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EMBODIED PUBLIC POLICIES: THE SEXUAL STEREOTYPING OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF U.S. POLICIES

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Images of black women as “oversexed” and hyper-fertile have persisted in the United States from slavery through the eugenics movement and into modern welfare debates. Stereotypes such as the “Hottentot Venus” and the “black welfare queen” have often dominated public discourse and shaped laws governing sex, reproduction and family life. Policy makers need to assess their own and their colleagues’ roles in perpetuating such stereotypical constructions of individual attributes in order to create policies that recognize the ways in which the subjects of their policies are complexly shaped by social, political and economic forces.

INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes of black women as sexually unrestrained have influenced U.S. public policy since the 17th century.¹ In this paper, I will look at the historical production of stereotypes about black women’s bodies and the ways in which these myths have influenced U.S. public policy. Specifically, I will trace the role these sexual stereotypes about black women have played in the development and implementation of U.S. public policy during slavery, sterilization campaigns beginning in the late nineteenth century, and more recent welfare legislation.

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This paper is an attempt to interrogate the ways in which policy makers envision the subjects of their policies and the impact of these visions on the policies they create. To this end, it traces the development and reinforcement of one set of stereotypes of black women as “oversexed” and hyper-fertile. My intent here is not to propose that this is the only stereotype written onto black women’s bodies or that stereotypes of black women are the only important stereotypes to consider in the creation, implementation and evaluation of public policies. My purpose, instead, is to push policy-makers and policy analysts to consider the ways in which stereotypes that rely on multiple axes of power and difference (gender, race, class, age, etc.) seep into the fabric of public policies and “color” the ways in which we discuss and analyze them. I want to offer policy-makers and policy analysts a historical analysis of the ways in which one type of stereotype has influenced policy-making in order to encourage others to undertake similar analyses of the ways in which public policies produce, reinforce and rely on damaging stereotypes of their subjects.

A SEARCH FOR ORIGINS

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the location and moment in time in which stereotypes are born, feminist and race theorists have pointed to various originary sites of the myth of black women’s bodies as sexually unrestrained. Barbara Omolade asserts that the sexual stereotyping of black women’s bodies is rooted in colonialism. She argues that European male colonists read African women’s sexuality “according to [their] own definitions of sex, nudity, and blackness as base, foul, and bestial (Omolade 1995, 362).” Omolade contends that European perceptions of the sexuality of the colonized as “[absent] of any sexual codes of behavior” led to a simultaneous fascination and repulsion with this sexuality.² Historian Richard Hofstadter explains:

Naked and libidinous: for the white man’s preoccupation with Negro sexuality was there at the very beginning, an outcome not only of his own guilt at sexual exploitation-his easy access to the black woman was immediately blamed on her lasciviousness-but also of this envious suspicion that some extraordinary potency and ecstatic experience were associated with primitive lust (Hofstadter in Omolade 1995, 363).

Paula Giddings argues that scientific and anthropological interest in and exhibition of Sara Bartman, a.k.a. the “Hottentot Venus,” played a crucial role in the creation of the stereotype of black women as sexually unrestrained. Bartman, a South African woman, was “discovered” by

anthropologists and subsequently displayed throughout Europe from 1810-1815 (Giddings 1995). Scientific and popular interest in Bartman revolved around “the extraordinary size and shape of her buttocks” and genitalia (Giddings 1995, 416).

Sander L. Gilman agrees with Giddings’ analysis, arguing that the sexual parts of the “Hottentot Venus” were central to white images of black women and black sexuality throughout the nineteenth century (Gilman in Giddings 1995). He posits that the links between sex and race were developed during this period, when cultural stereotypes equated blackness with a sexuality that was both alluring and dangerous, a fecundity that was both copious and threatening (Gilman 1985).

