Chapter Eight

Pop Culture and the Media

When I get big, I'm gonna have blond hair, blue eyes, and I'm gonna be white. I told my mother I don't wanna be black no more.

-Whoopi Goldberg
in her stage show and video
Whoopi Goldberg Live, 1985

When I was a little girl, I wished I was black. If being black is synonymous with having soul, then, yes, I feel that I am.

-Madonna,
in Vibe magazine article, 1992

In the fall of 1994, the NBC weekly drama "Sweet Justice" made its debut. Set in New Orleans, the show featured the Academy Award-winner Cicely Tyson and the Emmy-winner Melissa Gilbert as two liberal lawyers working together at the same firm. At first glance, "Sweet Justice" seemed to represent a gigantic step forward in the popular media's portrayals of White and Black women. Never before had a major network showcased in a prime time slot the relationship between two women of different races compatibly engaged in such nontraditional work.

On closer inspection, however, "Sweet Justice" appears to have recycled some familiar, though updated, racial stereotypes of women. As the pampered daughter of a wealthy White Southern patriarch, Gilbert's Kate Delacroy comes across as naively idealistic and also a little hysterical when things don't go her way. Carrie Grace Battle is the older but wiser African American woman for whom Kate Delacroy works; as her name implies, the character played by Tyson is "battle" -- scarred from her participation in the South's Civil Rights Movement and yet full of moral "grace." She is the contemporary strong Black woman, possessing not so much physical strength as uncompromising ethical principles. If there is any doubt about how stereotypical these two female characters are, imagine their roles reversed, with the younger, more emotional woman being Black, and the older, more worldly woman being White. It simply wouldn't fly.

And therein lies the problem. The media, in all their forms, ultimately mirror and maintain popular notions of women and African Americans. This is particularly true when it comes to a commercially sponsored television show like "Sweet Justice." Regardless of media form, the result is usually the same, because in mainstream culture Whites create and control the images of those who are not part of the mainstream, Blacks. The media constitute a powerful tool for influencing culture, and for that reason they also hold for Black women and Americans. This is particularly true when it comes to a commercially sponsored television show like "Sweet Justice." Regardless of media form, the result is usually the same, because in mainstream culture Whites create and control the images of those who are not part of the mainstream, Blacks. The media constitute a powerful tool for influencing culture, and for that reason they also hold for Black women and American women the greatest hope for social change. In the right hands, the media have the power to transform cross-race relations in America. This chapter takes a historical and contemporary look at the way relations between Black women and White women have been portrayed in fiction, films, and television, as well as in advertising, modeling, and music.

Early Portrayals

The earliest representations of relations between White women and Black women can be found in nineteenth-century American novels. Stories of romance and adventure were a wonderful source of entertainment throughout the 1800s; they were especially popular with White women, an estimated 70 percent of whom were literate. But romances were also read by those Black women fortunate enough to have received an education, and women of both races wrote novels during the nineteenth century.

The best-known American writer of the period was probably Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1851). A White Northern abolitionist, Stowe wished to tell a tale that would raise an alarm about the brutalities of slavery and help bring it to an end. The book's success must have exceeded Stowe's dreams. Uncle Tom's Cabin became an instant best seller, and to this day holds a prominent place in American culture.

Although Uncle Tom's Cabin is usually remembered for its stark antislavery sentiment, it was also instrumental in creating the myth of warm relations between White plantation mistresses and Black female house slaves. Again, this was an important message to convey: if women of such disparate circumstances could be friends, surely there was hope for others to share in a common humanity. Mrs. Shelby, the plantation mistress in Uncle Tom's Cabin, was never cruel and was always sympathetic toward her house slave, Aunt Chloe. And Aunt Chloe was never spiteful and always forgiving of her White mistress. Chloe was, in fact, a mammy, as the African American cultural critic Patricia A. Turner notes in Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and Their Influence on Culture (1994):

Dark-skinned, loyal to her master and mistress, an able cook and housekeeper, plump, asexual, good-humored, Aunt Chloe was one of the first of a long line of fictional black women whose characters comforted and assuaged.

Portraying Black female house slaves as happy and content to wait on the White household served other purposes as well. White female authors and readers alike could successfully avoid thinking about their own ethical responsibilities to the Black slaves. Clearly slavery was the fault of White husbands, never that of the wives. In the pens of White authors, the Black female house slave was also stripped of any sexual allure. Since the mammy was always described as dark-skinned, overweight, and unattractive, her presence in the home of a White woman could more easily be tolerated. No White husband would be sexually interested in such a woman. Of course, in reality, sexual
relations between female house slaves and White masters were a common and painful experience for the slaves, some of whom were brutally raped. The illicit relations were also humiliating for White wives because of their inability to stop them. In novels, at least, it helped not to dwell on such unpleasanties. No wonder White women much preferred to read about loyal mammyes than to hear the sober truth about what really went on in the lives of enslaved Black women. Stowe's novel helped White women readers feel good about opposing slavery, and her book, and the books of other White women writers who followed similar formulas sold well.

Although it was a time of widespread educational disadvantages, the nineteenth century also managed to produce the first Black women novelists. Among them was Harriet Wilson, whose 1859 largely autobiographical book *Our Nig* is now considered by literary scholars to be the first novel ever written by a Black woman in this country. Nearly lost to obscurity, *Our Nig* was discovered and reissued in 1983. Not surprisingly, when Black women like Wilson assumed creative control, relations between White and Black women were painted rather differently. *Our Nig* centers on the story of a mulatto indentured servant named Frado -- presumably Wilson herself living in the North, and her difficulties with a cruel White female mistress, Mrs. Bellmont, who had an even meaner daughter, Mary. Although not every White female in *Our Nig* is portrayed as cold and unfeeling, enough of them were that the book did not make for pleasant reading by White women. In fact, this may be one of the reasons the book failed to find commercial success when it was first published. Wilson made it clear that she was writing for a Black reading audience, not a White one, but at that time there were not enough literate Blacks in the country to support such a literary endeavor.

The paucity of Black readers was a problem that continued to plague other early African American female novelists. If a Black woman author hoped to make a living by writing books, she had to make her story appeal to White female readers as well. One early African American novelist who managed to do just that was Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. Her novel *Iola Leroy* (generally thought to have been published in 1888, although some scholars date its publication as early as 1863) featured a fair-skinned mulatto heroine named Iola, who meets and falls in love with an aristocratic White doctor. When the doctor discovers Iola's true ancestry, he decides that he loves her anyway, and proposes that the two of them run away together. But in a surprise move that comforted both Black women and White women readers, Iola turns down the good doctor's offer. Concerned about the fate of future mulatto children, she remains true to her race. The book sold well.

