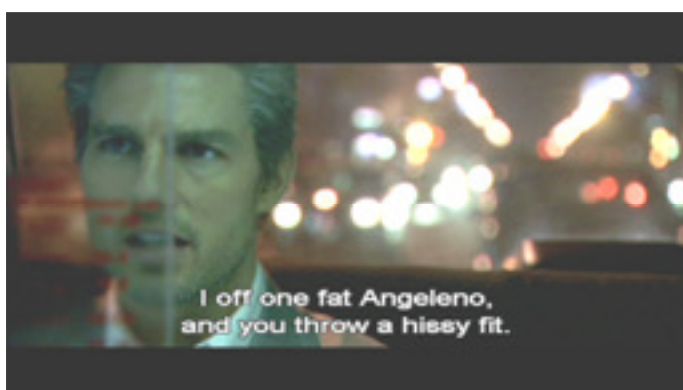


Fig.156

In the closing minutes of the film, Max demonstrates key concerns that cultural theorists discuss in terms of Progressive Black Masculinity. Athena Mutua says:

[...] that progressive black masculinities are unique and innovative performances of the masculine self that, on the one hand, personally eschew and actively, ethically stand against social structures of domination and, on the other hand, that value, validate, and empower black humanity- in all its variety- as part of the diverse and multicultural humanity of others in the global family.<sup>475</sup>

There is pathos in Vincent's death because his attitude and actions suggested that he had lived a misanthropic alienated life and that raises the question of what dreadful social circumstances damaged his Ego. In the special features of the DVD, Michael Mann tells us that he composed a full biography for Vincent's early life.

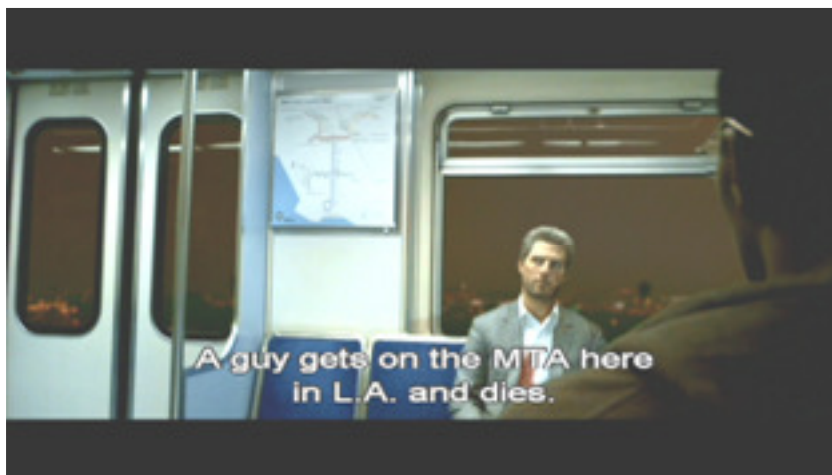


Fig.157

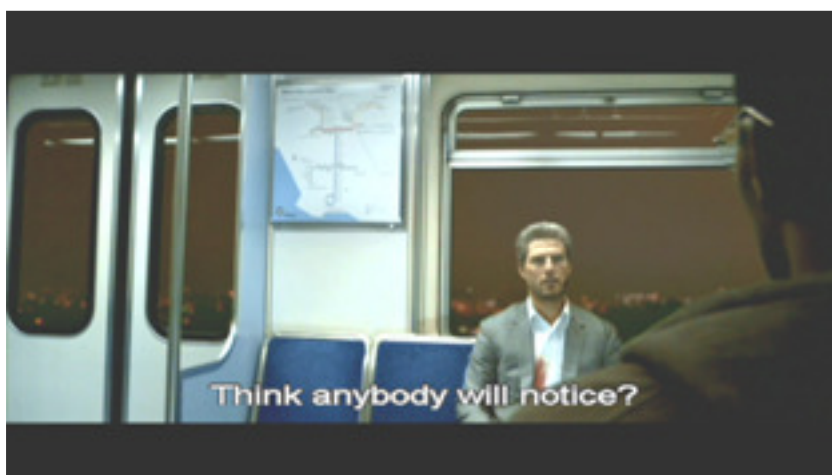


Fig.158

<sup>475</sup> Op cit, Mutua, Athena D. ed, (2006), *Progressive Black Masculinities*, p7



In preproduction and rehearsal, Tom Cruise, Jamie Foxx and Jada Pinkett Smith all fleshed out their characters through real life contact with an L.A. prosecuting female attorney and L.A. cab drivers, and Tom Cruise was trained by former SAS marksmen and martial arts experts. They learned how to embody the characters they were playing by understanding how they conducted themselves in their everyday lives.

