



October 16, 2008 - Issue 295

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Sister, Can You Spare Some Class: Black Women in the Media

The Substance of Truth

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Who can argue with prophetic leader and political prisoner, Mumia Abu Jamal's [assessment](#) that "Black women are the most disfavored of all the nation's women?" Only a fool would. Black Women, historically, have had to endure the horror of living in a world that screams hatred from its four corners. Like piercing swords drilling a hole into one's soul, many Black Women are subjected daily to inhumane attacks from the left, right, front, and back angles of society. White Men, whose historical role as the original Slave master still persists, hold steadfast control of the wheels of society and therefore decide in which direction wealth, prestige and honor are steered.

With a [2004 Government report](#) documenting \$30,134 as the median income for Black households, one is certain which course the national financial vehicle has traveled. Black men, once devoted protectors of Black Women, now function as "Slave-master surrogates," in interaction with their sisters. Black Women also have a hard time with confronting the reality that "White feminists," who recruited them in the 70s for the epic "Gender War," never abhorred any desire to join hands in the fight for liberation from the shackles of White Male Supremacy. In addition to coming to grips with the rampant racism exhibited in many White feminist organizations, financially-disempowered Black Women also face the [firey scorn](#) of well-to-do Black Women who hypocritically blame them for the criminal conditions in which they exist. With such precedent, I ask again, who can argue with prophetic leader and political prisoner, Mumia Abu Jamal's [assessment](#) that "Black women are the most disfavored of all the nation's women?"

The controversies of Tawana Brawley and Anita Hill are explicit examples of the White Supremacist media's hatred of Black Women. To hide this malevolence, one or two Black news anchors are employed (disproportionately meteorologists), but underneath,

the evidence is as overt as Fox News' bias. In the world of Mass Media, the role of Black Women has traditionally been dual-natured: "The stereotypical, angry black bitch" or "the regurgitating, self-hating, conservative mouth piece" – *a la* Amy Holmes & Tara Setmayer. Any other attribute is vetoed or outlawed. Fox News reporter, Cal Thomas, [bore witness](#) – though unknowingly – to this reality earlier this year. Thomas was quick to point out that Black Women of sophistication are a rare commodity on Television screens because of the White male supremacy culture that revels in the demonization and objectification of Black Women. Cal Thomas, a man of low intelligence, made a blunder, however, in confusing passion for anger:

"Look at the image of African American Women who are on television. Politically, you have Maxine Waters of California, liberal Democrat. She's always angry every time she gets on television. Cynthia McKinney, the former Congresswoman from Georgia, was another angry black woman. And who are the black women you see on the local news at night in cities all over the country. They're usually angry about something. They've had a son who has been shot in a drive-by shooting. They are angry at Bush. So you don't really have a profile of non-angry black women."

With corporate America's grip on Commercial Hip-Hop Culture tightening by the hour, the commodification of Black female bodies takes on a whole new context. It is no coincidence that Queen Latifah, who once embodied the symbolism of a Black goddess, is today, nothing but a sad spectacle to behold. The once-upon-a-time pro-Black militant-minded and feminist **Queen** Latifah has become a washed up Hollywood product, with an appetite for destruction. If Viacom and other big-name corporations within the Hip-Hop beltway were to exist unimpeded, Trina, Lil' Kim and Remy Ma would represent the holy trinity of female artistry in Hip-Hop. But such inference would be problematic because, for every Trina, there once was a Nefertiti; for every Lil' Kim, there once was a Moni Love; and for every Remy Ma, there once was a Lauryn Hill. Unfortunately, a self-respecting, knowledgeable and highly-educated female artist like Lauryn Hill is deemed radioactive in an industry built around the exploitation of diffident young Black Women.

Many younger Blacks are familiar with "Tip Drill," and the horror of Hip-Hop music videos. In this particular video, the rapper Nelly is featured swiping a credit card down the gluteus maximus of a Video Vixen. As expected, this despicable act – deemed entertainment – was beyond the pale for certain Black female activists who perceived it as the last straw in their accommodation of misogyny in Hip-Hop. In 2004, Nelly was scheduled to visit the Black female College, Spelman, for a bone marrow drive. Unbeknownst to Nelly, a few Spelman students didn't quite consider his music to be that "entertaining," and had drafted a plan to see how much of a man he truly was. "The Spelman sisters," as they've come to be known, challenged Nelly to a forum to address the issue of Black female Exploitation in Hip-Hop videos – particularly with regard to his video, "Tip Drill." As one might imagine, Nelly swiftly turned down the offer, appearing to be more concerned with his image than the dire issue of bone-marrow transplants. The way the Spelman sisters figured, a bone-marrow drive is equally as essential as a healthy soul. The Spelman sisters sought to question the conscience and motive of a man who would openly denigrate the legacy of Black Women, but claim concern to the sector of their organism that guarantees blood circulation – hence, life.

The morally decrepit performance of artists like Nelly has granted ample leverage to White-controlled media channels such as Vh1 to promote shows that defile the integrity of Black Women. Vh1, a subsidiary of Viacom, has done more damage to the self-worth and decency of Black Women than any other channel in recent history. Vh1 has skillfully structured its programming in such a way that an untrained eye watching it might be misled into believing that Black Women are naturally promiscuous and adulterous. Some might even fall victim to the lie that the availability of young Black Women on Vh1 reality shows is ample proof of culpability or willingness, but such inference would suggest that if those same Black Women were paid the exact share of incentives to appear on a morally upright and spiritually nurturing show, they would decline instantaneously. By this measure, it's presumably evident that White male executives of big media are easily satisfied with a Black female constituency whose preoccupation with self-deprecation runs afoul of the legacies of Fannie Lou Hamer, Harriet Tubman, Barbara Jordan, Rosa Parks, and Callie House.

It is no surprise that the same media which revels in the destruction of Black female identity seeks to fulfill the same with today's most important Black female: Michelle Obama. More disturbing is the reality that Michelle, like prominent Black public figures before her, lacks the confidence – there's certainly the [willingness](#) – to, quite simply, *be herself* and refuse the Obama camp's incessant attempts at recreating her into a "submissive, all-American first lady." One thing is for certain, however: Black folks of consciousness have their work cut out for them. For *Change* is not an empty rhetorical stunt, but rather a fortified, systematic dismantling of a historical structure – especially one which has oppressed, repressed, depressed and suppressed the hopes of a mighty race.

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