Racially mixed women like Iola were common in the novels of many White women, too, but in their hands such heroines were nearly always killed off by book's end. Along with the stock mammy character, there emerged another image of Black women in early American literature—the beautiful but tragic mulatto. Like the mammy figure, the tragic mulatto seemed to meet a strong though somewhat different psychological need in White women, particularly those of the South. It was comforting for them to read about the tragic consequences awaiting the offspring born of sexual relations with their men. For those White women outside the South, stories about the fate awaiting any racially mixed woman, especially one who dared to pass and to pursue White men, may have helped soothe growing anxieties about race mixing in this country. In fact, well beyond the era of Reconstruction, novels about tragic mulattoes continued to sell well.

In the 1920s and early thirties, there was a virtual explosion of books, art, plays, and music written and performed by Blacks, the period is called the Harlem Renaissance. As exciting as this creative era was for African American artists, musicians, performers, and authors, most of them still had to make their work appeal to largely White producers, publishers and gallery owners. Black women writers such as Nella Larsen, who wrote *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), and Jessie Redmon Fauset, who wrote *There Is Confusion* (1924) and *Plum Bun* (1928), were most successful when they followed the formula, penning stories of beautiful mulatto heroines tragically struggling with their racial identity. But unlike their White counterparts, Harlem Renaissance authors included in their works White women characters who were often cruel or indifferent to the problems of Black women.

Toward the end of the period, a few women writers, like the poet Gwendolyn Brooks and the novelist Zora Neale Hurston, began writing specifically for Black audiences and worried less about whether White audiences would approve or understand. Although Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) has now claimed its rightful place in American literature, at the time that it was first published, it did not sell well. The story is of a racially mixed heroine, Janie, who, instead of meeting an unhappy end, triumphs. That simple but crucial departure from formula has since led scholars to credit *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as the first feminist African American novel. But because White women hardly figured in the story at all, it was not a book that Whites recommended to their friends. To make ends meet, Hurston was forced to survive on secretarial wages, unemployment benefits, welfare checks, substitute teaching, and domestic work.

The most popular female novelists of the thirties continued to be White women who stuck to familiar genres. Among them was Fannie Hurst, for whom, ironically, Hurston once worked as a secretary. Hurst wrote one of the all-time classic tragic mulatto stories, *Imitation of Life* (1933). Drawing on racial stereotypes, Hurst portrayed a dark-skinned Black woman named Delilah who is warm and subservient in her relations with her White employer, Bea. Although she is not a slave, Delilah still functions very much like a mammy. She remains loyally devoted to Bea even after the White woman makes a financial success from marketing, of all things, Delilah's famous pancake recipe. Both women have daughters, but it is only the light skinned Black daughter, Peola, who is tragically fated. In her attempts to pass as White, Peola pretends, in scene after scene, to deny that Delilah is her mother. And in the end, before Peola realizes the error of her ways, Delilah dies, leaving a guilt-ridden daughter behind. So popular was this tale that only a year after it was published, *Imitation of Life* was made into a movie.

The new industry of film became yet another powerful medium through which the stereotypes of Blacks and White women were perpetuated. Nowhere was this more evident than in the film *Gone With the Wind*, based on the 1936 novel by Margaret Mitchell. The movie was released in 1939 by MGM, and went on to win a record ten Academy Awards. *GWTW* remains to this day one of the all-time top grossing films in history.

Although many of the relationships in *GWTW* left indelible marks in the minds of viewers, one of the most enduring was that between the
White plantation mistress Scarlett O'Hara and her house slave, Mammy. Who can forget the scene before the Wilkes's big picnic in which Mammy (portrayed by large, dark-skinned Hattie McDaniel, who won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar) fusses over the dress to be worn by the spoiled but ever resourceful Miss Scarlett, (portrayed by the delicately beautiful Vivien Leigh, whose performance netted her the Best Actress award)? Like Aunt Chloe in Uncle Tom's Cabin, Mammy is completely devoted to Scarlett, highly maternal, and devoid of any sexual allure. In GWTW, Mammy emerges as the conscience of the story. It is she who "tssk, tssk, tssk" over Scarlett's constant scheming ways, and it is Mammy whose approval the charming White Rhett Butler seeks.

Another big-budget film about the antebellum South released during the thirties was Warner Brothers' Jezebel (1938), which featured a feisty yet self centered Southern White woman named Julie, played by Bette Davis. She, too, has a devoted house slave, Zette, played by Black actress Theresa Harris. The plot centers on Julie's refusal to conform to the Old South's restrictive codes of femininity, especially the genteel ways of her banker fiance, Pres. The pivotal scene takes place at the Olympus Ball, an event at which all unmarried women were expected to wear white. To embarrass and shock Pres, Julie decides to wear a red dress -- an act of defiance that ultimately leads Pres to leave her. By the film's end, Julie is labeled a Jezebel, the Biblical by-word for a wicked female.

According to the film scholar Richard Dyer, Jezebel is notable for the way in which it used color to symbolize Julie and Zette. Whiteness was associated with order, rationality, and conformity to social convention; blackness conveyed disorder, irrationality, and looseness. The Black characters in Jezebel were also more natural, emotional, sensual, and spiritual than any of the White characters. This dichotomy was further reflected in Julie's insistence on wearing the red dress to the ball, seen merely as dark in this black-and-white film. While White family members and associates found the dress vulgar, Zette was attracted to its bold and flashy color. And when Julie finally realized the error of her ways, the dress was passed to Zette, who presumably had a much better time wearing it.

In the years before the activist sixties, there was one other big-budget movie that bears mentioning, a remake of Imitation of Life. Released in 1959, on the eve of the Civil Rights Movement, Imitation of Life starred Lana Turner as the White woman, Sandra Dee as the White daughter, Juanita Moore as the Black maid, and White actress Susan Kohner as the light skinned Black daughter. For the remake, the story line and character names were all updated. Instead of marketing a pancake recipe (too much like Aunt Jemima), the White woman, now called Lora, abandons her domestic ways to become a glamorous Broadway star. This leaves the Black woman Annie, less a business partner than an ever-constant, smiling domestic servant. Annie also functions as the surrogate mother for the White daughter, abandoned by her overly ambitious, career-minded White mother. The light-skinned daughter, now called Sarah Jane, still tries to deny her racial heritage; and in keeping with the stereotype of the sexually aggressive woman of mixed race, it is she, not the White daughter, who is recklessly promiscuous. At one point, Sarah Jane runs away to become a stripper in a seedy nightclub. The ending remains intact. Once again the Black mother dies before her ungrateful daughter can properly apologize for her actions. There is even an elaborately staged funeral scene, complete with soaring strains of Mahalia Jackson, during which Sarah Jane hysterically flings herself on Annie's coffin, begging for forgiveness.

