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*Branding the American Jezebel:
The Evolution of a Consumer Character*

ABSTRACT: *Historically, when white supremacists wanted to validate racial subjugation, they employed theories of natural selection, biblical references, and beastly promiscuity to portray black women with low IQs, thwarted by their inability to control their sexual desires. This essay examines the evolution of the “Jezebel” character from her emergence in anecdotes prior to the American Civil War to the imagery that captured consumers in post-World War II society. The analysis of this inaccurate, yet prevailing, stereotype demonstrates the archaic, xenophobic influences that continue to dominate contemporary depictions of black femininity.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; U.S.; race; stereotypes; femininity; white supremacy; black fictional characters; Bible; Jezebel; film*

Introduction

To most movie enthusiasts, Quentin Tarantino’s Golden-Globe and Academy-Award-winning film *Django Unchained* (2012) depicts an unlikely pair of bounty hunters (Django and Dr. King Schultz) and their attempt to coerce an inhumane plantation owner (Calvin J. Candie) into selling them a “special,” female slave. The film’s combination of the Old West and the Antebellum South evokes several racial stereotypes. In one scene, the audience witnesses the provocative attires and sensual behaviors of two African American women. When Django and Dr. Schultz meet Candie at his gentlemen’s club, a black girl in a hiked-up maid’s skirt escorts them inside. Once she has taken Dr. Schultz to his seat, she picks up a handful of multi-colored candy balls from a side table, and while the men exchange introductions, she slowly slips the sweets into her mouth, maintaining eye contact with the men the entire time. The camera then skips to Django who is having a drink at the bar. On the farthest stool, a finely dressed black lady eyes him intently. She then picks up a glass of champagne and a bottle and walks over to a spacious love seat, swinging her hips along the way, while the man tries to ignore her seductive moves by sipping on his sweet tea and bourbon.¹ On the opposite side of the room, Candie and his white associates cheer on a “Mandingo” fight.² The lady disregards the screaming and focuses her attention on the black stranger. When Candie questions Django about his “Mandingo” knowledge, his associates are astonished that he, a white man, would consult a black man, thereby implying

¹ *Django Unchained*, directed by Quentin Tarantino (New York: The Weinstein Company, 2012), DVD.

² The term “Mandingo” has a systematically oppressive performance history. Rather than recognizing individuals by their names, this label consumed their identity. During staged “Mandingo” fights, slaves killed their opponents for their masters’ satisfactions. The exploitation of the Black body in live entertainment is explored further in Taylor Spratt, “The Operation of Names: Historical Memory, Social Imagination, and the Phenomena of Blackness in Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen*,” *WIG: The Martin Worman Review of Performance Research at Antioch College* 1 (2016), [online](#), accessed June 18, 2022.

that the latter might be versed in the matter. Django's snarky comment impresses the sultry lady, suggesting that his domineering personality is attractive to the submissive. After Candie dismisses the maid and the bartender, he turns toward the black lady, whom he addresses as Sheba, and commands her to remain in the room. Sheba observes the order but states that she had planned on staying anyway, with or without his consent. By teasing Candie's authority, Sheba perks his interest with a bit of defiance in addition to their exchange's sexual undertones. For the sex-crazed white man, she deliberately transforms herself into a toy, one used for pleasure or pain at his disposal, and thus takes charge of the game.³

Since *Django Unchained* features a number of notable actors using derogatory language, it immediately received severe backlash. However, Hollywood critics only targeted the racialized ethos insofar as it pertained to masculinity. Moon Charania, a film analyst, highlighted the black-on-black violence, black passivity, and white supremacy portrayed by the predominantly white male cast. Rather than endorsing racial equality, Charania argued, the movie is an exhibition of the severity of slavery without deconstructing slavery's discrimination from its theoretical roots; it appears to be a white satirist's ill-willed attempt at "fictional vindication," one xenophobic remark away from prejudicial propaganda.⁴

In his monograph, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film* (1973), Donald Bogle analyzes classic black movie characters, yet he does not consider the iconography of the "Jezebel."⁵ The same oversight is evident in more recent studies on film, such as *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* and *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film*.⁶ These studies of white-created stereotypes fail to deconstruct the Jezebel, let alone mention her by name. Instead, they allude to her as a transitional character, used to evoke sexual undertones. The Jezebel's absence in scholarly analyses does not stem from a lack of evidence; rather, it derives from the authors' choice of sources and their focus on attacks against black intelligence, not sexuality. Thus, scholars impede their own objective of detecting inaccurate caricatures, thereby allowing the latter to continue to seep into American culture.

Due to the prominence of the "sambo," "pickaninny," "zip coon," and "Uncle Tom" characters, it seems easier to identify attacks on black masculinity. By contrast, the "Mammy" character is considered to serve as comic relief. In 1914, a blackface version of Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, titled *Coon Town Suffragettes*, depicted the Mammy in her physical form for the first time; it featured a group of

³ *Django Unchained*, directed by Tarantino.

⁴ Moon Charania, "Django Unchained: Voyeurism Unleashed," *Contexts* 12, no. 3 (August 2013): 58-60, here 59-60.

⁵ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Black in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 2009; first published 1973).

⁶ Anna Everett, *Returning the Gaze: A Genealogy of Black Film Criticism, 1909-1949* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

black washerwomen who rallied to keep their lethargic husbands in bed and away from places of ill repute. Besides this curmudgeon attitude, directors showcased the Mammy as a domineering woman. By the 1930s, the ill-tempered and in-charge Mammies routinely received push-back from leading female characters, perhaps most famously in *Gone with the Wind* (1939); at the same time, these “handkerchief heads” or “Aunt Jemimas” embodied religious virtue through their attentive nature toward their white bosses. Their depictions drew attention to social hierarchies, not the free-spirited nature of the Jezebel whose character appeared comparatively stagnant. While the Mammy was humanized for her labor, the Jezebel remained trapped in the confines of her imposed sexuality.⁷

This essay attempts to fill a void in the existing literature that has primarily focused on the Mammy. The latter’s overstudied stereotype seeks to counteract misogyny but thereby indirectly validates the Jezebel. A fixture in the homes of white folks, the Mammy refutes the debauchery of the Jezebel, thus creating a rift within the black female identity. Thus, this essay intends to recast the African American woman as the only rightful proprietress of her own sexuality.