What Tom, Jamie and Jada added was finding the humanity in the damaged and world-weary lives of their Vincent, Max and Annie. Spending time with their real-life counterparts helped them to renounce the stereotype and relate to their own humanity.

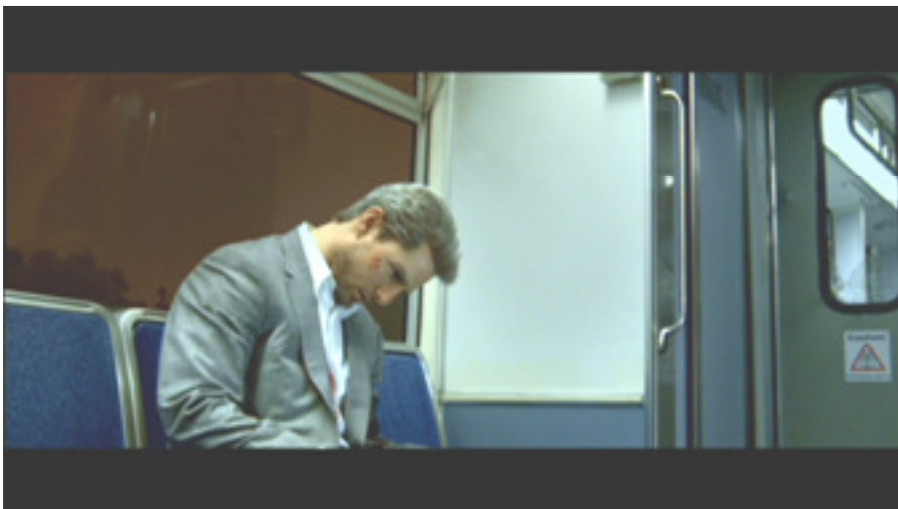


Fig.159

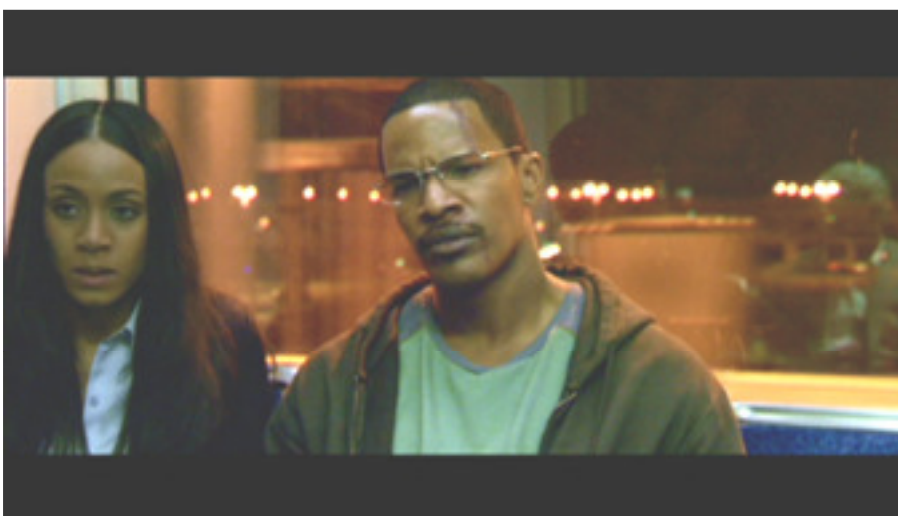


Fig.160

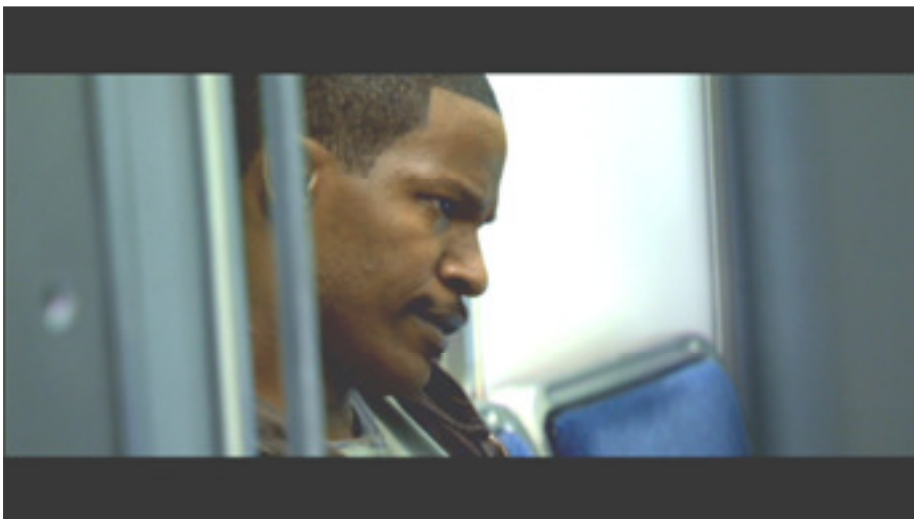


Fig.161



Fig.162

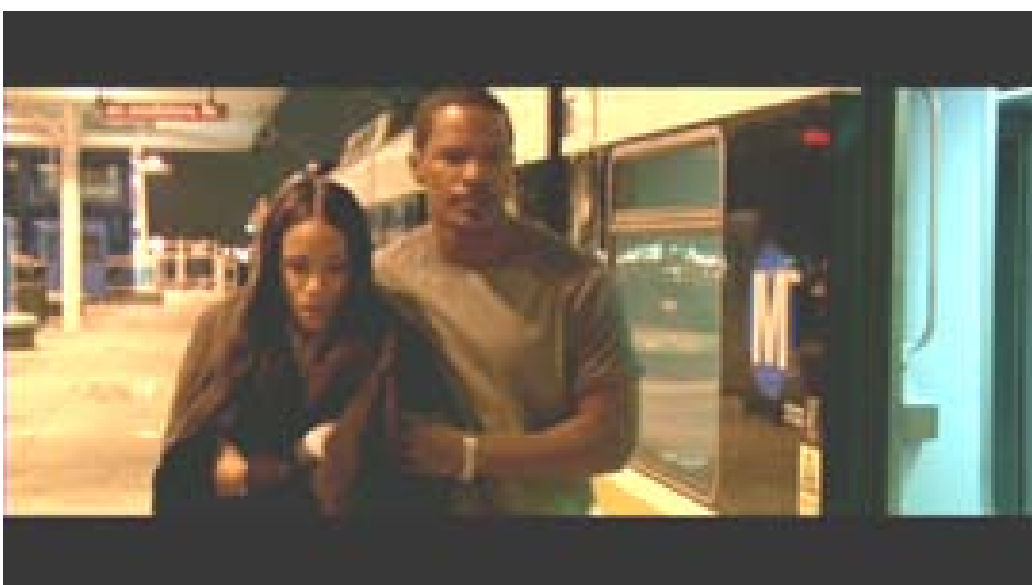


Fig.163





Fig.164

Hegemonic masculinity is overturned at the end of *Collateral* because the myth of the Black male as a beast is disavowed by the actor and the character he is playing, as well as the producer, author and director in post-classical cinema. The combined aims of the production crew and cast work to challenge racial slurs and a defamatory racist language. Furthermore, the social comments in the film text representing everyday life work to rebuild a film narratology and iconography of Black masculinity.

In the closing minute of the film, Max's body language clearly denotes the protective concerns of progressive Black masculinities in his tenderness to Annie. Because Beatie and Mann have shifted away from a speculative sexual profile of Black masculinity, they are able to focus on a humanist portrayal of Black American identity. Max does not paraphrase Afrocentric discourse; instead, he speaks as a Black man who perceives himself to be an American. This strategy allows Jamie Foxx and Michael Mann to make Max's personal life a political aspect of Black male characters in film. That is to say, everything Black characters legally strive to achieve in narrative film is balanced against hegemonic control and Black assertive resistance to White supremacy. Max singlehandedly saves Annie's life and his own, to triumph against the hegemonic male, because post-classical film has begun to reject the myth of the Black beast.