Although in many ways the plot of Imitation of Life seems laughable today, in the context of the fifties it was a fairly liberal film. Not only did the story line center completely on women, rather than men, but it also portrayed a real friendship that crossed racial lines. In scene after scene, a genuine intimacy between Lora and Annie was evident. Of course, Annie was still Lora's devoted servant, and in that regard the film ultimately placated White audiences as much as it challenged them. Thus, while the tears of White women helped to make this Universal release one of the studio's highest grossing films, Black audience members may have been more inclined to laugh in disbelief at the absurdity of Annie's being so blindly devoted to a White employer.

The fifties witnessed the rise of yet another image-making medium, and that, of course, was television. In 1951, only 12 percent of American homes had a television set. By 1963, that number had risen to close to 90 percent. In the beginning, Black people barely existed at all on TV, except for a few superstars like singers Nat King Cole and Diahann Carroll. A few more were featured in all-Black comedies, like "Amos 'n' Andy," where no opportunities for cross-race relations existed. This popular but highly racist show is memorable for creating yet another stereotype of the Black woman, the loud-mouthed, strong-willed, emasculating Sapphire.

One show in the early fifties did feature in its title role a Black woman: "Beulah." Portrayed by the plump, dark-skinned actress Louise Beavers, Beulah was, naturally, a maid. The message the show presented was clear: every White family should be lucky enough to have a maid like Beulah. She was always there to assist the White mother with her children, and never seemed to have concerns about her own Black family, even on holidays. For years, the medium of television clearly did no better than film in advancing the image of Black women.

White women, too, were at first narrowly portrayed on television, primarily as happy homemakers, whose main concern in life was taking care of husband and children. During the fifties, this limited image of middle-class White women was seen in shows such as "Father Knows Best," "Leave It to Beaver," and "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet."

In the decades that followed, all forms of the media were forced to react to the growing demands of the civil rights and, later, the women's movement, to improve their representations of African Americans and women. Publishing was among the first outlets to respond to the activist winds of change.

**Literature**

For African Americans, the outpouring of literature and arts following the Civil Rights Movement became another Black Renaissance. At last, the missing discourse of Black voices in American fiction was being heard, and this time there was a large, literate, and hungry Black reading audience ready to support it.
One early book by a Black author to come out of that era set the tone for a new portrayal of women's cross-race relations; it was Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966), a Civil War epic, for which the author won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship. Based in part on the true story of Walker's great-grandmother, *Jubilee* takes place in the South, where all its major characters experience the sweeping effects of the Civil War. The book is often called the Black *Gone With the Wind*, because the events are told not through the eyes of a White heroine, but through those of a Black house slave named Vyry (Walker's grandmother). Another difference is that in *Jubilee* many Black female slaves suffer horribly. It was Walker's best seller that finally presented a less idealized depiction of female house slaves at the hands of White mistresses in the South. But at the book's ending, Walker has Vyry forgive the vicious cruelty of the older, now dying, White Southern woman. With that simple gesture, *Jubilee* ultimately celebrates the humanist spirit while suggesting a future in which relations between White women and Black women might be better.

It is interesting to note just how many Black women authors of the sixties and seventies portrayed their Black female characters in service to White women. Given the degree to which domestic work was so long the principal form of employment for Black women in this country, perhaps this is not surprising. Yet, as Black literary scholar Trudier Harris makes clear in the title of her 1982 book, *From Mammies to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature*, Black maids in the hands of Black authors were no shrinking violets. Their White female employers were nearly always portrayed as grossly insensitive, incapable of befriending a Black woman, or even of treating her with any degree of fairness or kindness. For African American novelists, it was pay-back time.

This anti-White woman sentiment is evident in many of the novels written by Toni Morrison, the most critically acclaimed African American female writer to come out of this era. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), set in Ohio before the Civil Rights Movement, follows a poor, uneducated Black woman named Pauline, who works as a maid for a White woman, portrayed in an extremely negative light. In *Song of Solomon* (1977) Morrison returns to roughly the same time and place, although the White employer, Michael-Mary Graham, is a poet and thus slightly more sensitive. The main female protagonist, a Black woman named Corinthians Dead, is college-educated and middle class; it is societal racism that forces her to work as a domestic. But while the circumstances and personalities may be somewhat more sympathetic, Morrison still makes clear that no real human connection can be made between these two women of different races.

In *Tar Baby* (1981) Morrison first offers a glimmer of hope for the development of an interracial friendship, in this case between a White woman named Margaret and her Black domestic servant, Ondine. Their interactions are helped by the fact that Margaret grew up dirt poor and has at least some understanding of being disadvantaged. It is only because she marries well that she is now able to afford a domestic servant. Although much that happens in this story serves to drive Margaret and Ondine apart, in the final chapter Morrison offers the possibility that the two women may form a friendship.

"Ondine? Let's be wonderful old ladies. You and me."

"Huh," said Ondine, but she smiled a little.

"We're both childless now, Ondine. And we're both stuck here. We should be friends. It's not too late."

Ondine looked out of the window and did not answer.

"Is it too late, Ondine?"


Racial tension between Black and White women is similarly explored in the work of Alice Walker. Although most of Walker's books, notably *The Color Purple* (1982) and *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989), focus primarily on Black characters in predominantly all-Black environments, *Meridian* (1976) suggests a new treatment of White women in Black women's literature, that of disadvantaged sisters. Set in the South during the Civil Rights Movement, *Meridian* follows the activist commitments of a Northern White Jewish woman, Lynne Rabinowitz, and the book's title character, a Southern Black woman named Meridian Hill. Complicating their cross-race relations is a Black man named Truman, who marries Lynne but in times of need seeks out Meridian. Despite this, Meridian comes to respect and even to like Lynne.

Among the other African American women authors associated with this period are poet laureate Maya Angelou, author of the autobiographical *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), playwright Ntozake Shange, who wrote *For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Was Enuf* (1975), and Gloria Naylor, whose novel *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) won the National Book Award. While none of these works dealt primarily with women's cross-race relations, all were embraced by progressive White women.

A new generation of White women authors also emerged in the sixties and seventies, writing about themes of new-found independence and sexual liberation for women. Such authors included Marge Piercy (*Small Changes*, 1972; *Women on the Edge of Time*, 1976), Marilyn French (*The Women's Room*, 1977), Erica Jong (*Fear of Flying*, 1974), Lisa Alther (*Kinflicks*, 1976), and Rita Mae Brown (*Rubyfruit Jungle*, 1977; and *Six of One*, 1978). Unfortunately, Black women in these stories were either ignored or relegated to maids' roles, though they were maids who were paragons of virtue, strength, warmth, and wisdom. That portrayal was especially common in the books of Southern White women, such as Alther and Brown.