While critics did not realize, or at least not acknowledge, the misrepresentation of African American women in *Django Unchained*, it is more or less evident throughout the film. Disguised by alcohol and sex, such typecasts exist as by-products of a racially complex history. While white females gradually managed to overcome, or at least reduce, promiscuous typecasting, the emergence of black women into questionable types of femininity predates the advent of film. Society’s ignorance toward prevailing racial stereotypes allowed black sexuality to be manipulated into inaccurate molds. Tarantino employed the Jezebel character in particular because she enhances the film’s machismo-centric theme. The Jezebel is a prominent, yet understudied, stereotype of black females as licentious and lustful objects who warrant sexual conquering, and they possess an innate, sexual power that cannot be replicated by their white counterparts.

The absence of meaningful scholarly discussion on the iconic renditions of the Jezebel proves that this character, through years of recreation, has ultimately been normalized by being embedded into American culture. This forces black women to falsely assume an association with the behavior of the Jezebel. Preconceived notions about African American women morphed from thoughts on paper to a physical persona around a hundred years ago, namely, with the start of screen entertainment. Due to the peculiarities of its era of formation, the typecast remains an incorrect, yet thriving, version of black femininity, and it influences perceptions of black masculinity as well. As *Django Unchained* illustrates, the stereotype encompasses all of black identity as susceptible to the supervision of white, cultural brokers. Those who vie for cultural domination employ stereotypes as power in group conflicts or as a means to justify the status quo. They become mechanisms for maintaining control over the people whom they strip of power.

⁷ Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks*, 9.

Due to their extensive reach over society, stereotypes serve as ideal structures to distribute “raw material for daily conversations.”⁸

Rhonda Walker claims that cartoons are the most overlooked socio-political tool in the media. They use humor as an “equalizer” that allows everyone to formulate a public opinion. Since cartoon stereotypes are operated by the dominant party as cultural weapons under the protection of comedy, the attacked minority cannot combat or resist them. Thus, the most overtly powerful version does not appear in playacting but, rather, in sketches, which eliminates the constrained human factor and permits the guiltless harassment of blackness. Due to the mass production of cartoons in the 1940s and 1950s, the Jezebel character, as a caricature, became fully embedded into American culture with a “perfected” physical adaptation that linked black women with hyper-sexuality.⁹

The Jezebel woman has been around since biblical writers intertwined stances for slavery and against feminism. She resurfaced after the Civil War in a series of theoretical texts on racial inferiority, again including references to gender. At the dawn of the twentieth century, directors transferred bigoted descriptions from the written word into public entertainment. These repeated offenses increased the Jezebel’s popularity, naturally attaching themselves to the black female identity. This essay incorporates a historiographical approach to the intersectionality of racism and sexism that upholds the traditional state of race-and-gender relations in the media. In *Social Crisis and Social Demoralization* (2005), Ronald Kuykendall explains that examining people’s social status in relation to their complex identities reveals how an artificial hierarchy places people not according to their actions but, rather, according to the actions of their identity predecessors. Those in charge of granting social status wield their authority through years of manipulating the image of other people’s interactions. Thus, an identity is only accurate to the degree that the dominating party wants it to be perceived. When white supremacists compiled their racist propaganda, they only included the characteristics that upheld previous ethnic notions about black women.¹⁰

Since the individuals in question are both black and female, they suffer from racist and sexist attacks on their identity. Feminist and antiracist scholars often operate along a “single-axis framework” that ignores the other dimensions of identity experiences, meaning that they cannot find solace in the social movements of the respective other side. In opposition to this single-mindedness, Kimberlé Crenshaw, a leading voice in the field of critical race theory, has coined the term “intersectionality” which highlights the compound marginalization of subjects –

⁸ Donald R. Brown, Charles M. Firestone, and Ellen Propper Mickiewicz, *Television/Radio News and Minorities* (Queenstown: The Aspen Institute, 1994), 8.

⁹ Rhonda Walker, “Political Cartoons: Now You See Them!” *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 26, no. 1 (2003): 16-21, here 16.

¹⁰ Ronald A. Kuykendall, *Social Crisis and Social Demoralization: The Dynamics of Status in American Race Relations* (Portland: Arissa Media Group, LLC, 2005), 10.

a central theme in the refutation of legal arguments that favor color-blindness. Intersectionality halts the traditional approach of dividing race and gender into single-faceted constructs that neglect the interconnectedness of the African American woman's experience and obscure her unique perspective in the narrative by stories of black men and white women. Intersectionality merges the two histories of intolerance into a new, individualized story.¹¹

According to Patricia Hill Collins, the systems and intensities through which oppression is administered affect people's perception of their identities and respective intersectionality. Collins refers to this as the "matrix of domination" which comprises an array of events, sequences, and patterns. Thus, intersectionality does not constitute a single lens of persecution. Discrimination comes from multiple angles, and it is imperative to acknowledge the degrees to which gender and race have been employed as means of subjugation.¹²

The Jezebel exists as a combination of perpetuated misconceptions concerning blackness and womanhood, and it controls white society's perception of the black female identity. It is near impossible for black women to escape their prescribed character that the media continue to endorse. To track the progression of this stereotype, scholars must cover material that extends from the sentiments behind anti-abolitionist papers to contemporary portrayals of blacks in the media. While the stereotype's persistence does not denote legitimacy, it suggests a social acceptance of encoded discrimination. This essay first considers the origins of the Jezebel story. It subsequently turns to the creation of an Americanized Jezebel, which supported the racialized attitudes of the transition from slavery to Jim Crow. It examines reviews of white actresses and their failed attempts to portray African Americans and, in its last section, analyzes the consumerist exploitation of the Jezebel in 1940s and 1950s cartoons. The stereotype was shrouded during the Civil Rights era, only to be reclaimed by the mass media in 1970s blaxploitation.¹³

Today, some social conservatives blame hyper-sexualized black women for all the ills of the world. In a recent *YouTube* episode, a Mississippi preacher named Shane Vaughn commented on Oprah Winfrey's 2021 interview with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex in the wake of their split from the British royal family. Meghan

¹¹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140, no. 1 (1989): 139-167, here 139; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margin: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299, here 1244.

¹² Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2002; first published 1990), 18.

¹³ Josiah Howard, *Blaxploitation Cinema: The Essential Reference Guide* (Godalming: FAB, 2008), offers an in-depth chronology and analysis of the portrayal of African Americans in feature films. In addition to motion pictures, Howard assesses the posters and advertisements that promoted erotic and eccentric images. Yvonne D. Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), complements this article's Black feminist focus.

