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Where the White Women at? White Liberal Men and their Race Card

By Richard Leader

“Has Katrina saved the US Media?” The question was posed by the BBC in the wake of the hurricane: news pundits such as MSNBC’s Keith Olbermann were abandoning stoic nonpartisanship and leveling harsh words at the Bush Administration, race and class were topics now being broached by the most mainstream of journalists, and even visibly distraught FOX News anchors were breaking script, overawed by the callousness they encountered. The answer to that question is a resounding “no.” Just as the West quickly slipped back into its old ways after a grave declaration of “everything changing” after September 11th, Americans encouraged to be good consumers in the fight against terrorism, we have also bounced back from disaster after disaster (mostly of the “over there” and “natural” varieties) in order to focus on more manageable matters here at home.

The question itself requires contextualization: what was the US media up to before Katrina and in what ways did it need saving? Prior to the devastation of New Orleans, race was also central to a simmering media crisis: The saga of the murdered Laci Peterson having been put to bed by both the legal system and the nightly news, Terri Schiavo’s unfortunate destiny having been met, a fresh drama was required; enter Natalee Holloway and her disappearance in Aruba. Given the more participatory medium of the internet, a certain segment of public opinion quickly shifted against this “soft” news, this latest story being the tipping point, and the burgeoning resentment against it likely emboldened those in traditional media as well: Bob Costas balked at filling in for Larry King on an episode devoted to Holloway and for his reticence became a sort of hero for the cause. Still, critics of the trend towards “news lite” found their complaints did little to stem the tide, at least until they turned in desperation to another tactic, accusations of racism, pointing out that almost all of the women featured in these stories were white.

There have been some sincere attempts at communicating this racial imbalance, typically by those optimistic that such news stories fundamentally are about the public good: locating missing women and finding a measure of justice for them, not just more crass objectification of the same sort that led to the violence against them in the first place. Latoyia Figueroa, a Philadelphia woman likely murdered by the father of her unborn child—and thus an easy parallel to Laci Peterson—became the figurehead of this counter-movement intent on giving equal time to minority women. Still, as many white males involved in promoting the case of Figueroa were dissatisfied with personal tragedy as news in general (no matter the ethnic background of the women involved) and were only participating as a way to strike back at cable news media, once Figueroa's body was found and her boyfriend jailed they did not move on to other missing women of color: instead, they found a way to make the discussion about themselves and their own cleverness. The lion's share of the discourse was framed by satire, the genre of choice for pointing out the illegitimacy of soft news. This came to a head when NPR's "On the Media" borrowed material from a weblog at thepoorman.net for a segment called "White Noise." [transcript from onthemedia.org]

BROOKE GLADSTONE: A headline in this week's USA Today declares that sending teens on group trips can be harrowing—part of that paper's in-depth coverage of missing vacationer, Natalie Holloway. Apparently, it also makes great television. On her blog, huffingtonpost.com, Arianna Huffington points out that NBC News aired 62 segments on the missing teenager in May and June. Compare that with six segments on the Downing Street Memo during the same period. And CNN—294, compared to 30 for the memo. Which got us thinking about the future of TV news.

ANNOUNCER: In a surprise move expected to send shock waves through the world of TV journalism, CNN, the original cable news network, and NBC, which owns cable channels MSNBC and CNBC, announced a deal to consoli-

date their news divisions into a single giant network. The new network, to be called Where the White Women At or WWWW, is set to debut this week. CNN spokesman Jack Little explained the deal at a press conference Monday.

JACK LITTLE: For most of history, journalists could afford to spend their time covering wars, famines, politics and business. The reason for this is that everyone knew where the white women were at—at home, probably in the kitchen, minding the kids. Sometimes they were out shopping or knitting at a friend's house or, or even working as elementary school teachers, but by and large, the location of all white women was known. However, society has changed, and the business of journalism has changed with it. These days, with the increased opportunities available to white women, as a nation we are losing track. White women are disappearing in Aruba, from their jobs as Washington interns and even right before their own weddings. With this merger, we will increase the breadth and depth of our missing white women coverage, and so we meet our sacred obligation to keep the electorate informed and aware about where the white women are at.

ANNOUNCER: The new network will include WWWW Headline News which will deliver key missing white women developments every half hour. Most of the network's time will be devoted to covering current missing white women, but there will also be talk shows where groups of white men get together to discuss the significance of past missing white women, imperiled white women and white women in persistent vegetative states. WWWW debuts in most markets on Monday. Coming up, missing white boy scout found in Utah. [THEME MUSIC]

The lengthier version at thepoorman.net contains all of the same substance but with several extended sections on specific personalities and news networks that NPR was able to safely omit with-

out diluting the message, or more importantly, the humor. Other weblogs followed the lead, posting similar stories, such as bigpicnic.com and their “White Women Under Siege” feature. Theirs mostly consisted of a graphic taken from the videogame *Donkey Kong*—a woman yelps “help” in defiance of the big brown ape holding her hostage—complaining that the media “devoted about 50 times more airtime to Lacy [sic] Peterson than recent proof that the march to war was a lie.” A whitewomeninperil.org (complete with splattered blood for the “PERIL”) was unveiled, turning the work from satire to a reality of sorts, where visitors could even purchase branded merchandise with text such as “Where is [insert random missing white woman here]?” Disturbingly, five of the eight clothing items offered are designed specifically for female wear.