By the eighties, a small trickle of White women writers, most of them Southern-born, attempted to move beyond the stereotypes of Black women and White women. Among this group is Ellen Douglas, whose *Can't Quit You, Baby* (1988) examines not only the barriers separating Black women servants from their White female employers, but also their many unacknowledged bonds. Douglas is unusual in that she dares to have her Black female character steal something from the White family for which she works as an expression of Black
Another White Southern author to move her characters beyond the stereotypes is Gail Godwin. In her novel *A Mother and Two Daughters* (1982) she reverses the power relations between a White woman and a Black woman as a means of raising issues about race and gender. A subplot centers on Lydia, one of the two White daughters referred to in the book's title, who is a divorcée with two young sons. She returns to college in her late twenties, and there she encounters a Black woman professor named Dr. Renee Peverell-Watson, who teaches a course on the history of female consciousness. It is Renee who serves as the means of raising Lydia's consciousness about women in society. The two women initially become friends because they are the same age and both are single parents. But in the book's final chapter, which takes place years later, at the wedding of their two children, clearly the friendship has become strained. Having quit her teaching position following a local incident of racial terrorism, Renee is too busy studying to become a civil rights lawyer to make it to her own daughter's wedding, and Lydia has gone on to become the host of a popular Martha Stewart-like television show.

In more recent years, a few African American women writers have dared to explore women's interracial relationships in nonstereotypical ways. At the forefront of this group is Bebe Moore Campbell, whose best-selling novel *Brothers and Sisters* (1994) delves deeply into both the rewards and discomforts of a female friendship that crosses racial boundaries. Increasingly, children's book authors are also exploring themes of cultural diversity and girls' interracial friendships.

**Film**

Hollywood, too, began responding to the Civil Rights Movement, and in several ways. One was to begin making big-budget films about Black families, from *Sounder* (1972), starring Cicely Tyson, to *The Color Purple* (1985), starring Whoopi Goldberg and Oprah Winfrey. The seventies also saw the rise of so-called blaxploitation films, such as *Shaft* (1971) and *Superfly* (1972), which featured Black men in heroic but ultimately stereotypical roles. Today, this genre has surfaced again in the form of "gangsta" films, like *New Jack City* (1991), starring Wesley Snipes. When women of either race appear in these films, they have been relegated to being either ornamental girlfriends or the targets of rape and physical abuse.

For the first time, Hollywood also began making such films as *A Patch of Blue* (1966) and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), which touched on themes of interracial attraction. More recently, there has been Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991), starring Wesley Snipes and Annabella Sciorra, *Made in America* (1993), starring Whoopi Goldberg and Ted Danson, and *The Bodyguard* (1992), starring Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner.

The buddy film was another genre that focused to an extent on interracial relations, although most of them featured men only. In the sixties, there were films such as *Robin and the Seven Hoods* (1964), starring Rat Pack members Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis, Jr.; in the seventies, *Silver Streak* (1976), starring Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder. In the eighties *48 Hours* (1983), starring Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte, became a big hit, and recently, *White Men Can't Jump* (1992), with Wesley Snipes and Woody Harrelson, did well at the box office. Clearly the interracial male buddy genre has been a formulaic success and, as a marketing strategy, has the added advantage of appealing to audiences of both races.

Women, however, have had no such vehicle for exploring cross-race relations on the big screen. In fact, films about women, and especially their relationships with each other, have not been particularly popular in Hollywood's eyes. Black male directors, many of whom emerged on the scene during the late eighties and nineties, have rarely bothered to focus on the lives of Black women. The one exception is Spike Lee, in the film *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), about a Black woman named Nola Darling, who must have her sexual freedom, although in one scene she pays for it with rape. Lee has been criticized for his portrayals by some African American women, including author and columnist Janice Malveaux, who, in an article entitled "Spike's Spite," wrote:

> While Lee treats black women peripherally, he treats Angie (Annabella Sciorra), the white woman who has an affair with Flipper (Wesley Snipes), in a careless, offhand manner . . . We never know how she feels about the affair, herself, her life. Like Nola Darling, she has to pay for her sexuality [and] like Nola, Angie Tucci is a reactor, not an actor. These passive women are painted in activist garments, as women who are liberated and courageous. But Lee's view of women is that we play it as it comes, exercising little choice.

The few films in recent years that have addressed women's interracial relationships are nearly always set in some earlier historical era. In that way, Black women can once again be acceptably cast in service to White women. Thus, we have such films as *Cross Creek* (1983), starring Mary Steenburgen as author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, and Alfie Woodard as her domestic servant, Idella Parker, and *The Long Walk Home* (1991), starring Whoopi Goldberg and Sissy Spacek. *The Long Walk Home* takes place in the fifties during the Montgomery bus strike. Spacek plays a middle class White woman who is torn between her allegiance to a racist White husband and her growing respect for their maid (Whoopi Goldberg), who must now walk miles to work rather than take the bus. In the end, Spacek sides with truth and justice, joining Goldberg at a civil rights rally. Once again it is the Black woman who functions as the moral center of the story.

The career of Whoopi Goldberg is interesting to look at not only because she is one of the highest paid actresses in Hollywood today, but also because of the frequency with which she has been cast as a maid. In addition to *The Long Walk Home*, Goldberg has been a domestic servant in *Clara's Heart* (1988) and *Corrina, Corrina* (1994), both of which were also set in earlier eras. When not playing a maid, Goldberg is invariably the one in the film who brings color, life, and spiritual awakening to the White female characters. In *Sister Act* (1992), she plays a Las Vegas lounge singer who opens the convent doors, letting in life and laughter to a group of cloistered White nuns; in *Ghost* (1990), for which Goldberg won the Best Supporting Actress award, she is a fortune teller named Oda Mae Brown who can make
contact with the recently deceased boyfriend of a young White professional woman, Molly (played by Demi Moore). Goldberg's Oscar was the first won by a Black woman since Hattie McDaniel's Oscar for Gone With the Wind. Of the character played by Goldberg in Ghost, African American film scholar Donald Bogle writes that it is, "decades old -- the matronly black woman who deals with spirits and whose eyes pop open wide at the appropriate moments . . . The role is a nurturer for a white couple, and Goldberg has this feistiness that mammys in the past often had."

Among Black actresses in film today, Goldberg is hardly alone in being asked to play the role of a maid to a White woman. In Fried Green Tomatoes (1991), set in an earlier era, Cicely Tyson plays a cook in a restaurant owned by two White lesbians. Driving Miss Daisy (1989), again set in an earlier era, casts Theresa Merritt as a domestic servant working for White actress Jessica Tandy; and Passion Fish (1992) stars Alfie Woodard as a live-in nurse's aide assisting a recently disabled and self-pitying White soap opera star.