Markle, the biracial wife of Prince Harry, had indicated in the interview that representatives of the monarchy had denied her son Archie a title because he jeopardized the white bloodline as the royal family's first baby of color. In addition, the events of the past several years had led Markle into a deep depression in which she even contemplated suicide. In his reaction, Vaughn criticized Prince Harry, "pray[ing] every night that God would...give [him] the backbone of a man [...] that [he] would take control of [his] house and quit letting Jezebel lead [him] away from [his] family." Although the essence of the Jezebel survives in popular culture, Vaughn's reference points to classical arguments of slavery and eugenics. According to Vaughn, Markle, a racially confused woman, had corrupted the cowardly Prince Harry like the wives and concubines who had debased King Solomon in the Bible;¹⁴ the white crown reigns as a sign of racial superiority, and a suicidal deviant was compromising an ancient color line.¹⁵

While some whites wield the Jezebel in their attacks against black women, some black men employ the same type of messaging, especially in the entertainment industry. Kanye West, an award-winning hip-hop artist, goes beyond generalizations and objectifies Serena Williams, one of the world's top tennis players, who happens to be black. In "Gold Digger," West states, "my psychic told me she'll have an ass like Serena."¹⁶ This suggests that the respective discriminatory imagery is pervasive in black-and-black relations as well. Guillermo Rebollo-Gil has argued that even hip-hop, supposedly a product of black culture, is employed as another stigmatic tool by white American critics. This means that misogyny is swept up into a "social vacuum where the larger U.S. racial and social structure [has] [...] no bearing on the production and distribution of the musical product."¹⁷ Kanye and other black male artists empower themselves through the patriarchal brotherhood to exploit African American women's sexuality, ultimately attacking the reputation of specific individuals directly.

Since African American women are viewed as threats to two social dynamics, this essay concentrates on a specific stereotype that excludes them from feminist and antiracist movements. Although she is nameless in contemporary conversations, the Jezebel serves as a vehicle by which white racism attempts to conceal the truth by means of overt sexuality. When the Jezebel is used as a symbol of a collective identity, the people who employ the stereotype use a repressive device that derives from the post-slavery sentiment of protecting the white race. Thus, the Jezebel survives, awaiting redemption.

¹⁴ The story of King Solomon and his wives and concubines can be found in 1 Kings 11: 1-13.

¹⁵ RWW News, "Shane Vaughn Attacks Meghan Markle as a 'Jezebel' and a 'Narcissist'," *Right Wing Watch*, March 9, 2021, *YouTube*, [online](#), accessed June 18, 2022.

¹⁶ Kanye West, "Gold Digger," track 4 on *Late Registration* (Universal Music Group Recordings Incorporation, 2005), *Spotify*.

¹⁷ Guillermo Rebollo-Gil, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music: Misogyny, Violence and the Negotiation of (White-Owned) Space," *Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 1 (2012): 118-132, here 119.

I. The Story of Jezebel

The Jezebel's story begins in the Old Testament of the Bible. According to the Books of Kings, she was a Phoenician princess from Tyre, the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal, and married to King Ahab, the ruler of Israel. Since she was a non-Jew and her people worshipped different deities, the Israelites deemed Ahab's union with Jezebel an exemplification of sin.

1 Kings 16:31: And as if it had been a trifling thing for him to walk in the sins of Yarov'am [Jeroboam] ben Nebat, Ahav [Ahab] took as his woman Izevel [Jezebel] bat Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and went and served Ba'al, and worshiped him.

According to Wilda C. Gafney, a specialist in womanist biblical interpretations, the name "Izevel" shares a similar linguistic structure with the word Jezebel; it may derive from the phrase "Ba'al Exalts," perhaps subsequently transformed by the writer into an insult, meaning "Lacking Nobility" or "Fecal Matter."¹⁸ Its negative connotation continues in the Old and New Testament:

2 Kings 9:22: When Jehoram [Joram] saw Yehu [Jehu] he asked, "Have you come in peace, Jehu?" "How can there be peace," Yehu replied, "as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Izevel abound?"

Revelation 2:20: Nevertheless, I have a complaint to make: you tolerate the woman Izevel who claims to be a prophetess, and by her teaching she is luring my servants away to commit the adultery of eating food which has been sacrificed to idols.

In the first excerpt from 2 Kings, the term "witchcraft" purportedly refers to sexual seduction and prostitution, but in Revelation 2, the slur attacks Jezebel's spirituality and classifies her as a heretic. Since she has agency in the canon, biblical writers could not omit her from their texts, but they did employ language condemning her sexuality and idolatry. Based on her foreign status and practices, Jezebel was portrayed as someone who was threatening the Israelites' religion and culture through sex and paganism. Perhaps because her religion embraced the human body, biblical writers included the gruesome details of her death. According to 2 Kings 9:30-37, Queen Jezebel, in anticipation of her execution, put on makeup and fixed her hair. When she taunted Yehu from an upstairs window, he challenged those around her to throw her down, which they did. When Yehu later commanded her burial, her body had been devoured by dogs, thus fulfilling a prophecy of Elijah about ending the worship of Ba'al and avenging Jezebel's killing of the prophets of Israel's god. All that remained of Jezebel's body were her skull, hands, and feet, while the rest was "like excrement on the ground" (2 Kings 9:37). The text is a warning to those who claim autonomy that the physical structure they employ in their exercise of power will perish into oblivion. In particular, it is a warning to females, especially "foreign" females, who try to use their sex to operate outside traditional patriarchal hierarchies of civilization.

¹⁸ Wilda C. Gafney, *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 240.