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the constructions of Black characters are positioned on diachronic and synchronic paradigms. The foundation of my research on the Black male beast in post-classical film is rooted in Shakespeare's *Othello*, which I used to map out a theory of Othellophobia and Othellophilia. My aim has been to show that the myth of the Black male beast is based on Othello as a prototype Black character. Hollywood, as an industry of ideological White male Christian superiority, supported by producers, directors and writers, has unconsciously and consciously reconstructed this archetype through myths related to Black men, split across four paradigms of diachronic and synchronic myths.

Historically, Black men have been scripted with a 'Savage Body', namely, black, protuberant and dirty. The Black 'Savage Mind' has been defined as inferior and pathological. The myth that Blacks' 'Object of Desire' is the White female as a goddess figure is deeply ingrained in White supremacy. This belief contributes to a 'Clash of Wills', where the Black male, who is perceived to be a savage, is subjugated by White men who imagine the threat 'blacks' pose to civilisation and therefore believe he must be tamed. This often results in violent clashes where White men dominate 'blacks' and consequently Black men fail to achieve full self-determination and hegemonic dominant capitalist masculinity.

I have stated that Othellophobia and Othellophilia represent two perceptions of Black characters in drama, specifically post-classical film. Othellophobia is the White male characters' fear of being re-enslaved by Islamic Blacks or enslaved by African-Americans. Consequently, the 'black' character is subjugated through hegemonic authorship that employs one of the aforementioned synchronic mythemes to demonise and control 'black' characters. Othellophilia is a humanist

perception of Othello as a Black man, and the narrative works to overturn the myth of the Black male as a beast. This dramatises White characters that reject the myth of Black people's inferiority because the author of the text rejects the ideology of White supremacy in the history of human civilisation.

I have stated that Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Carl Jung offer strategies in structuralism, semiotics and archetypes in the collective unconscious to explain the myth of the Black male beast. Each of these methodologies in its own way works as a contributory factor in Hollywood's hegemonic authorship that employs myth to demonise Black men in film. I suggested that structuralist methods of inscribing and reading characters can overlap, however, because Black cultural criticism works to dismantle the essentialism of diachronic and synchronic myth.

Post-classical American filmmakers usually ignore the real-life experiences of African-Americans that are put forward by Ralph Wiley in *What Should Black People Do Now*, Don Belton in *Speak My Name: Black Men on Masculinity and the American Dream* and Janet Mancini Billson's studies of Black men's real-life experience. This is because realism works to naturalise myth, whereas reality, as a rule, tends to challenge myth as it is spoken, written or acted out on the grounds of discrimination and racist denotative practices in everyday life.

White men that have adapted and adopted what I distinguish as the four-part structural system chiefly govern the post-classical American film industry. This can be discerned and tested by studying the way Black men are defeated by White characters and how they are kept away from White women as potential lovers, principally because they *are* Black and are bearers of skin replete with historical myths about the 'nature' of Blacks. What the narratology and iconography of the

Black male have shown are ways of studying film outside the limits of heterosexist hegemonic masculinity, on the assumption he represents the Othello archetype.

In studying the four films, I considered whether Black characters are reconstructed out of Shakespeare's *Othello*, and why there have been so many distortions of Othello. This pointed toward the possibility that the idea of Othello as a savage Black man might be rooted in the minds of authors from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, who have therefore recreated heathen, sexually depraved, inferior 'blacks' because Othello *is* a prototype Black character. Consequently, Othello is a character who embodies a humane psychological complexity that threatens the White male Ego persona and therefore, to the White supremacist, Black men are unconsciously imagined as a Jungian shadow, a projected black evil twin.

A continuum of White supremacy can be traced from the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1492 that exemplified deep-rooted fears of their insurgence and *Othello* addresses those fears. Then the Reconstruction period from 1865 to 1877 instilled many anxieties about Blacks' dominance of Whites. When we consider the era of segregation after 1896, the first American classical narrative film, *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, clearly demonstrates the ideology of White supremacy. In the post-classical era of American cinema I have suggested that fears of Black equality manifest principally because the rational mind is conscious of Black people's humanity regardless of their racial heritage or religion.

Today, the Moors and diaspora Africans' contribution to civilisation is well evidenced because they built their own civilisations, as Ivan Van Sertima has argued in *The Golden Age of the Moor*, and the 2008 BBC documentary *After Rome: The Holy War and Conquest* has shown that. Consequently, I submit that the Black male as a

beast is a myth because the humanity and intellect of the Moors and diaspora Africans threaten White supremacist ideology; through White hegemonic authorship a shadow is projected as a beast because the reality of Black civilisation and humanity appears to undermine the White supremacist Ego persona.