At least in Passion Fish, made by independent White male director John Sayles, Woodard's character is fully fleshed out with some flaws of her own, instead of being dully perfect. Ultimately, this is a story of triumph in which two women help each other to enjoy life again. Passion Fish is one of the few films in recent history, placed in a contemporary setting, that has at its center the developing relationship between a White woman and a Black woman. In general, Hollywood has failed miserably to advance the images of White women and Black women in their relations to each other.

**Television**

Television has done little better in this regard. Following the activism of the sixties, the networks were forced to re-evaluate and alter stereotypical images of both Blacks and women. Not surprisingly, it was the men, not the women, who were given first crack at exploring cross-race relations. The male buddy show "I Spy," starring Bill Cosby and Robert Culp as two detectives, ran from 1965 through 1968.

"Julia" (1968-1971), a sitcom starring the beautiful Black actress and singer Diahann Carroll as a single mother who is a nurse, was the first show built around a Black woman who wasn't a domestic servant. But Julia's acquaintances all seemed to be White. Her boss was White, and her best friend was a White woman named Marie, who lived next door in the same high-rise apartment complex. In being cast as a perky nurse with no racial opinions of her own, Julia came across as little more than a domestic servant.

As Diahann Carroll herself said of the show in 1968, "At the moment we're presenting the white Negro. And he has very little Negroness."

Following "Julia," television producers began creating more shows about Blacks who lived and worked among other Blacks, from "Sanford and Son" (1972-1978), to "Good Times" (1974-1979), to "What's Happening?!" (1976-1979). But in so doing, they eliminated from the picture Whites, especially White Women. Issues of race were sometimes raised, but never directly dealt with in relation to White characters. Meanwhile, the majority of other sitcoms and dramas continued to have all-White casts. With the notable exception of "All in the Family" (1971-1978), which had a Black family move next door to the Bunker household, Whites and Blacks on the small screen seemed to live in parallel universes throughout the sixties and seventies.

During the politically conservative and financially booming eighties, a few shows did deal with race. The first was "The Cosby Show" (1984-1992), which finally brought dignity and style to a Black family on television. Unfortunately, White women rarely entered the Cosby world. However, a spinoff from that show, "A Different World" (1987-1992), in which Cosby daughter Lisa Bonet leaves home to attend a prestigious Black college in the South, did. Her roommate was a White woman (played by Oscar winner Marisa Tomei), apparently the only White woman in attendance at the school. In some of the show's early episodes, women's cross-race relations were discussed. But gradually plots began to center on the romantic tension between Whitney (Jasmine Guy) and Dwayne (Kadeem Hardison), and by the second season, the White woman student had transferred out.

Another long-running, top-rated show of the eighties notable for its treatment of race was the nighttime soap opera Dynasty (1981-1989). It attempted to integrate its cast, at least for one season, when Diahann Carroll showed up as a fabulously wealthy singer named Dominique Deveraux, who claimed to be the half-sister of patriarch Blake Carrington (John Forsythe). Although such a plot twist could have lent itself to a searing discussion of race and racism in America, with the many White women in Carrington's life feeling conflicted or threatened by Deveraux's sudden presence, no such discussion ever took place. The tension surrounding Deveraux's claim to some of Carrington's great fortune was never linked to her being Black and everyone else in the family being White. Once again, the talented Diahann Carroll was forced to portray another white-faced Black woman.

In the nineties, various weekly drama shows, such as "L.A. Law," "Picket Fences," and "NYPD Blue," have attempted to frame more realistically, in contemporary settings, issues of race and racism in America. Unfortunately, most of the plots have centered on men. With the exception of "Sweet Justice," women's cross-race relations in a contemporary setting have taken a back seat. The only two shows that do touch on women's race relations, "I'll Fly Away" and "The Homefront," are once again set in earlier times, with Black women back in the homes of White women.

More time has been devoted to exploring women and their race issues on daytime television. One obvious reason is that women make up the bulk of daytime viewing audiences, and African Americans, in particular, constitute nearly 38 percent of it. As a result, the producers of soap operas have been forced to find ways to attract and satisfy these otherwise often ignored market segments.

As of 1992, there were fourteen Black women working on eight of the eleven daytime soaps. In some soaps, the characters these actresses play are nonstereotypical and highly visible regular members of the casts. Most African American daytime actresses complain, though, that ultimately they function as either the love interests for White men or as the token friends of White women in the show.

African American actresses have fared better in some of the big-budget made-for-TV movies, most notably Queen (1993), the story of Alex...
Haley's paternal grandmother, starring Halle Berry and Jasmine Guy, and The Women of Brewster Place (1989), the adaptation of Gloria Naylor's book about eight Black women living on the same dead-end street. Without the backing of the executive producer, Oprah Winfrey, however, The Women of Brewster Place, which starred Winfrey along with Cicely Tyson and Robin Givens, would likely never have seen the light of day.

In recent years, a few cable and network movie productions have featured White and Black women together, but the formula is nearly always the same -- a weak-willed, mixed-up White woman is saved by a morally stronger Black woman. The fact remains that few shows on television have addressed women's cross-race relations in nonstereotypical ways.

Advertising

Advertising is another powerful influence shaping images of Black and White women in America. Here, too, stereotypes rule. Aunt Jemima, for example, is one of the most enduring advertising images of a Black woman, and despite her weight loss and handkerchief removal in recent years, she remains a mammy. While Black men and White men in commercials and print ads work, play sports, and drink beer together, women still seem mostly to pitch cleaning, food, and beauty products in racially segregated worlds.

According to research conducted by psychologist Carolyn West, Black women are sexualized more often than White women, even in the same advertising campaign. White women in the Virginia Slims cigarette ads, for example, are typically placed in a historical setting, such as early twentieth century, where they are dressed in assertive, masculine attire and shown working hard for women's suffrage. Across the bottom of such ads reads the slogan "You've come a long way, baby," which manages both to promote a woman's independence and to deny her adult status. In contrast, the Virginia Slims ads featuring African American women convey themes of covert sexuality. In one such ad, a Black woman is dressed in tight-fitting clothing; across her chest is an iridescent strip with the slogan "Change is ok, big bills are better." Although the ad could be interpreted to depict a woman's right to be financially ambitious, because of how the woman in the ad is dressed and where the ad copy is placed, another interpretation is that she is essentially a tramp or a prostitute.

In 1992, Advertising Age surveyed a racially mixed sample Of 470 marketing and media executives on race and racism in the advertising industry and found that more than half agreed that advertising has played a role in the country's current racial problems. Roughly the same number admitted that there were no Blacks working in their departments, other than in clerical or other low-level positions. If more African Americans held creative and executive positions in the advertising industry, perhaps they would have a louder voice for change. As one African American respondent in the survey noted, "All we ever see is a bunch of us dancing to a good beat and smiling. That's not how we are. Ads just perpetuate stereotypes."