North American authors latched on to the corruption of the Jezebel and used it to reinforce sexism and racism.¹⁹ Even though biblical characters are not of white descent, white supremacists employed biblical references to establish a racial hierarchy with lighter skin tones at the top. They claimed that God had instituted racial division during Creation and, naturally, appointed whites – those with the fairest complexions – as the masters over humanity. In 1900, Charles R. Carroll, a self-proclaimed scientific race theorist, published his thoughts on the evolutionary process. He rationalized social inequity by pointing to a culprit who exemplified lowliness: the black woman. According to Carroll, the Adamic family is of pure lineage, and God condemns hybridization; thus, the offspring of parents who belong to different races will live as flesh of “beasts.” Carroll exempts black men from blame: since it is the black woman who physically carries a baby to term, she is the one who renews the cycle of oppression. Carroll also suggests that, if a white woman gives birth to a dark-skinned child, there must have been non-consenting circumstances at conception, thus nullifying a white woman’s contribution to hybridization and the cycle of oppression. According to Carroll, the black woman bears the entire weight of racial damnation for all eternity.²⁰

Carroll critiques “beasts” and their incomplete qualities that trickle down the line: “The soul creation in its imperfect and dependent state in the germ of the [black] man, finds no corresponding side or part in the negress.”²¹ Thus, while a black male possesses an incomplete soul, a black female does not have one at all. Carroll argues that, in order to obtain the three aspects of human creation, namely, matter, mind, and soul, both parents must carry these attributes, meaning that these attributes cannot be made. Due to a black woman’s “animalistic” nature, the soul lives outside of her reach. Carroll suggests that the black woman understands this ethical dilemma, yet she continues to bring humanly deficient babies into an unwelcoming world. She is a shame to motherhood, the role normally entrusted to women to protect children; thus, while women involuntarily assume the responsibilities of safeguarding morality, these standards punish black women due to the confines of their color. Society assigns a specific task to women, but it declares that women from unequal (i.e., non-white) races live outside the sphere of “womanhood” and its entitlements. They have no opportunity for redemption. Based on Carroll’s pseudo-science, since a black woman does not fit the criteria of white womanhood, she cannot be considered a woman at all, even if she abides by the same gender roles; she is only identified by her blackness. These two

¹⁹ Gafney, *Womanist Midrash*, 246; Tamura A. Lomax, *Jezebel Unhinged: Loosing the Black Female Body in Religion and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 42-43.

²⁰ Charles R. Carroll, *The Negro a Beast or In the Image of God [...]* (St. Louis, MO: American Book and Bible House, 1900), 70-71. The full title of Carroll’s book is too long (over 90 words) and too offensive to be reproduced here.

²¹ Carroll, *Negro a Beast*, 60.

characteristics—race and gender—isolate the black female, allowing white supremacists to strike at her sexuality as the source of her unique, beastly nature.²²

Virginia historian Philip Alexander Bruce (1856-1933) claimed that slavery supported the responsibility of African American women to serve as leaders of morality: “As long as the negress was a slave, there was no danger of her presuming upon an immoral intimacy—a fact well known to her white paramour for his encouragement.”²³ Bruce argued that servitude prevented African American women’s sexually provocative behavior from overcoming their familial obligations. Thus, according to Bruce, the white institution of slavery served as a compulsory check over black femininity. Bruce believed that black women who succumbed to their instincts would not convey chastity to their daughters. He blamed sexually liberated black women for ruining the reputation of their peers. Bruce considered former slave masters to be authorities on black sexuality since they had witnessed its effects following abolition.²⁴

In *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (2004), Patricia Hill Collins asserts that such assumptions about sexuality—like the ones just outlined—were not enough to cement them into American culture. Instead, the behavior of black men became an example of the effects of black women’s eroticism. Due to their allegedly sex-crazed bodies, black females could never be sexually satisfied, so their counterparts had to result to raw force to bring about fulfillment. This implies, then, that men could not rape black women because the latter essentially “asked for it” due to their carnal need for ravishment. Collins shows that the proliferation of rape rests on stereotypical characters, like the Jezebel, who appear as lascivious. Rape allowed white men in particular to annex black women’s bodies and usurp their agency for their personal advantage.²⁵

While white men could use these assumptions to try to rationalize their rape of black women, the same assumptions also served as a basis to rationalize the alleged sexual inclinations of black men. It was argued that, once the latter had escaped from the plantations, they sought out white women for their eloquence and gentleness. While black men were captivated by white women’s tenderness, they had become dull to passion; they sexually violated their female counterparts because they did not know any other methods of pleasure. After the Civil War, large numbers of Southerners used such racist theories to insist that black men’s violent tendencies warranted the reinforcement of racial tyranny through lynching and other types of public punishment. As supposed keepers of morality, black

²² Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 31, 49.

²³ Philip Alexander Bruce “Evolution of the Negro Problem,” *The Sewanee Review* 19, no. 4 (1911): 385-399, here 389.

²⁴ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 31.

²⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (London: Routledge, 2005; first published 2004), 56, 66.

women were thus blamed for any deviant sexual conduct by members of their own ethnicity, causing some black men to resent them as well.²⁶

Just as America's caste system periodically redesigns itself, the Jezebel stereotype undergoes revisions as well; however, it always seems to retain the characteristics used by white supremacists during the Reconstruction era to rationalize their beliefs concerning black inferiority. While slavery was abolished in 1865, its remnants survive in subliminal forms, including the Jezebel stereotype. Even in contemporary film, as we have seen, the Jezebel appears as overly dramatic and aggressive, using sex for pleasure, drugs, or money. Thus, the media retain the pre-manufactured sexuality of early racist sympathizers like Carroll and Bruce, while simply modernizing the stereotype with popular contemporary elements; according to cultural critics, this modernized version translates to "gold diggers" or "skeezers." Sexuality is being systematically exploited via race, socio-economics, ethnicity, religion, and gender, which increasingly complicates the understanding of intersectionality. Thus, marginalized groups become linked to a long-lasting, historical narrative: the Jezebel connects to slavery like "rape to patriarchy [and] child prostitution to contemporary global sex work."²⁷ In the past, black females were accused of threatening the integral unit of the nation—the family. Now, they are being accused of undermining morality on a grand scale, so society dehumanizes them by means of a nameless and shameless caricature.²⁸

II. The Portrayal of Jezebel

Travis L. Dixon, a media studies scholar, claims that the human mind prefers to approach the media in a heuristic manner because it facilitates numerous, cognitive associations with regard to various social entities without the stress of personally engaging with someone and formulating an opinion.²⁹ Yet reliance on this process can lead to stereotypical assumptions strengthened by repetition. Typically, it reinforces a white narrative that portrays people of color negatively, resulting in stereotypes being absorbed by themselves. White cultural brokers build typecasts with minimal black resistance, allowing them to be sold on the open market without racial authentication. However, such depictions only display a distorted image rather than the experiences that inspire a person's identity.

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, light-skinned performers doused themselves in thick coats of dark paint to mimic African Americans. These entertainers then acted antagonistic or dull-witted, but the Jezebel could partake in both traits. White actresses portrayed her as foolishly helpless; however, her alter ego turned

²⁶ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 281-282.