Cultural conceptions of black women as sexually unrestrained were further developed in the American colonies. Although all blacks were “fearfully thought to be [creatures] under the domination of [their] passions (Takaki 1990, 114),” black women in particular were equated with “sinful, evil strength and carnal knowledge (Omolade, 1995, 363)” and were viewed by whites as both “sexually available and morally impure (Abramovitz 1996, 59).” Black slave women were referred to in terms of their sexuality and ability to reproduce. They were perceived to have “excessively ‘large nipples’ and ‘an extraordinary ease of child bearing’ (Stetson 1982, 73).” One advertisement for a black female slave bragged that she was “very prolific in her generating qualities, and affords a rare opportunity to any person who wishes to raise a family of healthy servants for their own use (Stetson 1982, 74).” Winthrop Jordan points to the South Carolina Gazette and various West Indian books published during slavery as sites where “the common assumption that Negro women were especially passionate (Jordan in Stetson 1982, 73)” was put into print. He asserts that during this period the black woman was popularly conceptualized as “the sunkissed embodiment of ardency (Jordan in Stetson 1982, 73).”

The positioning of blacks between animals and humans on the “Great Chain of Being” was integrally linked to the black woman: philosophers, scientists, scholars, lawmakers, and physicians agreed that it was the black woman who attracted the sexual attention of orangutans and who had, at some unknown historical moment, created the black race by mating with the orangutan (Stetson 1982). Thomas Jefferson explained this mating through an assertion that the orangutan’s desire for sexual union with black women was a drive to better the orangutan race. According to Jefferson, this made sense in a world in which whites, who sat at the pinnacle of the Great Chain of Being, desired to preserve the “white beauty

and 'loveliness' (Takaki 1990, 47)" of their own race by avoiding miscegenation. He writes, "the circumstance of superior beauty is thought worthy of attention in the propagation of our horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man?" (Takaki 1990, 47)

Constructions of black women as beyond the moral constraints of white sexuality codes were contrasted with images of white women as the embodiment of the "Cult of True Womanhood" (Welter 1966) which held up purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness as the four ideals towards which (white) women should strive. Louise Newman reports that black women "exposed the unstated but implicit racism in the ideology of true womanhood, which stigmatized women of color as incapable of chastity, purity, and moral virtue (Newman 1999, 6)." Newman explains, "Whether the 'primitive' woman was embodied in the white imagination as the Indian squaw, an Oriental harem girl, or an African savage, she became the physical yardstick by which white women in the United States measured their own moral status, social progress, and racial development (Newman 1999, 42)."

This stereotyping of black women's bodies fit nicely with the self-proclaimed white male right to sexual freedom: white men could have unrestrained sex with black women (claiming no responsibility for the consequences of this practice) while protecting the purity and chastity of white women, with whom sex only occurred within the boundaries of marriage (Omolade 1995). The construction of black women as oversexed was also reinforced, reflected, and propagated through the lynching campaigns of the late 1800s, which were based on the stereotyping of black men as rapists of white women. Paula Giddings explains: "black men were thought capable of these sexual crimes because of the lascivious character of the women of the race in a time when women were considered the foundation of a group's morality (Giddings 1995, 415)."

As early as 1662, U.S. public policy both reflected and reinforced the stereotyping of black women as "sexually unrestrained" by asserting white men's rights to control and fix the limits of the sexual behavior of black women while supporting the sexual freedom of white men. During that year, the Virginia colony passed a piece of legislation stating that all children born within the colony would follow the condition of the mother. This legislation overruled English common law's determination of a child's status through the father's condition and allowed white men to exercise their self-proclaimed right to sex with black women without concern for the consequences of their actions. The law "implicitly condoned sexual intercourse between white men and black slave women, in

effect allowing white men more legal, social, and psychological freedom by not holding them responsible for any offspring resulting from sexual relations with female slaves (Stetson 1982, 72).” During slavery, this law provided support for slave owners’ use of black women’s bodies as a means of increasing capital through coerced or forced sex with black male slaves or with the slave owners themselves (Omolade 1995).