There is a need for advertising to be more sensitive to the subtle interplay of the racial and sexual stereotyping of women, in particular. In 1993, Foote, Cone, and Belding, in San Francisco (FC&B-SF), began airing a series of five thirty-second commercial television spots, with such titles as "Woman with a Purpose" and "Woman Getting It Off Her Chest," for their Levi's for Women campaign. Designed to sell Levi's to women, all but one of the spots featured abstract animated White female figures in blue-colored jeans expressing their independence and assertiveness. The fifth in the series, entitled "Woman Not Feeling Blue," was specifically aimed at promoting the Levi's line of multicolored jeans for women, and it was the only spot to feature an animated Black female figure dancing to the sounds of house music. Halfway into the commercial, a female voiceover, with an obviously Black accent, teasingly intoned, "Girl, pick yourself a color." Taken together, the commercials were an immediate success. "Woman With a Purpose" was awarded a Clio, the advertising world's equivalent of an Oscar, and the media watchdog consumer group Women in Communication (WIC) awarded FC&B-SF its annual Leading Change Award for its positive portrayals of women. But in an unprecedented move, WIC also gave the negative Needing Change Award to the one spot entitled "Woman Not Feeling Blue." Why is it, WIC asked, that the only woman shown dancing in the overall campaign was the only Black female figure?

White copywriter Mimi Cook, who was among those at FC&B-SF to work on the Levi's account, admitted, "Instead of depicting a general feeling, which is what all the spots were supposed to do, the "Woman Not Feeling Blue" one ended up saying "This is what a Black woman is all about." I now realize that once you skew toward someone who is Black, Hispanic, or Asian, you necessarily make a bigger political statement than if you use a White character." Not all African American women who saw the "Woman Not Feeling Blue" commercial found it objectionable. In fact, it seemed to Cook that most women, regardless of race, thought the spot made a positive statement that applied to all women.

Modeling

Just as actresses of both races have had to weigh concerns at being cast in stereotypical roles against their desire to make a living, so too have models. A 1991 report entitled Invisible People, issued by New York's Department of Consumer Affairs, documented the extent to which African Americans are underutilized in advertising. The percentage of Black models appearing in over eleven thousand ads in twenty-seven different national magazines was tabulated and compared against the percentage of Black readers for the magazines. While 11 percent of the magazines' readers were Black, only 3 percent of the models in the magazine ads were Black. And when African American women models were featured in ads, they usually appeared as little more than token figures in the background of a group of White models. Apparently, some businesses fear having their products become associated through advertising images with Blacks, with the possible consequence of alienating their larger market of White consumers.

A more subtle form of racism in advertising shows in the choice of which African American female models appear in the ads. The Department of Consumer Affairs report found that most of the Blacks were light-skinned. Dark-skinned African American women with natural hair styles were the most "invisible" of all the women in print magazine ads.
Only in the world of fashion, where the point seems to be to create trends that run counter to the mainstream, can beautiful dark-skinned women, such as Naomi Campbell and Iman, find great success. Here skin color is treated more as an accessory than as a racial feature. As the high-fashion designer Givenchy says, regarding his preference for dark-skinned African American fashion models, "Their bodies are perfect for my clothes… the colors I use look more beautiful on darker skin." Every year the houses of LaCroix, Chanel, Versace, and Saint Laurent book dark-skinned women of African descent to display their haute couture in the runway shows of Paris, Milan, and New York.

The appearance of a few highly paid African American supermodels ultimately does little to alter the perception that it is still White women whose images are most valued in our culture. One indication of this can be found in the sales figures of beauty magazines. Some magazines suffer a clear loss of revenue when a Black woman is featured on the cover. Another indication of how marginalized Black models continue to be is found in Vogu'e's 1992 book On the Edge: Images From 100 Years of Vogue. Conspicuously absent was African American supermodel Beverly Johnson. In 1974, she became the first Black woman to appear on the magazine's cover, but somehow the editors of this historical look-back into the world of fashion modeling deemed her not important enough to be included. In a letter to Vogue's owner, S. I. Newhouse, Johnson angrily addressed the racism behind this glaring omission:

I was proud to be the Jackie Robinson of the fashion world. To ignore that moment in history is to discredit all African American contributions in fashion as a people. I waited a year to write because I was shocked and traumatized by the incident.

While clearly an incident like this is brought about by the individuals in power rather than the models themselves, it nonetheless creates tension between the Black women and White women who work in the modeling industry.

In an effort to raise awareness of just how prejudiced the world of modeling can be, a consortium of powerful Black fashion models, including Naomi Campbell, Tyra Banks, Veronica Webb, Beverly Peele, and Iman, decided to organize into the Black Girls Coalition (BGC). In November of 1992, they held a press conference attended by more than a hundred journalists. Devoid of their high-fashion personas, these sought-after models asked some serious questions about African American women still getting so much less modeling work than their White counterparts. Campbell asked why the industry seemed able to single out only one Black model at a time to be its latest supermodel. "You can have ten or twenty White supermodels, and no one is saying, 'You're the new one; you'll bump out So-and-so.'" And Iman spoke of how racist it was to tell her that she looked like a "White woman dipped in chocolate," and, worse, how the comment was delivered as though it were a compliment. Other models told of constantly being asked to wear wigs, weaves, and falls to emulate the flowing hair of White women. While some people have criticized the BGC as spoiled, rich Black women asking for more at a time when more "girls" with "ethnic" looks are finding work as models, the founders of the BGC remain adamant in their determination to bring an end to prejudice in the modeling industry.

Beauty Pageants

Beauty pageants are yet another place where White women and Black women compete around their perceived attractiveness. The mother of all beauty contests remains the Miss America Pageant. It began in 1921 in the resort town of Atlantic City as a gimmick to boost sagging business sales over Labor Day, the summer's last holiday weekend. Each state in the union was asked to send its most attractive young White woman to parade in a bathing suit up and down the boardwalk in the hope that she might be crowned "the most beautiful woman in America." The event was a huge success. It was later brought inside, and contestants were judged on the basis of talent and poise, in addition to their appearance in a bathing suit. And the winners also were awarded huge college scholarships. But Black women were barred from competing. In response, the Black community formed its own contest, the Black Miss America pageant.