²⁷ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 11.

²⁸ Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 127-128.

²⁹ Travis L. Dixon, "Media Stereotypes: Content, Effects, and Theory," in *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research*, ed. Mary Beth Oliver, Arthur A. Raney, and Jennings Bryant (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243-257.

her into a scornful sex addict. They ultimately failed to capture the demeanor of their black characters because they were detached from their experiences and identity, thus creating a major problem on the sets of motion pictures.³⁰

In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe had written a piece of anti-slavery fiction titled *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Published a few years before the Civil War, the novel exposed the continuing plight of African Americans subjected to slavery and contributed significantly to the abolitionist movement. Yet theatre and movie directors soon contrived derivative versions that would have aggravated Stowe. In 1901, an article in the *New York Tribune Illustrated Supplement* critiqued a live production of the tale. While it does not comment on the makeup, it praises Topsy's sexuality, stating that "[she] is a wonderfully and delightfully original conception [...] endowed with the additional charm of juvenility and sex."³¹ Thus, the article seems to suggest that Stowe had created a character with the enhanced allure of the Jezebel, completely ignoring the countless Jezebel narratives that had preceded Stowe's work. The article then proceeds to retract its initial statement, recognizing that the character is not a product of literary genius, and, instead, attacks Stowe's "plagiarized" composition:

There may be no good reason for crediting Mrs. Stowe with this conception: the minstrel end man may never have entered into her thoughts, nor Topsy into those of the original end man; Mrs. Stowe may have had a very different and much more serious idea in her creation; but all these things are as ancient history to the contemporary New-York schoolgirl, who accepts Topsy as pretty good ragtime fun.³²

The article's author then realizes that Stowe's character appears as a collective reference to all black females because she carries the sexually deviant traits that white writers like Carroll and Bruce were trying to corroborate via the Bible or science. This is an early instance where the Jezebel is not just a character but, rather, the true essence of black femininity. These subjective traits followed African American women into mainstream media and opened the door for amplified racial stereotyping. However, the hard part would prove to be the casting of a white actress to break the limitations of the color line in acting.

Mary Alden (1883-1946), a Broadway star trying to make it in Hollywood, achieved stardom through her role in the controversial film *Birth of a Nation*. Directed by D. W. Griffith, this silent movie contains several assaults on gender and race. In one scene, a mix-race maid (played by Alden) swoons over House Representative Austin Stoneman who captures her heart through his fight for abolition. She tears her clothing in a suggestive manner, but he ignores her seductive attempts, pities the "tragic mulatto," and offers her comfort.³³ The

³⁰ Dixon, "Media Stereotypes," 248.

³¹ "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *New-York Tribune Illustrated Supplement*, March 17, 1901.

³² "Uncle Tom's Cabin," *New-York Tribune Illustrated Supplement*.

³³ The "tragic mulatto" is another stereotypical figure of American fiction that appeared around 1830. This stereotype suggests that, due to her mixed-skin tone, the mulatto cannot find

audience watches as the emotionally disturbed maid pursues Stoneman as a solution to the racialized disparity. This part of Griffith's story references the relationship between real-life House Representative Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868) and his housekeeper Lydia Hamilton Smith (1813-1884). Scholars believe that Stevens, an opponent of slavery, enabled Smith to become a businesswoman by accepting her as his common-law wife. In the film, Stoneman's interaction with the maid suggests that Stevens surrendered to Smith's sexual allure. *Birth of a Nation* heavily influenced the use of illicit relationships to portray exaggerated stereotypes in the film industry. Since President Woodrow Wilson screened the film at the White House, it served as America's cultural guide to race relations.³⁴

Casting a multiracial mulatto as the Jezebel proved to be racially imperative. While the Mammy is depicted as overweight and very dark-skinned, the Jezebel appears slim and lighter-skinned by comparison. Psychologist Carolyn M. West acknowledges that body-image issues affect individuals from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, but for black women, beauty is intensified by historically white standards.³⁵ While the size of the Mammy excuses food as a coping mechanism for financial and familial stress, a lighter-complexioned lady appears to retain whiter characteristics that uplift her physical attractiveness. The Jezebel is more appealing to society and exhibits a stronger personality. Film scholar Jared Sexton suggests a supplementary theory regarding the stereotype's mixed color. In *Amalgamation Schemes*, he claims that the mulatto evokes a "distorted desire [within the white man] to transgress the color line."³⁶ Simply put, the lighter-skinned woman seduces the weak white man, thereby vindicating the inevitable sexual encounter.³⁷

From the perspective of white racism, these sexually explicit and racially blended women instigate white genocide; if a black woman conceives a child with a white man, the mixed offspring is racially impure; and once blackness infiltrates whiteness, a portion of it survives for eternity, no matter the number of times reproduction tries to bleach away the contamination. While sterility might be

solace in either race, which makes her the victim of a binary society, and she is depicted as depressed, sometimes even suicidal. The Jezebel and the "tragic mulatto" share similar physical traits as well as lascivious attitudes. It would be misleading, though, to conceptualize all mixed-race women under the umbrella of the "tragic mulatto." The Jezebel has emerged as the stereotype's predominant rendition. For the social legacy of this stereotype, see Emily Clark, "The Tragic Mulatto and Passing," in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Southern Gothic*, ed. Susan Castillo Street and Charles K. Crow (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 259-270.

³⁴ *The Birth of a Nation*, directed by David Wark Griffith (New York: Epoch Producing Corporation, 1915), *YouTube*.

³⁵ Carolyn M. West, "Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel: Historical Images of Black Women and Their Implications for Psychotherapy," *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 32, no. 3 (1995): 458-466.

³⁶ Jared Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 208.