THE EUGENICS MOVEMENT, BIRTH CONTROL, AND COMPULSORY STERILIZATION

Cultural stereotypes about black women’s sexuality were again reflected in and reinforced by the eugenics movement that began in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Faced with national questions about the colonization of Cuba, Guam, and the Philippines, policy-makers and concerned citizens debated the plausibility of implementing assimilationist policies (developed after the Civil War to “assimilate” blacks, American Indians and immigrant groups) to deal with foreign “savages.” Social theorists addressed these concerns by reconceptualizing the white man as less adaptable than previously thought and thus free to have sex with the colonized without causing concerns of racial degeneration. Other theorists, including women’s rights activists, revised white women’s traditional role as “mothers of the race” to encompass their new duty as “racial conservators” who harbored the ability to ensure “racial progress” despite white men’s miscegenation as long as they produced sufficient numbers of racially “pure” offspring (Newman 1999).

With intellectual roots in the work of Francis Galton, eugenics took hold as a social movement in the United States in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and continued to draw adherents into the 1920s and 1930s. When the white birth rate significantly decreased in the late nineteenth century as the United States became increasingly urban, eugenicists called for restrictions on immigration, anti-miscegenation laws and birth control campaigns to “control the reproduction of so-called ‘inferior’ groups in order to promote ‘racial progress’ (Newman 1999, 46).” Stereotypes about black women’s hyper-fertility fueled the call for government regulation of the reproduction of non-whites (Davis 1981; Newman 1999). President Theodore Roosevelt cautioned against the impending threat of “race suicide” and the white middle class women’s birth control movement responded by asserting that blacks, immigrants and the poor had a moral duty to control their reproduction. As the eugenics movement gained popularity during the first decades of the twentieth century, birth control advocates and eugenicists teamed up to

provide contraception to-and ultimately to sterilize-women from poor and immigrant communities and communities of color (Davis 1981).

In 1939, the Birth Control Federation of America planned a “Negro Project” that attempted to get black ministers to lead local birth control committees, based on a belief that “the masses of Negroes, particularly in the South, still breed carelessly and disastrously, with the result that the increase among Negroes...is from that portion of the population least fit, and least able to rear children properly (Davis 1981, 393).” Although the movement died out at the end of the 1930s, sterilization campaigns continued into the 1970s. By 1970, 20 percent of all married black women in the United States had been sterilized. Other women of color were also subjected to these campaigns. In 1976, 24 percent of all American Indian women of childbearing age had been sterilized, and in 1970, 20 percent of all Chicana women had been sterilized.

Public policies and public management practices at both the state and the federal level supported the eugenicists’ efforts and the sterilization campaigns that lived on after the popular movement’s demise. In 1932, the Eugenics Society bragged that twenty-six states had passed compulsory sterilization laws “and that thousands of ‘unfit’ persons had already been surgically prevented from reproducing (Davis 1981, 393).” Between 1933 and the mid-1970s, the state of North Carolina alone conducted 7,686 sterilizations under the auspices of the state’s Eugenics Commission, 5,000 of which were performed on black women. In 1972, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare stated that the federal government had funded between 100,000 and 200,000 sterilizations that year-at the high end this estimate of U.S. government-funded sterilizations in a single year came close to the total number of sterilizations conducted under the Hereditary Health Law during the entire course of the Nazi regime. Beginning in the 1950s, the U.S. government’s sterilization campaign under the guise of population control in Puerto Rico resulted in a 20 percent decline in population growth by the mid-1960s and the sterilization of more than 35 percent of all Puerto Rican women of childbearing age by the 1970s. In 1970, African American women accounted for 43 percent of sterilizations funded by the U.S. government (Davis 1981).

FAMILY VALUES DISCOURSE AND WELFORM REFORM

Bonnie Thornton Dill, Maxine Baca Zinn and Sandra Patton assert that modern family values discourse blames the “breakdown of the family” on the unrestrained sexuality of black women. They argue that the family

values campaigns' explanation of social decay as rooted in the degeneration of the family unit that has become broadly accepted in modern mainstream political discourse centers on racialized stereotypes of black women. They write: "the images of unrestrained childbearing, freeloading, idleness, delinquency, crime, violence, abandonment, abuse, gangs and lack of love are all associated with single mothers on welfare and inscribed on the bodies of black women (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 13)."