It was not until 1970 that the first Black woman, Cheryl Browne of Iowa, appeared on stage in the national Miss America contest. A Black woman did not win the pageant, however, until 1984, when Vanessa Williams was hailed the "most beautiful woman in America." Her crown sparked controversy in the Black community. While many were proud that one of their own had finally won, others were angered. With her green eyes, light skin and sandy, long hair, she seemed to resemble a White woman rather than a Black woman. That controversy was soon overshadowed by another when Penthouse published a series of nude pictures of Williams. In response, pageant officials took Vanessa Williams's crown away from her. Another Blackwoman, Suzette Charles, who was the runner-up that year, stepped in to finish out, uneventfully, the remaining two months of Williams's term. The African American community now rallied behind Williams, perhaps realizing that no matter how "White" her features, she was still vulnerable to attack by the White mainstream media. Williams has since gone to become not only a respected actress, but also a Grammy Award-winning singer.

Nonetheless, it wasn't until 1990 that pageant officials were ready to take a chance on another Black winner: African American Debbye Turner won the Miss America crown that year. The following year, another African American woman, Marjorie Judith Vincent, was crowned. Vincent's victory was considered a real breakthrough by some, because, despite the requisite shoulder-length hair, she has skin that is somewhat dark and facial features that are more Black in their characteristics than White. And then in 1994, yet another African American contestant, Kimberly Aiken, became Miss America.

Performing Arts

Beauty pageants aren't the only stage from which Black women, until recently, have been excluded. It wasn't until 1987 that the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes hired their first Black dancer, and she was only an alternate. Before that time, the director of the Rockettes, a White woman named Violet Holmes, defended the all-White mirror line on the grounds that its symmetry and precision would be ruined by the presence of "one or two black girls." African American cultural critic and legal scholar Patricia Williams wrote a scathing criticism of Holmes's rationalization in The Alchemy of Race and Rights:
Mere symmetry, of course, could be achieved by hiring all black dancers. It could be achieved by hiring light-skinned black dancers, in the tradition of the Cotton Club's grand heyday of condescension. It could be achieved by hiring an even number of black dancers and then placing them like little black anchors at either end or like hubcaps at the center, or by speckling them throughout the lineup at even intervals, for a nice checkerboard, melting-pot effect. It could be achieved by letting all the white dancers brown themselves in the sun a bit, to match the black dancers—something they were forbidden to do for many years because the owner of the Rockettes didn't want them to look "like colored girls."

From two to four, usually light-skinned, African American women now routinely appear in the kicking line, and audiences have coped just fine with the "disruption" of the show's harmony. Such a color-blind solution to the problem is no doubt abetted by the larger trend in theater productions of nontraditional casting. African American actresses and actors are now appearing in leads and secondary parts in what were once all-white productions by such playwrights as Shakespeare and Tennessee Williams.

For African American actresses, the benefits of nontraditional casting have been genuine. Not only are more of them finding work, but many are earning rave reviews for injecting new life into old lines. While one effect of nontraditional casting has been to allow more Black actors to play what were once White-only roles, the reverse-White actresses and actors playing Black roles—has not been successfully realized. In fact, the few attempts have created a firestorm of controversy.

African American director Phylis Griffin, of DePaul University's acclaimed Theatre School, encountered some resistance when she decided to cast White women in Ntozake Shange's play For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Was Enuf (1975). Her decision to do so did not come easily, and in the Playbill notes she went to great lengths to give her reasons. Her primary one was that DePaul's Theatre School never seemed to have enough African American women students to take the different parts. As a result, year after year the play kept getting shelved. Finally, Griffin, who is the only African American faculty member on staff, decided it was better to cast Shange's play nontraditionally than not produce it at all. Thus it was that, in December of 1993, For Colored Girls Who Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Was Enuf opened with four White women and three African American women playing the seven lead roles originally written for an all-Black female cast.

Griffin describes the experience of putting on this play as "surreal." More than a year after it closed, she confesses to having "intense dreams about the incomplete communication associated with that show." The African American actresses were furious with Griffin for allowing White women to tread on "their" territory, while the White actresses were intimidated and hurt by having been put in such a no-win situation. If they overacted, they risked grossly stereotyping Black women, but if they underacted, they were accused of not using their bodies fully or taking their parts seriously. During one performance, Griffin found one of the White actresses backstage crying after she was told by one of the African American actresses that her performance as a Black woman simply didn't "cut it."

This splitting of female roles into noninterchangeable parts is particularly evident among singers. Sixties rock legend Janis Joplin, for example, was constantly described as singing more like a Black woman than a White woman. Joplin herself once remarked that she had two distinct singing styles, her White choir voice and her Black gospel voice, inspired by the likes of Bessie Smith, Mavis Staples, and Big Maybelle. Regardless of a woman's race, soulfully and provocatively, she is said to be "Black," but if she sings or moves classically, or even in a pop style, she is said to be "White." Yet because of the cliche that Blacks have better rhythm than Whites, it is viewed as more insulting to a Black woman to be told that she moves and sings like a White woman than it is for a White woman to be told that she moves and sings like a Black woman. In fact, for many White women rock and blues singers, from Joplin to Bonnie Raitt and Rickie Lee Jones, the latter comment is considered a huge compliment.

Actress-singer-comedian Sandra Bernhard confronted the issue -- that White women feel they must steal from Black women to have soul in their performance -- in her stage show, Without You I'm Nothing, which was also released as an independent film in 1990. In the show, Bernhard appears before a largely disdainful Black audience at a Black nightclub. In one absurd scene, an older White woman, identified as Bernhard's manager, tries to argue the following point about Sandra:

And let's be frank -- she doesn't have any influences, she doesn't need any. And if you want my opinion, they've all stolen from her. Donna Summer, Tina Turner, Whoopie Goldberg, Nina Simone. And I have even seen traces of Sandra in Diana Ross.

Bernhard follows with a searing parody of Diana Ross. But the punchline -- and point -- is subsequently made not by Bernhard, but by the beautiful Black model Cynthia Bailey, who mysteriously pops in and out of several scenes. In the film's final moments, which take place in the now empty nightclub, Bailey glares at Bernhard. She then pulls out of her purse a tube of bright red lipstick and writes on a white tablecloth, "Fuck Sandra Bernhard." In effect, the Bailey character is saying, "You may think you're black, but I'm the one who has paid the dues." Freelance writer James Ledbetter, in an article about White wannabes in the music industry for Vibe magazine's premier issue, had this to say about Bernhard:

It is a rare white performer who is capable of pointing out the irony, and often the absurdity, in the ways in which white people appropriate blackness. In doing this, Bernhard goes even further: she is willing to play the idiotic white person-functioning, in essence, as the butt of her own jokes. So who better than Sandra Bernhard to break down this whole white-people-who-think-they're-black thing for us?