³⁷ West, "Mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel," 459-460.

considered the greatest obstacle to the perpetuation of the white race, the negativity surrounding the Jezebel deems the disassembly of white civilization by means of the black female body a far greater offense. The Jezebel endures the never-ending identity crisis caused by the separation of race and gender, thereby cultivating an unhinged character who cannot achieve legitimacy in any aspect of her life. While these are all theories about the emergence of the light-skinned Jezebel, a simple argument suggests that blackface makeup could not obscure whiteness; thus, the mulatto character solved the issue of flawed complexions.³⁸

Catherine M. Cole and Tracy C. Davis have suggested that the makeup, engineered from charred corks and grease traps, was only the beginning of botched attempts to conceal whiteness. In their work, Cole and Davis readdress the historiography, analyze international reinventions, and challenge uncorroborated connections between minstrelsy and racism in America; they claim that the combination of the minstrel actors' gestures, dialects, and unrhythmic movements clearly labeled them as insensitive imposters. Although Mary Alden's celebrity status possibly protected her from harsh critiques, up-and-coming actresses who dabbled in blackface in a desultory bid to enter the film industry were spotted and denounced by journalists. Thus, this antiquated method of performing could lead to the abrupt and inopportune conclusion of promising acting careers. Ethel Barrymore Colt (1912-1977), the daughter of the "First Lady of American Theatre," experienced this demise first-hand. While she shared her mother's name, she would struggle to find success in the family business because she could not overcome her experiment with blackface.³⁹

When Ethel Barrymore (senior) acquired the dramatic rights to Julia Peterkin's Pulitzer-Prize-winning work, *Scarlet Sister Mary*, in January 1929, Ethel Barrymore Colt saw a chance to emerge from her mother's shadow. Similar to Stowe, Peterkin had abandoned a white mindset to contribute to literature without the prevailing stereotypes. Set in South Carolina, Peterkin's adaptation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* concerns the existential dilemma of the title character Mary who contemplates two opposing lifestyles: vice and virtue. Mary's complex character appealed to the talented young Barrymore, so she agreed to take the stage in the family's first attempt at blackface. Ultimately, her hopes backfired, and her famous name could not save her from relentless backlash.⁴⁰

Before Broadway, the show toured the Great Lakes region with an opening night in Columbus, Ohio. While the eighteen-year-old Barrymore celebrated her

³⁸ Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*, 208.

³⁹ Catherine M. Cole and Tracy C. Davis, "Routes of Blackface," *The Drama Review* 57, no. 2 (2013): 7-12, here 8.

⁴⁰ Carol Stein Hoffman, *The Barrymores: Hollywood's First Family* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), presents exclusive photographs and portraits from the family's personal collection. The author documents the Barrymores' history from Elizabethan England to the early days of Hollywood, showcasing the accomplishments of six generations that collectively fashioned the Barrymores as American media icons.

debut, the critics compiled a list of theatrical disasters. News of a Barrymore failure rapidly spread across the country. On October 11, 1930, the *Pittsburgh Courier* published an article with the headline, “Columbus Critics View Miss Barrymore’s ‘Scarlet Sister Mary’ With Alarm,” relating that, according to H. E. Cherrington of the *Columbus Dispatch*, “the drama of the Negro is best realized by his own race.”⁴¹ The idea was that a white actress could never master a black persona because racial cognizance emerged from personal experience. Thus, these types of performances came across as overtly racist and senseless efforts to avert the legitimization of blacks in entertainment, even though the cultural curators could also not allow their stereotypes to be manipulated by black people to display their humanity.

While Barrymore had selected Mary to showcase her range, she gave in to the stereotypical portrayal of an African American woman who was living in a perpetual state of oppression. According to the reviewer, Barrymore could not “shake off the shackles of repression, which is the essence of her finest art, and Sister Mary is anything but a repressed being.”⁴² While Barrymore received the harshest reviews, other actresses—new to the Hollywood scene—struggled similarly with the racial-acting line. They often thought that the easiest and most-polished representation of black females stemmed from traditional notions of disenfranchisement or eroticism. Sister Mary, though, was written as a woman who was conducting herself as sexually free, something Barrymore completely omitted from her portrayal. Additionally, the reviewer noted errors in the dialect, a common deficiency of white actors in blackface. Nevertheless, readers would have noticed that a majority of the negative comments targeted Barrymore’s “black inexperience,” thereby dragging her down as a corroborating victim.⁴³

Writing for the *Brooklyn Times Union*, Rowland Field questioned Barrymore’s willingness to participate in a substandard medium. He contradicted others who deemed it a decent production because, as he put it, “it is hard to imagine [whites] impersonating colored characters.”⁴⁴ Field did not scrutinize Barrymore’s limited control over the theatrical concept. He excused the naïve actress for following an unsustainable trend. While she was not famous herself, her name alone increased concern about the efficacy of blackface throughout the industry.

Once show business critics acknowledged the shortcomings of these imitations, they temporarily subsided. Directors understood who played the best black person, but they could not authorize dark-skinned actors and actresses to serve as cultural figures in the spotlight; after all, the chance of African Americans twisting intricately constructed stereotypes to showcase the truth remained all too

⁴¹ Associated Negro Press, “Columbus Critics View Miss Barrymore’s ‘Scarlet Sister Mary’ with Alarm,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 11, 1930.

⁴² Associated Negro Press, “Columbus Critics.”

⁴³ Associated Negro Press, “Columbus Critics.”

⁴⁴ Rowland Field, “The New Play,” *Brooklyn Times Union*, November 26, 1930.

possible. The movie sector saw the effects of allowing black artists a role in music, so they refused to surrender all of entertainment to a racial revolution.

Attempting to embrace the Jezebel, the black blues community reversely accepted the white-saturated version, thus altering an obscene storyline into one of triumph and awe. Jane E. Goodman has analyzed the evolution of songs from composer to singer from the angle of one Kabyle song in Algeria. While the tribal song is copyrighted, its reproductions lose the connection to the village women who wrote the lyrics. The singers serve as the visible conveyors of the message, gaining a unique repertoire for each song. This demonstrates a transfer in the power dynamics of culture. Under the same perception theory, black blues artists employed their expressionism to capitalize on words written by white males. Rather than attacking sexualized culture, they wielded it as a socio-political weapon on behalf of their personalities. Thus, scholars trace their persona in popular culture back to these lyrical legacies. These women spun criticism about toxic sexuality from a mechanism of shame into a mode of empowerment.⁴⁵

Bessie Smith, the “Empress of Blues,” spent the 1920s and 1930s exposing her risqué spirit through song. In 1931, she recorded “Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl.” In its second chorus, Smith sings, “I need a little sugar in my bowl / I need a little hot dog between my rolls”⁴⁶ – thus, instead of denying her desires, inviting any man to fulfill her sexual appetite. Although the public subconsciously propagated the Jezebel stereotype, Smith’s open invitation to pleasure spotlighted a socially taboo topic. In her rendition of “Shave ‘Em Dry” (1935), blues singer Lucille Bogan presented another prohibited discussion about a female enjoying sex: “Say I fucked all night, and all the night before, baby / And I feel just like I wanna fuck some more.”⁴⁷ These metaphors, when performed with a visceral passion in voice and figure, painted the exact image of African American women that white society feared. Both Smith and Bogan showed their rawest selves, thus leaving audiences in uncomfortable awe of their abrasiveness. This aggravated white creators who saw their cultural power being distributed to the black domain.