According to Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton, the image of the "black welfare queen" sits at the heart of the family values debate. This image is the latest incarnation of the African woman dubbed sexually unrestrained by European colonists, the slave woman forced to increase the slave holder's "capital" during U.S. slavery, and the unrestrained black woman breeder who threatened the "racial purity" of the United States according to eugenicists. The black welfare queen is a "bad mother" who is constructed as pathological because she is single and because she gives birth to many children in order to get her hands on public funds that she doesn't deserve (she is undeserving because of her failure to conform to "traditional" family values). This mother is designated black through "an assumed racialization of sexual and reproductive deviance (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 8)" that equates the deviant black single mother with perceived black family pathology. Critical race feminist Nathalie A. Augustin explains:

The "welfare mother" is a deviant social creature. She is able-bodied, but unwilling to work at any of the thousands of jobs available to her; she is fundamentally lazy and civically irresponsible; she spends her days doing nothing but sponging off the government's largesse. Despite the societal pressure to be gainfully employed, she enjoys her status as a "dependent" on the state and seeks at all costs to prolong her dependency. Promiscuous and shortsighted, she is a woman who defiantly has children out of wedlock. Without morals of her own, she is unlikely to transmit good family values to her children. She lacks the educational skills to get ahead and the motivation to acquire them. Thus, she is the root of her own family's intergenerational poverty and related social ills. She is her own worst enemy. *And she is Black.* (Italics mine) (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 7)

Understanding single motherhood (which, as explained above, gets equated with black single motherhood) as the result of personal or cultural "problems" conceals the structural and economic causes of poverty (Abramovitz 1996; Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998). This

conceptualization of the causes of single motherhood echoes the “pathological black family” perspective first put forth by DuBois (1908) and Frazier (1939) and popularized in the 1960s by Moynihan (1965) that blames the ruination of the black family on the “aggressive black matriarch” (Bell Scott 1982; Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998). Black women’s supposed sexual aggressiveness thus gets equated with the breakdown of the black family through black women’s failure to comply with patriarchal white middle class gender roles that assign familial power to men. Discourse about “personal values” and the “culture of poverty” ignores government’s interest in perpetuating this patriarchal family structure, a structure that “controls and directs the fertility, sexuality and child rearing, and employment behavior of women (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 16).” Thus the focus on (white middle class) “family values” obscures the ways in which stereotypes about black women’s sexuality produce a desire to police the reproduction of black women.

The primary threat of the black welfare queen becomes, in the language of family values, her production of “illegitimate” children who “are likely to become unruly citizens (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 20)” and her subsequent contamination of white women, creating an “epidemic of illegitimacy (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 8).” In his testimony to the House Subcommittee on Human Resources, Charles Murray, whose theories have fueled conservatives’ allegations of the “disincentive effects of the expansion of welfare programs (Harrison 1999, 104)” and who explicitly contends that the facts support the common American perception that the majority of women on welfare are black and/or Latino asserts that:

Illegitimacy is the single most important social problem in our time—more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness because it drives everything else. Doing something about it is not just one more item on the American policy agenda, but should be at the top (in Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 20; Abramovitz 1996, 363).

In 1996, welfare reform legislation emerged as a “cure” for the illegitimacy that Murray and others claimed lay at the center of our nation’s social ills. Family values advocates garnered support for the Personal Responsibility Act by touting it as a means of disciplining and controlling the sexual behavior of black women (and, by example, white women). Megan McLaughlin argues that while welfare reform advocates possess “a fervent desire to limit the number of children that poor people have,” legal and

societal constraints prevent them from directly stating this desire and push them to couch their arguments in moral discussions of the danger of single motherhood, particularly amongst teens (McLaughlin 1995, 65). In light of Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton's argument that "poor woman on welfare equals black woman," we can read the Personal Responsibility Act's focus on teen pregnancy as a veiled expression of a desire to limit the reproduction of black women. The act details a lengthy list of the negative outcomes of teen pregnancy and parenthood, including a greater likelihood of long-term reliance on public assistance and "lower cognitive scores" and "lower educational aspirations" for women who have children before completing high school as well as increased likelihood that children raised in such homes will "[become] teenage parents themselves (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton 1998, 20)." Welfare reform's cure for illegitimacy is to make it impossible for poor (read black) single mothers to survive on public assistance for long. The five year lifetime limit on benefits, the two-year work requirement, the requirement that minors live at home or with an adult and are enrolled in school, and the requirement that unwed mothers cooperate in identifying paternity can all be read as attempts to punish and restrain black women whose sexual and reproductive actions fail to comply with white middle class "family values."