I have argued that African-Americans have actively struggled against the myth of Blacks' inferiority and the Black male beast through a self-determined reclamation of the Black mind and body. Using the work of Black feminists such as bell hooks, Michele Wallace and Patricia Hill Collins; and Black cultural critics Cornel West, Ronald Jackson, Robert Staples and Martin Summers on Black masculinity and sexual politics, I have demonstrated how Black resistance is practised.

With each of four films I showed how it problematised the narratology and iconography of the classical narrative system through the counter-mythic strategies of each of the filmmakers contesting the historical and cinematic myth of the Black male beast. Melvin Van Peebles's *Sweetback's Song* reclaimed Black men's freedom by allowing Sweetback to escape White injustice denoted by the police force and connoted by Hollywood's history of subjugating 'blacks'. *A Soldier's Story* showed the destructive legacy of inculcated racism and how Black perspicacity triumphed over prejudice, as Captain Davenport solved the crime that his White superior officers could not. I argued that *Brother to Brother* questions the object of desire across sexual preference and it challenges heterosexist control of 'Queer' identities. I also showed that filmmakers today can overturn Hollywood's White hegemonic authorship and strive to liberate the Black male from the myth that he is a beast. I suggested that exposing the pathology of the White male and revealing the humanity of the Black male challenges racist ideas of supremacy.

In many ways all the films indicate the labyrinth of ideological and psychological myth. I have argued that no **one** myth can explain the historical ways in which the Black male beast has been constructed. In film studies, I believe Jungian analysis of the collective unconscious can be combined with social and historical studies of Black collective consciousness to create an approach that foregrounds counter-mythic filmic strategies: agit-prop used by Melvin Van Peebles, to establish political consciousness in the reading of African film and strategies used by Rodney Evans such as newsreel footage, poetry and fantasy. They transcend time and space to bring the past into the present for an audience unaware of their own Black historical achievements.

In post-classical American film, archetypes remain fixed because they symbolically exist in our popular collective consciousness where White supremacists fear enslavement by Black men today. The feared Black man arguably harbours residual anger against White Americans for their disenfranchisement and continued emasculation. We can therefore see how 'blacks' are denied power in so many post-classical films and how they are destroyed or incarcerated through Hollywood's ideological practices in employing myths about the pathology of Blacks, who are said to be intrinsically inferior and evil beasts.

Additionally, in resisting archetypes such as the morally inferior gay *Brother to Brother*, points toward central issues of liberation and empowerment. By making the gay men atypical it problematises notions of legitimate masculinities. It also points toward fears within Black collective consciousness and it opens up a space for using Jungian analysis to explore the construction of masculinities.

I posit that Othellophobia and Othellophilia allow for a study of the myth of the Black male beast in film through a narratology and iconography of history, religion and culture. The work of Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, and Jung enabled me to apply a methodology to discern that. In terms of how myth affects Black people throughout the diaspora, however, the works of Frantz Fanon, Cornel West, Patricia Hill Collins, Michele Wallace and Ronald Jackson work are central in understanding the Black cultural psyche, and Gladstone Yearwood is the central Black film theorist who offers explanations as to how the Black aesthetic is translated into new Black cinema.

My research has shown that the myth of the Black male beast is a distortion of the heroic archetype that threatened the White male ego and, as an ego defence strategy, Black characters are consciously and unconsciously made into savage beasts. Othello shattered Iago's notion of the White masculine ideal because Othello was trusted by the State and Desdemona chose Othello over other, White, men. This I read as a deep rejection of White male power in the aftermath of Islamic domination and enslavement. In the post-classical era of film I believe this subject has been reiterated, re-inscribed, and dramatised in countless ways that evidence the rejection of Black men's intellectual and social equality, as well as their journey of heroic masculine fulfilment in films today. It is the principal reason for choosing the four films that demonstrate journeys toward self-determination where the characters overcome White male dominance.

If the myth of the 'Savage Body', 'Savage Mind', 'Object of Desire' and the 'Clash of Wills' can be employed for social and historical analysis of the construction of the Black male as a beast in post-classical American cinema, I believe Othellophobia and Othellophilia contribute a viable approach to race and gender studies in film theory.