The film industry could not stand the idea of a similar upheaval on the silver screen, and neither could they overcome the limitations of white acting. Thus, they took advantage of comedy and cartoons, which explains the historiographical lapse in the timeline from blackface to blaxploitation. In the 1940s and 1950s, racist cartoons caused new issues apart from a xenophobic national culture. They added to the identity crisis African American women had been facing since slavery.

⁴⁵ Jane E. Goodman, “‘Stealing Our Heritage?’ Women’s Folksongs, Copyright Law, and the Public Domain in Algeria,” *Africa Today* 49, no. 1 (2002): 85-97, here 86-87; Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 72.

⁴⁶ Bessie Smith, “Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl,” track 19 on *The Best of Bessie Smith* (Sony Music Entertainment, 1931), *Spotify*.

⁴⁷ Lucille Bogan, “Shave ‘Em Dry,” track 18 on *Shave ‘Em Dry: The Best of Lucille Bogan* (Sony Music Entertainment, 1935), *Spotify*.

Neither musicians nor actresses could stop this mass appropriation of the black female body which was stamping the Jezebel into a subliminal character for life.

III. The Branding of Jezebel

After the 1930s, cultural brokers reintroduced the Jezebel through media that required marginal human interaction. Since whites botched the black image and blacks could easily distort the white message, a new side of consumerism got its chance. The respective success of the entertainment industry drove executives to salvage the stereotype through derisive animations. Cartoons created and cemented the illusion of the immoral African American woman in a way that continues to be recognized by contemporary America. While the Jezebel is not the only traditional typecast used to portray black women, she appears to be the most ignored and understudied version, suggesting that she is not a mere character but considered incarnate in every dark-skinned female. In the twenty-first century, this typecast does not appear to be one version of the black lady. She exists as a universal adaptation, a direct product of post-World War II chauvinistic America.

The critics had clearly condemned the portrayal of black characters via subpar white performances. Yet if executives stripped the stereotypical black characters from the big screen, they would shatter the white supremacist message that had taken years of fundamentalism and science to construct. Thus, executives decided to depict African Americans as caricatures. As the general audience rarely recognized cartoons as political propaganda, especially children's comedies, the illustrators could skew their sketches devoid of censure. Since the image itself was, once again, at the whim of white creators, the sound mixers only needed blacks for their distinct dialects. This genre gave white operators full agency at last.

There is a number of cartoons that contain the infamous—yet overlooked—Jezebel. While the first parody to be considered here is not listed as one of the Censored Eleven, it serves as proof that major enterprises besides *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies* used scornful imagery. These animated sketches developed into the primary medium for implanting racist thoughts into young inquisitive minds who would grow up to be walking advertisements of national culture.⁴⁸

In 1941, Universal Pictures released “Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat,” a rendition of a popular boogie-woogie song written by Don Raye. The setting, Lazy Town, is exclusively comprised of indolent black males and one female, depicted as a Mammy. The Mammy typically carries a sense of authoritative urgency, but as she grudgingly attends to the laundry, the men sit idly by. Then a mulatto Jezebel arrives on a riverboat, suddenly sparking the men's interest. She elegantly descends from the vessel, whistling as she maneuvers her way through the eye-gawking crowd. The nameless lady approaches the Mammy, scolds her for her lack of rhythm in attending to the laundry, and then takes over the laundry to

⁴⁸ To understand the evolution of blackface minstrelsy into cherished American cartoons, see Nicholas Sammond, *Birth of an Industry: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Rise of American Animation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

show the right technique, singing to the title song as she works. It cuts to a montage of the enlivened townsfolk who are dancing erotically as they return to their responsibilities. Before the Jezebel had landed at Lazy Town, the men had seemed overly content. Then her arrival gave them a renewed sense of energy, one that might impress the attractive young woman. The cartoon's greatest reversal is actually the removal of the Mammy from atop of the female hierarchy. Once the Jezebel used her sexuality as a motivator, the grumpy Mammy lost control, confirming that the sexually liberated lady did not just threaten the white race but the order of her own race, making her a mutual enemy across all communities.⁴⁹

In 1943, Warren Foster, a top Warner Brothers cartoonist, conspicuously converted the story of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" into "Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs," set in the era of World War II. Foster transforms the Evil Queen into a food and goods hoarder—a reference to those living lavishly while the rest of the country is starving—and typecasts her as the Mammy, while "So White"—whose hair is "coal black" and who is usually known as Snow White—is juxtaposed as the Jezebel. Foster preserves essential elements, for example, the poisonous apple, but the story otherwise strays significantly from the original. While the entire cartoon contains considerable sexual innuendo, one scene shamelessly targets the promiscuity of the Jezebel stereotype. Once the Evil Queen has seen the Prince and So White swinging to the Jitterbug, she hires "Murder Inc." to "black out So White" (i.e., assassinate the young lady). They capture So White, pull her into their vehicle, drive off into the distance, but then, suddenly, stop the car. The combination of noises and the swaying of the car suggest that So White is offering a series of off-screen "favors"—left to the audience's imagination—in exchange for her safety. When she is voluntarily released, the "assassins" are covered in lipstick and request her company again soon. While the individuals who are in conflicts seem the same as in "Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat," this cartoon adds another character trait to the Jezebel: she uses sex as a means for survival. Foster depicts So White with a dopey demeanor and low intelligence; as a result, she employs her sexuality as a defensive shield. Typically, people perceive the Jezebel as an offensive player, but this illustration suggests that she understands the various ways she can wield her sexual power.⁵⁰

First aired on September 2, 1944, Tedd Pierce, a legendary cartoon writer, delivered America "Goldilocks and the Jivin' Bears" a black parody that blended "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" and "Little Red Riding Hood." Goldilocks, a mulatto fashioned in a crop-top and short shorts, assumes the role of the Jezebel. When the three bears leave the black lady alone at home, the Big Bad Wolf, who has been stalking her, rushes to greet her in bed upstairs. Before she lies down,

⁴⁹ "Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat," directed by Walter Lantz, written by Ben Hardaway, aired March 28, 1941 (Universal Pictures).

