

Why Does The Porn Industry Get Away With Racist Portrayals Of Black People?

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This guest piece was written by [Carolyn M. West, Ph.D.](#), an expert in domestic violence and sexual assault. 5-minute read.

TRIGGER WARNING

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Racism in Pornography: Why I care and you should too

By Carolyn M. West, Ph.D., University of Washington

As a Psychology Professor, who has been investigating domestic violence and sexual assault for more than two decades, I never aspired to be a pornography researcher and I never expected to produce something like my documentary, [“Let Me Tell Ya’ll ‘Bout Black Chicks: Images of Black Women in Pornography.”](#) Yet, I became inspired to do this work after reviewing the visual images on more than 4,000 front and back covers of pornographic DVDs featuring Black women performers that had been produced in the past 20 years.

Here’s what I have learned along the way and why I think you should care about racism in porn.

Why does porn get a pass?

As critical consumers of media, we have begun to critique racism in just about every media format—movies, Twitter and Facebook feeds, and even children’s programming.

Despite the financial benefits of its release on the Disney’s streaming site, Bob Iger, the company’s [chief executive wisely concluded](#) that the 1946 film *Song of the South* “wouldn’t necessarily sit right or feel right to a number of people today.” In this case, it was probably a good corporate move to apply cancel culture to a movie that featured musical and animated sequences of happy formerly enslaved Black people on a post-Civil War Southern plantation.

Yet, in our same culture, the porn industry appears to get a free pass to promote horrifically racist and abusive content in the name of sexual entertainment to anyone with internet access, even children.

At the time of writing, [PornHub has an average of 115 million daily visits](#), which is equivalent of the combined populations of Canada, Australia, Poland, and the Netherlands all visiting this popular website in one day. Despite PornHub’s terms and conditions that do not allow “racial slurs or hate speech,” a search for the “n” word turned up thousands of user-loaded videos with the word used in the title, description, or in comments. This should violate the rules by anyone’s measure. Even on professional porn sets the “n” word is frequently hurled at Black men performing with White women.

The racism was so unbearable for one Black performer named Maurice McKnight, who performed under the name Moe the Monster, that he [filed a lawsuit against the director](#) for allowing another performer to call him the n-word, against his wishes, during filming. Talk about a hostile work environment.

It doesn't take long to stumble upon any number of racist titles that promote offensive and unwarranted racial stereotypes about Black women. Relegated to "gonzo" porn, which are low budget films with little glamor, Black women most often play the role of prostitutes in videos entitled *"Ebony Sex Workers"* and *"Black Girls Working the Streets."* Not satisfied to call them the usual gonzo terms of slut/whore/cumdumpster, the performers are called *"Black Ghetto Freaks"* and *"Inner City Sluts."* To further smear them as lower class, Black women are featured in urban settings, rundown buildings, and trash-filled alleys.

So porn sexualizes everyone, but the combination of racism, sexism, and often classism, since Black women are often shown in distressed communities, leaves Black women both sexualized and dehumanized in different ways than other ethnic groups.

Over the years, thanks in part to the civil rights activists, overt examples of racism that were once commonplace in mainstream media have become less acceptable. Yet, hidden behind the façade of fantasy and fun, porn delivers racist stereotypes that would be considered unacceptable were they in any form of mass-produced media.

We should all care because no multi-billion dollar business should side-step scrutiny after they play on and cash in on racially harmful images.

History matters

The myth that Black women are more hypersexual and animalistic [has been used to justify](#) enslavement, rape, forced reproduction, and other forms of sexual coercion throughout the United States' history.

Ideas that originated in slavery continue to live on and to be graphically depicted in pornography. "Too good!" was how a Black woman, who was dressed as maid,

described her enthusiastic sexual encounter with two performers dressed as Klu Klux Klan members, a White supremacist organization founded in 1866. This scene was featured in the 1985 porn video *"Let Me Tell Ya'll 'Bout Black Chicks."*

More recently, the video series *Cum Bang* described a similar version of "Hillbilly Hog Heaven" where multiple Confederate flag-waving White men ejaculate on one Black woman. In other video series, the violence against Black women is overt, graphic, and deeply disturbing as in the series *Ghetto Gaggers*, which shows Black women being beaten, choked, and humiliated. The website invites the viewer to "join to see White boys conquering Angry Black women." You can even buy merchandise, including t-shirts and coffee mugs, with the Ghetto Gaggers logo.

We should care about racism in porn because as we continue to unearth the stories of sexual brutality that were experienced by countless Black women, [such as what happened to Recy Taylor](#), the aforementioned titles have eroticized, sanitized, and erased this long history of sexual terrorism against Black women in this country. When viewers are unaware of this history, sexual violence can become a joke. Perhaps, this is why *(link trigger warning)* [a comedian could sing](#) the catchy, theme song to *"Let Me Tell Ya'll 'Bout Black Chicks"* and laugh about becoming aroused by images of Black women being anally, orally, and vaginally penetrated by men dressed as Klu Klux Klan members.

Porn shouldn't be sex education

After more than 20 years of teaching Human Sexuality courses, it makes me profoundly sad [when young people admit](#), "Without porn...I wouldn't know half the things I know now."

Some Black and Latinx teenagers watched porn for sexual entertainment, instructional purposes, and to alleviate boredom. [Even some celebrities have joked](#) *(link trigger warning)* about getting their sex education from porn.

To be clear, the representations of adults engaged in healthy, respectful sexuality is hardly the problem, but rather it is the ways in which images in porn perpetuate and validate racism and violence that calls for a major transformation. Porn shouldn't be sex education. We must do a better job of educating all children and young people. [Some states](#) are moving in that direction.

Taken together, porn both shapes and reflects racism in society. On March 21, 2020, the annual [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#), we must seek to confront racism in all its forms and formats. Porn doesn't get a pass.



About the Author

Dr. Carolyn M. West is a Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Washington where she teaches courses on Human Sexuality, Family Violence, and Sex Crimes and Sexual Violence. She is nationally recognized for her scholarship on gender-based violence in the lives of African American women, specializing in domestic violence, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. She can be reached at www.DrCarolynWest.com.