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<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00g222s#broadcasts>  
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## Filmography

*100 Rifles* (Tom Gies, 1969, USA)  
*48 Hrs* (Walter Hill, 1982, USA)  
*A Family Thing* (Richard Pearce, 1996, USA)  
*A Patch of Blue* (Guy Green, 1965, USA)  
*A Soldier's Story* (Norman Jewison, 1984, USA)  
*Across 110th Street* (Barry Shear, 1972, USA)  
*African Queen* (John Huston, 1951, USA)  
*American Gangster* (Ridley Scott, 2007, USA)  
*American Gigolo* (Paul Schrader, 1980, USA)  
*Apocalypse Now* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1979, USA)  
*Baby Boy* (John Singleton, 2001, USA)  
*Baadasss Cinema* (Isaac Julien, 2002, USA)  
*Bad Boys* (Michael Bay, 1995, USA)  
*Bamboozled* (Spike Lee, 2000, USA)  
*Beverly Hills Cops* (Martin Brest, 1984, USA)  
*Beverly Hills Cops II* (Tony Scott, 1987, USA)  
*Black and White* (James Toback, 2000, USA)  
*Black Caesar* (Larry Cohen, 1973, USA)  
*Black Knight* (Gil Junger, 2001, USA)  
*Blue Collar* (Paul Schrader, 1978, USA)  
*Blues Brothers* (John Landis, 1980, USA)  
*Body and Soul* (Robert Rossen, 1947, USA)  
*Bornie and Clyde* (Arthur Penn, 1967, USA)  
*Boomerang* (Reginald Hudlin, 1992, USA)  
*Boys in the Band* (William Friedkin, 1970),  
*Brewster's Millions* (Walter Hill, 1985, USA)  
*Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005, USA)  
*Brother to Brother* (Rodney Evans, 2004, USA)  
*Cabin in the Sky* (Vincente Minnelli, 1943, USA)  
*Carmen Jones* (Otto Preminger, 1954, USA)  
*Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz, 1942, USA)

*Classified X* (Mark Daniels, 1997, France/USA)  
*Cleopatra Jones* (Jack Starrett, 1972, USA)  
*Coffy* (Jack Hill, 1973, USA)  
*Collateral* (Michael Mann, 2004, USA)  
*Color Purple* (Steven Spielberg, 1985, USA)  
*Colors* (Denis Hopper, 1988, USA)  
*Coming Home* (Hal Ashby, 1978, USA)  
*Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2005, USA)  
*Deep Cover* (Bill Duke, 1992, USA)  
*Devil in a Blue Dress* (Carl Franklin, 1995, USA)  
*Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988, USA)  
*Die Hard: With A Vengeance* (John McTiernan, 1995, USA)  
*Driving Miss Daisy* (Bruce Beresford, 1989, USA)  
*Drum* (Steve Carver, 1976, USA)  
*Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969, USA)  
*Enemy of the State* (Tony Scott, 1998, USA)  
*Equus* (Sidney Lumet, 1977, USA)  
*Falling Down* (Joel Schumacher, 1993, USA)  
*Four Brothers* (John Singleton, 2005, USA)  
*Fox Trap* (Fred Williamson, 1986, USA)  
*Gardens of Stone* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1987, USA)  
*Get on the Bus* (Spike Lee, 1996, USA)  
*Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000, UK & USA)  
*Go Fish* (Rose Troche, 1994, USA)  
*Green Pastures* (Marc Connelly & William Keighley, 1936, USA)  
*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967, USA)  
*Hallelujah!* (King Vidor, 1929, USA)  
*Hancock* (Peter Berg, 2008, USA)  
*Hit Man* (George Armitage, 1972, USA)  
*Hollywood Shuffle* (Robert Townsend 1987, USA)  
*Honeydripper* (John Sayles, 2007, USA)  
*The Human Stain* (Robert Benton, 2005, USA)  
*Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959, USA)