In addition to limiting the ability of poor black women to live on welfare, family values advocates propose another legislative technique for uplifting "illegitimate" children from their pathological family life: interracial adoption. Barely hidden in this ideology is a move from the control of the reproduction of the "oversexed" and "pathological" black woman to the control of the progeny she (re)produces. Murray once again is on the cutting edge of conservative responses to illegitimacy. In his and Richard J. Herrnstein's contested and misleading book *The Bell Curve*, interracial adoption becomes "the only social intervention radical enough to raise the IQs, and thus the chances for economic success, of poor, illegitimate children (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998, 24)." Although it was removed from the final version of the welfare reform bill, every previous version included the removal of all restrictions to transracial adoption as one of the strategies for combating illegitimacy. Despite the removal of this provision from the final version of the bill, during the week that the Personal Responsibility Act became law, a significant tax deduction for couples who adopt and legislation barring federally funded adoption agencies from considering race in child placement were also passed.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the Personal

Responsibility Act's predecessor, was not entirely unlike its successor in its reliance on stereotypes and its attempts to regulate black women's reproduction. Mimi Abramovitz argues that conflicts between desires to ensure both the reproduction of the labor force and the existence of low wage female labor on the one hand and a "general disregard for single mothers and racist attitudes (Abramovitz 1996, 315)" on the other shaped the Aid to Dependent Children (AFDC's name prior to 1962) program from the start. Abramovitz asserts that negative attitudes toward single women showed up in the decision to keep ADC benefits below the prevailing market wage, which, in addition to answering policy-makers' concerns about a "work ethic," also communicated their desires to preserve what Abramovitz calls "the family ethic" (Abramovitz 1996, 36) by making welfare less attractive than marriage and domestic life. Abramovitz's "family ethic" refers to historically contingent patriarchal conceptualizations of gender roles as biologically determined that are codified in societal institutions and "operate as [mechanisms] of social regulation and control (Abramovitz 1996, 38)." Whether emanating from the "cult of domesticity" in the nineteenth century or later models of ideal womanhood, the family ethic continues to assert the white, middle-class married woman as the harbinger of proper gender performance and excludes poor, immigrant women and women of color from the "rights of womanhood" by constituting them as the "Other" against which white women are defined.

Abramovitz argues that the ADC program adhered to the earlier Mothers' Pension philosophies that single mothers were "deviant," that mothers' employment outside the home harmed their children, and that "deserving" women belonged in the home. The program thus "substituted itself for the absent male breadwinner in an attempt to make the 'deviant' husbandless family approximate the 'normal' one (Abramovitz 1996, 341)." Likewise, it made the receipt of benefits dependent on a woman's fulfillment of the family ethic by distinguishing between undeserving and deserving women through "suitable home" policies. While only implicitly condoned in the early years of ADC, the Federal Bureau of Public Assistance officially sanctioned these policies in 1940.

The ideological barriers to allowing black women into the circle of "deserving" women constituted the barely hidden racial undertones of such policies. Bell asserts that states employed these rules with the specific intent of denying benefits to mothers of black children and children born out of wedlock (Bell 1965 in Abramovitz 1996). Abramovitz asserts that a related policy implemented by some states that disqualified women

deemed “employable mothers” also discriminated against black women, citing a southern public assistance field supervisor’s report that:

The number of Negro cases is few due to the unanimous feeling on the part of the staff and board that there are more work opportunities for Negro women and to their intense desire not to interfere with local labor conditions. The attitude that they have always gotten along, and that ‘all they’ll do is have more children’ is definite...There is hesitancy on the part of lay boards to advance too rapidly over the thinking of their own communities, which see no reason why the employable Negro mother should not continue her usually sketchy seasonal labor or indefinite domestic service rather than receive a public assistance grant (Abramovitz 1996, 318).