⁵⁰ Merrie Melodies, "Coal Black and de Sebben Dwarfs," directed by Robert Clampett, written by Warren Foster, aired January 16, 1943 (Warner Brothers Entertainment Incorporation).

Goldilocks assesses each of the mattresses to find the best comfort. She selects the last one in line and almost falls asleep next to the Big Bad Wolf. When he startles her awake, she escapes the intruder's tight clutch and runs downstairs. The three bears return to find the Big Bad Wolf chasing Goldilocks around the living room, but they ignore her predicament, shout "Jitterbugs," and start playing jazz music. They just assume that Goldilocks has invited the Big Bad Wolf, so she is forced to fend for herself, implying that she has put herself into this situation or "asked for it" by climbing into bed with him. However, the next scene reinforces the impression that the Jezebel always remains in control. When the Big Bad Wolf coerces Goldilocks into swing-dancing, she swiftly assumes the male lead, throwing the assailant across the room and stopping him from escaping on multiple attempts. Eventually, the Big Bad Wolf breaks away from the crazy lady. If Goldilocks-Jezebel always stays in control, she is also the one who grants her consent. This suggests that the Jezebel cannot be raped, allowing everyone to turn a blind eye to violence against black women.⁵¹

While cartoonists dealt with the dilemma on screens, the entertainment industry outsourced material culture to distribute their racist agenda. In *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (2003), Lizabeth Cohen argues that consumerism has always influenced the perception of citizenship, but it evolved the most amidst the economic recovery from World War II. During the war, the federal government had advised Americans to ration their commodities, including entertainment. After U.S. General Douglas MacArthur accepted Japan's formal surrender aboard a battleship in Tokyo Bay, domestic spending surged. Postwar buyers embodied patriotic citizenship, performing a civic duty to their country. The wealth of the nation was channeled straight into mass consumption. While cartoons served as visual media to display stereotypes to a wide audience, consumers also needed tangible objects to bridge the connection between entertainment and reality.⁵²

The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan, houses an exhibit on the Jezebel stereotype that contains relics of racialized consumerism, including the following four items. Firstly, on Indian Lake in Ohio, a little boat shop once sold a gag gift called "A Virgin Fishing Lucky Lure." The package includes a bare-chested black lady with large breasts and a hook dangling beneath her torso, suggesting that she is a sexual catch. Secondly, popularized in the 1950s, alcohol connoisseurs used to stir their mixed drinks with "Zulu Lulu" swizzle sticks, and the Jim Crow Museum possesses a six-pack. The product designers cut the black plastic pieces into outlines of naked females with their ages carved onto their buttocks. The older the woman, the more her figure

⁵¹ Merrie Melodies, "Goldilocks and the Jivin' Bears," directed by Isadore Freleng, written by Tedd Pierce, aired September 2, 1944 (Warner Brothers Entertainment Incorporation).

⁵² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004; first published 2003), 9, 119, 199.

reflects the natural changes that result from decreases in estrogen levels, the reproductive hormone that handles the female fat distribution pattern. Once this stunts the breast, buttocks, and thigh tissue, a woman's mammary glands will shrink, and fat will fill the space, making the parts feel soft and appear less full. Nevertheless, all the swizzle sticks work the same way and mix individuals' drinks to their desired liking. Thirdly, on a 1950s ashtray, the producers positioned the Jezebel figurine in a seductive fashion that inappropriately glorifies her as a proponent of smoking. Finally, the "Martini Anyone?" banner breaks away from the typical presentation of the Americanized Jezebel. She is adorned with Afro jewelry and appears highly inebriated, holding two full martinis, yet she still retains a suggestive expression in her eyes, which suits the discernable nature of the Jezebel. This version eases the threatening attitude of the Jezebel because she appears too foolish for white men to pursue.⁵³

Thus, cartoonists and merchandisers repackaged the white supremacist message into popular culture through animation and knickknacks. They did not attack the Jezebel from just one angle. Instead, each instance of appropriation exploited a new aspect of her hyper-sexuality, breaking down the black female identity into smaller segments for the purpose of manipulation. This allowed the cultural brokers of the 1940s and 1950s to produce the perfect white image of the black female body without interference. Once 1970s blaxploitation strengthened this conceptualization, the stereotype became so embedded in American culture that the Jezebel is now nameless and largely invisible in contemporary mass media.

Conclusion

In the context of the Atlantic Slave Trade, white society implemented structures to sustain their position atop the racial hierarchy. To defend their position, white men launched an attack on black humanity. To raise their own position, white women joined the attack, because patriarchy otherwise might have guaranteed black men a higher ranking. Yet all three groups—white men, white women, and black men—debased black females, attacking intersectionality through biblical references as well as fraudulent race theories that linked sexuality with "beastly" behavior. These ideas then got swept up into the entertainment industry which misappropriated Black femininity as toxic sexuality with the Jezebel as their icon.

In modern popular culture, people dismiss the racially insensitive stereotypes for two reasons. Firstly, twentieth-century cultural brokers embedded the Jezebel impressively deep—to the point that she is no longer considered a character but, rather, a being; hence, Tarantino merely presents an ordinary form of the black

⁵³ "A Virgin Fishing Lucky Lure," ca. 1950s, souvenir from Indian Lake, Ohio, *The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia*, Big Rapids, Michigan; "Zulu Lulu," ca. 1950s, swizzle stick, *The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia*, Big Rapids, Michigan; Circa 1950s, ashtray with attached figurine, *The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia*, Big Rapids, Michigan; "Martini Anyone?" ca. 1930s, banner, *The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia*, Big Rapids, Michigan.

female in *Django Unchained*. The Jezebel subconsciously transformed from a single typecast into an overarching generalization about African American women, one that, I would argue, outlasted the Mammy. This conversion proves that popular culture possesses power, in a historical sense, to perpetuate racism and sexism. Secondly, the success of the black blues community means that the Jezebel *can* be incorporated as a counter-revolutionary symbol. This does not suggest an acceptance of the stereotype; rather, it points to a strategy to upset white supremacy from its roots. The century-old tactics that hindered the display of true black femininity cannot and will not beset feminist and antiracist movements any longer. Thus, I contend that, in the future, the Jezebel will be wielded for visibility and justice, and without any mischievous intent.

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