*In the Heat of the Night* (Norman Jewison, 1967, USA)  
*Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich 1996, USA)  
*Island in the Sun* (Robert Rossen, 1957, USA)  
*Jackie Brown* (Quentin Tarantino, 1997, USA)  
*Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996, USA)  
*Jungle Fever* (Spike Lee, 1991, USA)  
*King Kong* (Marion Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1933, USA)  
*King of New York* (Able Ferrare, 1990, USA)  
*Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987, USA)  
*Live and Let Die* (Guy Hamilton, 1973, USA)  
*Long Kiss Goodnight* (Renny Harlin, 1995, USA)  
*Looking for Langston*, (Isaac Julien, 1989, UK)  
*Lost Boundaries* (Alfred L. Werker, 1949, USA)  
*Man With A Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929, USSR).  
*Men In Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 1997, USA)  
*Menace II Society* (Albert Hughes & Allen Hughes, 1993, USA)  
*Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1967, USA)  
*Midnight Express* (Alan Parker, 1978, USA)  
*Mogambo* (John Ford, 1953, USA)  
*Naked Gun* (David Zucker, 1988, USA)  
*Network* (Sidney Lumet, 1976, USA)  
*New Jack City* (Mario Van Peebles, 1991, USA)  
*No Way Out* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950, USA)  
*Nurse Betty* (Neil LaBute, 2000, USA)  
*O* (Tim Blake Nelson, 2001, USA)  
*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Milos Foman, 1975, USA)  
*Othello* (Geoffrey Sax, 2001, UK) TV Drama  
*Othello* (Oliver Parker, 1995, USA)  
*Othello* (Orson Welles, 1952, USA)  
*Othello* (Stuart Burge, 1965, UK)  
*Othello* (Wilson Miam, 2007, UK) Shakespeare's Globe  
*Othello* BBC (Colin Lowray, 1981, UK)  
*Othello* RSC (Colin Lowray, 1990, UK)

*Out of Africa* (Sidney Pollock, 1985, USA)  
*Paris Is Burning* (Jenny Livingston, 1990, USA)  
*Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, 1999, USA)  
*Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949, USA)  
*Planet of the Apes*, (Franklin J. Schaffner 1968, USA) Series: *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (Ted Post, 1970, USA), *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, (Don Taylor, 1971, USA), *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, (John Lee-Thompson, 1972, USA), *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*, (John Lee-Thompson, 1973, USA), Series.  
*Porgy and Bess* (Otto Preminger, 1959, USA)  
*Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994, USA)  
*Pursuit of Happiness* (Gabriele Muccino, 2006, USA)  
*Ricochet* (Russell Mulcahy, 1991, USA)  
*Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980, USA)  
*Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, 1976, USA)  
*Rue Cases Negres* (Euzhan Palcy, 1983, Martinique/France)  
*Sanders of the River* (Zoltan Korda, 1935, UK)  
*Sarkofa* (Haile Gerima, Ghana, 1993)  
*Save the Last Dance* (Thomas Carter, 2001, USA)  
*School Daze* (Spike Lee, 1988, USA)  
*Shadows* (John Cassavetes, 1959, USA)  
*Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971, USA)  
*Shaft in Africa* (John Guillemin, 1973, USA)  
*She Hate Me* (Spike Lee, 2005, USA)  
*Showboat* (James Whale, 1936, USA)  
*Showboat* (George Sidney, 1951, USA)  
*Slaughter* (Jack Starrett, 1972, USA)  
*Spartacus*, (Stanley Kubrick, 1960, USA)  
*Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945, USA)  
*Star Wars* saga (George Lucas 1977-2005, USA)  
*Story of a Three Day Pass* (Melvin Van Peebles 1967, USA)  
*Super Fly* (Gorden Parks Jr. 1992, USA)  
*Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1971, USA)  
*Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976, USA)

*The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915, USA)  
*The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978 USA)  
*The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, 1958, USA)  
*The Human Stain* (Robert Benton, 2004, USA)  
*The Hurricane* (Norman Jewison, 1999, USA)  
*The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927, USA)  
*The Jerk* (Carl Reiner, 1979, USA)  
*The Mack* (Michael Campus, 1973, USA)  
*The Messenger* (Fred Williamson, 1986, USA)  
*The Ten Commandments* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1923 & 1956)  
*The Thomas Crown Affair* (Norman Jewison, 1968, USA)  
*Thunderball* (Terence Young, 1965, USA)  
*Tongues Untied* (Marlon T. Riggs, 1989/1990, USA)  
*Traffic* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000, USA)  
*Training Day* (Antoine Fuqua, 2001, USA)  
*Troubled Man* (Ivan Dixon, 1972, USA)  
*Watermelon Man* (Melvin Van Peebles, 1970)  
*Watermelon Woman* (Cheryl Dunye, 1997, USA)  
*Willie Dynamite* (Gilbert Moses, 1974, USA)  
*Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, 1991, UK)  
*Zelig* (Woody Allan, 1983, USA)