This supervisor’s reference to the image of the black welfare queen who will only “have more children” if given the funds demonstrates that stereotypes about hyper-fertile black women breeding off the nation’s pocketbook were in place long before 1990s debates about welfare reform.

As the ADC rolls grew from the 1940s to the 1960s in response to population growth and family structure and labor market changes, critics ignored structural causes and began to attack the personal behavior of mothers receiving ADC, an attack that largely “grew out of racial tensions, a feeling that ADC families should behave in a manner not expected of others, and a lack of understanding of the ADC recipients and of the problems which they face which created their dependency (Greenleigh Associates in Abramovitz 1996, 322).” Previously based solely on financial need, states’ eligibility requirements began to include moral fitness standards. “Suitable home” rules were joined by “man-in-the-house” and “substitute father” policies which punished women on ADC for any contact with men that could be perceived as possible breadwinners and thus barred large numbers of single mothers and women of color from receiving assistance. Already defined as sexually unrestrained, black women were in a particularly vulnerable position when it came to welfare workers’ decisions about intimate relationships with men. As Abramovitz explains, these cuts “continued the harsh treatment historically meted out to poor women and women of color by public aid programs which forced them to work outside the home and routinely denied them the rights of womanhood under the terms of the family ethic” (Abramovitz 1996, 327).

1960s anti-welfare sentiment relied on stereotypes about women on welfare much like those employed by 1990s welfare reform advocates. Senator Russell Long of Louisiana referred to women on welfare as “brood mares’ who stay home to produce more children whom they raise

in an atmosphere of dependency” and argued that the system was “being manipulated by malingerers, cheaters, and outright frauds (Abramovitz 1996, 335).” The 1967 amendments to the Social Security Act answered such critics by extending regulations designed for “undeserving” women to all recipients. By limiting the allowable number of children born outside of marriage, increasing the possibility of the removal of children from the home, and requiring recipients to obtain employment outside the home, the amendments “[penalized] the entire AFDC caseload, now largely composed of single mothers and families of color, for lack of compliance with the family ethic (Abramovitz 1996, 337).” Directly tied to images of unrestrained fertility, the 1967 amendments also froze federal aid for cases arising from desertion or out-of-wedlock births³ and marked the first inclusion of a birth control provision “for the purpose of preventing and reducing out-of-wedlock births (Abramovitz 1996, 337).” Finally, although never fully implemented, the 1967 amendments’ Work Incentive Program (WIN), like more recent welfare to work programs, relied on a perception of welfare mothers as lacking the motivation and willingness to work.

In the 1980s, the combination of a failing economy and increasing public awareness of the decreasing prominence of the patriarchal nuclear family created anxiety about the loss of national “family values.” Reagan’s White House Working Group on the Family blamed both the failing economy and the changing face of U.S. families on social welfare programs, calling for reductions in welfare benefits in order to restore the two-parent, male-headed heterosexual family. Frustrated at welfare’s failure to ensure that the nation’s poor adhered to both the work and family ethics, conservatives expressed outrage over the fact that more poor women were receiving welfare benefits than were working and that AFDC had legitimized single motherhood by allowing women to live on their own rather than forcing them, as was intended, to comply with patriarchal gender roles. The 1988 Family Support Act completed AFDC’s evolution into a mandatory work program by replacing the Work Incentive Program with the more coercive Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Program (JOBS). Like the next decade’s round of welfare reform, “the ‘reformers’ rationalized the new program by billing AFDC recipients as lazy and unmotivated women who needed the strong arm of the state to make them go to work (Abramovitz 1996, 358).”

CONCLUSION

The myth of the sexually unrestrained black woman has permeated U.S. public thought and influenced U.S. public policy since the 17th century. I have drawn heavily from both Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn and Patton and

Abramovitz's work in order to demonstrate that government attempts to control this perceived unbridled sexuality through the regulation of black women's reproduction is not solely an historical concern. Like earlier evocations of black women as oversexed and hyper-fertile, 1990s family values rhetoric can be read as rooted in a powerful stereotype that equates black women with frightful fecundity. As the latest manifestation of a long line of policies that emanate from these strains of thought, the 1996 Personal Responsibility Act can be seen as a racialized expression of a desire to "[curtail] the 'excess' fertility of undesirables (Thornton Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998, 26)."