The music industry itself has played a part in stereotyping and dividing White and Black female performers. As in film and television, there has been a curious absence of cross-race pairings among female musicians and singers. From Benny Goodman's integrated swing band of the forties, to Paul Simon's world beat sound of the nineties, there is a rich history of White men and Black men performing music together. But White women and Black women musicians rarely record or perform on stage together.
While this is partly due to women's smaller presence and influence in the music industry at large, it also has to do with the way in which White women and Black women are sexualized and marketed for primarily male viewing audiences. To become successful in the music industry, especially as a singer, a woman, no matter how much raw talent she may possess, has an enormous advantage if she has a sexy body and a pretty face. Ultimately, whether she is an actress, model, beauty pageant winner, or singer, a woman on stage becomes a sexual object for male viewers. And it is here that the issue of race comes in. White women on stage sing to, and become the sexual objects primarily of, White men; when Black women sing, they are performing for, and being gazed at by, men of both races. Even Madonna, who has pushed the sex envelope more than any other White woman singer, has never appeared before a predominantly Black audience. Somehow, the image of a White woman sexually stirring an assembly of Black men remains vaguely taboo in our culture. Yet sexy Black women singers like Tina Turner are given free range to whip into a virtual frenzy an auditorium full of White men. Turner, for example, has appeared on stage and "privately danced" alongside a strutting Mick Jagger for a live worldwide concert broadcast before mostly White fans. But it is nearly impossible to conjure up the opposite image, that of a beautiful and scantly clad White woman sexily cavorting beside a Black male singer before a predominantly African American audience. The reason goes back to the role Black women have played as the objects of White men's sexual fantasies, as well as our history of White women long having been off limits to Black men. This lingering tension around race and women's sexuality ultimately explains why White women and Black women so rarely perform together. Occasionally, a woman of another race may be inserted as a background singer, but almost never do women of the two races actually sing together as equals. It would simply be too uncomfortable for most audiences. Perhaps that is why the one big hit that Black and White woman artists did do together, "Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves" (1985), by soul legend Aretha Franklin and White rock star Annie Lennox, was more of an anthem intended for female audiences than a sexy duet designed to seduce and entice men.

The emphasis on marketing women's sexual appeal in music became more pronounced during the eighties, with the emergence of music videos. Although a few women, such as African American songwriter and guitarist Tracy Chapman and White rocker Chrissie Hynde of the Pretenders, have successfully managed to escape being portrayed as sex kittens, many others have not. Sex sells, and the mostly male music producers know this. Some singers, like Madonna, have deliberately played up their sexuality, while others, like Annie Lennox, have begun to experiment with feminine images. Still others, like Whitney Houston, are so talented and strikingly attractive that they simply play it straight and sing to the camera. But, with notable exceptions like Houston, there has been a disturbing trend among both African American and White female singers to sell themselves sexually.

Violence against women in contemporary music is another issue that frequently divides Black and White women. Misogyny in lyrics is hardly new. Popular performers and groups from James Brown to the Beatles have written lyrics at one time or another that objectified and demeaned women. What is new is the extreme level of violence against women in the music of certain gangsta rappers. Most White women—and much of White society—are strongly opposed to lyrics that condone the rape of a woman, yet some Black women justify misogynist lyrics in rap music on the grounds that they are legitimate expressions of urban Black culture. But is it free speech that these women are protecting? Many African American women have simply been conditioned to defend whatever Black men do, even if their actions are potentially harmful to Black women. They fear that if they challenge Black men on such behavior, they will be ridiculed and ostracized for associating themselves with the politics of White feminists.

Indeed, this is what happened to African American Jamie Foster Brown, who publishes the women's hip-hop magazine *Sister 2 Sister*. She once sat in a meeting with a group of Black male recording executives listening to an about-to-be-released rap CD. One of the songs contained some sexually offensive lyrics, and Brown expressed her opposition to them. An executive responded, "Ah, why do you want to keep a Black man from making an honest dollar?" Another chimed in, saying that Brown was letting "White feminists influence her judgment." Brown angrily retorted, "I don't need a White woman to tell me that these lyrics are offensive."

One prominent African American woman who has 'oined in the fight against misogynist rap music is C. Delores Tucker, chair of the National Political Congress of Black Women (NPCBW). Under her leadership, the NPCBW unanimously passed a resolution in 1993 condemning any song containing "words, lyrics, and images that degrade and denigrate African American women with obscenities and vulgarities of the violent nature." Some prominent Black male leaders, including nationally syndicated newspaper columnist William Raspberry, are also calling for an end to this madness. In a 1993 column, Raspberry asked why it was that when "Ross Perot addresses a black audience as "you people," we go ballistic. Rappers call our women "bitches" and "ho's," and we develop lockjaw." A growing number of all-Black music radio stations, including KACE-FM in Los Angeles, have decided that they will no longer play music advocating violence or disrespect for women. Nonetheless, music executives and the rappers themselves have continued, unabated, to reap profit from such lyrics. Unfortunately, an unintended side effect of radio stations refusing to play music advocating violence against women is brisk business for gangsta rap CDs. Ultimately, African American women will have to join their White sisters in bringing in end to such misogyny.

As we've seen across the various media outlets, White women and Black women have been grossly stereotyped, maligned, and, worse, ignored altogether. Women's cross-race relations are without representation in most media outlets. In large part, this is because women, and particularly Black women, throughout history have lacked creative and marketing control over their portrayals. And the more expensive and influential the medium is, the less likely their chances to change the situation. Even when an African American female film director such as Euzhan Palcy is given the opportunity to make a major Hollywood film, she must exercise great restraint when choosing a project if she hopes to remain a player. Millions of dollars are required to produce and market major CD releases, music videos, television series, and films, and the companies and individual backers tend to be conservative. In fact, Palcy's understanding of the politics involved is reflected in her explanation for choosing to direct *A Dry White Season* (1989), a film about the effects of apartheid in South Africa not on a Black woman or a Black man, but on a White man (acted by Donald Sutherland).

I knew as a black filmmaker I now needed to do something about apartheid. I also know that no one wants to put any money into a...
film about black people. Black in Hollywood isn't commercial . . . I hate the idea that every time you talk about something like Vietnam, you have to have a white hero. But I want to scream to people who say this; they should write more, and they should join me and fight against those who have the money and the power to produce a movie.

While Palcy's call to "fight against those who have the money and power was targeted specifically at filmmaking, it can also be understood as a call to arms to women of all races to seize control of how they are depicted. The portrayal of Black women and White women in literature, television, advertising, modeling, beauty pageants, music videos, and rap lyrics has begun to change, but given the politics of money and power, White women and Black women would present a stronger, more united front if they joined forces to abolish their stereotypes. Both Black and White women must look at the interests and issues they have in common rather than focusing only on those which drive them apart. Only when Black women and White women change the way they interact with each other can they hope to challenge the limited and predictable portrayals of that interaction in the media.