Public policies should be designed with attention to the myriad factors that shape their subjects' lives rather than relying on reductive and faulty visions of those subjects. To this end, policy makers and policy analysts should resist calls to disregard critical theoretical and applied work and engage with scholarship outside their field(s) in order to gain a sense of different perspectives and divergent debates. Such engagement can help policy makers and analysts garner insight into the ongoing influence of stereotypes in the development and implementation of public policies and become attentive to the ways in which such myths privilege hegemonic norms. While stereotypes about the subjects of public policy will never be easy to change, it is imperative that policy makers and policy analysts interrogate such stereotypes in order to gain insight into the beliefs and values that underlie the policies they consider. It is also crucial that such interrogations involve self-reflexive assessments of policy makers' and policy analysts' own roles in the creation and perpetuation of stereotypes. With such careful attention, policy makers and analysts can most effectively argue for governance that reflects the ways in which the governed are differently affected by complex social, political and economic forces.

Notes

1 My use of the term "black" is in no way meant to imply a reliance on a biological or cultural model of racial difference that sets up people of color (in this case, "black" people) as innately or "culturally" different than "white" people. Biological and cultural theories on "race" are rooted in historical constructions of people of color as naturally inferior to "whites" and have been used, as this essay attempts to demonstrate, to justify myriad discriminatory practices against "non-whites." In this essay, "black" is, like "woman," intended to represent a view of social markers as constructed and always contingent—both across space and time and on other markers of social identity. Adding to common feminist conceptions of gender as socially constructed, Judith Butler (1993) has argued

that the category “sex” is also a social construction that is produced and regulated through a set of racially informed heterosexual norms that designate which bodies “matter” and which do not and that define those bodies that matter through the very exclusion of their immaterial counterparts (or, in other words, through the abjection of those bodies that “don’t matter”). Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s (1992) discussion of the “metalanguage of race” encourages feminist scholars to employ a similar constructivist eye to “race.” In “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” Higginbotham explains the importance of: defining the construction, elaboration, and execution of the discourses of race, gender and sexuality; uncovering the ways in which race is a metalanguage that has an underlying influence on the ways in which other social relations of power are fabricated and symbolized; and paying attention to the deployment of race as a “double-voiced discourse (196)” of both white oppression and black resistance that, in its liberating form, thwarts the recognition of difference within the black community. I thus employ “black” and “woman” as constructed categories (and attempt to demonstrate some of the ways in which such constructions are formulated, regulated, and altered over time and space) with an awareness of both their oppressive and their liberatory potential.

- 1 Despite what the terms imply, I do not adhere to a conception of subject construction as categorically distinct: i.e., I do not believe that subjects are produced along discrete lines of race, class, gender, etc., but rather that they are constructed and regulated according to what Wendy Brown (1997) calls “contingent developments, formations that may be at odds with or convergent with each other, and trajectories of power that vary in weight for different kinds of subjects (94).” My use of these terms to (inadequately) evoke this sense of a marker of socially produced and regulated identities is, itself, a reminder of the lack of terminology available to scholars at this historical moment. I employ the terms with full recognition of the danger of implying oversimplified similarities within groups and differences between groups and the consequent risk of reinforcing existing racial and gender hierarchies.
- 2 Robert Young explores this theme in depth in *Colonial Desire*. According to Young, since the 1840s racial theory has simultaneously attempted to separate the races and expressed an ongoing fascination with their mixing. While theorists have focused on the differences between the races and identified them in opposition to each other, they have at the same time been driven by what Young terms “colonial desire”: a preoccupation with inter-racial sexual union and hybridity. Young asserts that this desire is both a reflection of and a result of the commodification of bodies that sat at the center of colonialism: bodies

were exchanged both as economic goods and through sexual intercourse. He argues that these theories live on in modern racism's ongoing connection with sexuality and desire, even within the minds of today's postcolonial cultural theorists in the West.

³ As a result of the heated public debates surrounding this freeze, two presidents delayed its imposition before Congress repealed it in 1969.

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