All of this was largely abandoned in the immediate aftermath of Katrina (coverage of Natalee Holloway has since resumed in part, answering the question posed by the BBC), though the ephemeral attention to matters of racism during the initial period of the disaster in some ways mirrors that of the “Where the White Women at” phenomenon: liberal white men are typically only interested in matters of race when it puts their conservative white peers and rivals at a disadvantage. Similarly, conservative white men were suddenly and miraculously interested in the sexism of Kanye West and his song “Gold Diggers” after his remarks about George W. Bush not caring about black people.

Indeed, much of the “Where the White Women at” trope was not so much about genuine care over the well being of minority women, but men of all races communing together—as men—over the bloodied corpses of women. Satire as a genre mitigated responsibility for their words and their allegedly anti-racist polemic served to silence those who would be most likely to object to the often callous words employed in these campaigns: feminists, especially the white variety, would be forced to stifle any possible reservations with the rhetoric lest they be called racist themselves. It was a tremendously effective tactic as few people are equipped to deal with satire today, most being taught to read it as a humorous but simple one-to-one inversion of a scenario in order to make a singular point; an “opposite day” for the reader’s edification and someone else’s expense, a sacrificial victim being required.

People seem inordinately confused as to whether sexism in satire renders it sexist satire (it can and usually does): even when confronting misogyny and male privilege is not the focus of the work, the sexism only present to add spice, many readers approach the text as a total inversion of reality even if not all of the work’s elements function ironically. That is, readers who might accept sexist content at face value, reacting to it as such—or even enjoying it as such—rather than “inverting” it, will often find themselves claiming that the sexist content is not sexist precisely because it is located within the category of satire. A spectrum of arguments states that such sexism is, at worst, not to be taken seriously (only the most “humorless” of feminists would dare object), and frequently, is purportedly actually anti-sexist in its result, regardless of the author’s intention. Many often claim, rather incongruously, that it is the very best variety of feminist polemic because that feminism is accessible for use by everyone, never mind that patriarchal apologists are counted among that number.

Thus critics of such satire often have to battle uphill when confronting it in public venues, even against other feminists and pro-feminists reliant upon a more simplistic reading of the material: oddly enough, it was the latter who were armed with vicious condescension. Those sophisticated enough to understand that “Where the White Women at” operates on a number of levels, and can be framed in different ways when weighing the competing factors at play in its creation, transmission, and reception, were often treated as grade-school children in need of basic dictionary definition of “satire.” Patriarchy has certainly taken notice of this confusion, making the medium the favorite for a number of roles, including racist propaganda; see any number of both apologias and critiques of the white “underground” comic artist, R. Crumb, who has published stories such as “When the Niggers Take over America.”

Bigpicnic.com’s use of the *Donkey Kong* imagery deserves examination: it is impossible to say for sure whether the potential parallel of using an ape as a stand-in for the men of color being accused of involvement in the disappearance of Holloway is one the author intended. Whether they were deliberately highlighting the Black Brute stereotype in political resistance to it, were attempting to capitalize on a racist trope for heightened dramatic interest, or

were pathetically incognizant of it and chose the image solely for the white “damsel in distress” remains unknowable. Good satire attempts to limit its potential readings; yet most contemporary satire leaves all possibilities open in order to insulate the author from personal responsibility, where they are able to say everything and yet nothing. As popular conception of the genre requires not only a moral point but the written or verbal subordination of the inferior party, who is adroitly put in his or her place, it is also easily colonized by masculinity and its fetish for dominance and submission. Witness the decade of abuse leveled against the pop-singer Alanis Morissette for her song “Ironic,” men—by and large the less literate gender—taking every opportunity to point out a language-technicality (“irony” requiring more than a dramatic coincidence) in order to disqualify her from appropriating a format reserved for them alone.

Many feminists were certainly involved in promulgating the “Where the White Women at” response to media coverage of personal tragedies, but paradoxically, it was not minority women who were at the helm of creating the phenomenon (although many were quoted for sound bites, efforts such as Tiffany B. Brown’s reporting at blackfeminism.org did not break through into the wider discussion), nor even minority men for that matter, but white men themselves. This is undoubtedly part and parcel of white male domination of the media, even of the allegedly free and democratic kind perpetually rumored to exist on the internet, but in many ways it seems that their rancor was less about the racism of the media concentrating on missing white women to the exclusion of all others and more about the media daring to concentrate on women at all.

The narrative of personal tragedy is a feminine one in our society (for its emphasis on characterization and its serial nature) and for it to overtake a forum such as the conventional news broadcast is an affront to masculine sensibilities: the last thing men want to see when they tune in to CNN is a “chick flick.” Not only is it an affront to what they prioritize—hard news, backed by either pseudo-objectivity or scathing and vituperative subjectivities—it also signals to them that they are not the intended or most sought after audience of the network. To become secondary or immaterial is the

greatest fear of men, as it is to become like women. Those congratulating Bob Costas for his rejection of the Holloway story often declared his actions to be exceptionally manly—the opposite of womanly. Individuals responding to the Associated Press story posted at Ariana Huffington’s website (the same cited by PBS for “On the Media”), spoke of him as “having balls,” others as “refusing to whore himself,” and one anonymous commentator, comparing several other newscasters with a background in sports coverage who have behaved similarly to Costas in defiance of soft news, stated, “Maybe there is something good about the whole sports/testosterone thing!”

The *Donkey Kong* imagery employed by bigpicnic.com (labeled “last known footage of the victim”) is a reminder of another male response to losing out on status. Where men were originally the primary audience for video arcades, the once masculine spaces have lost that appeal due to changes in technology that encouraged men to stay home for such entertainment. For video arcades to survive through hard economic times women had to be invited into these spaces. Many males now rail against their dance-hall like atmosphere and the loss of an arena dedicated to their sex alone. The image at bigpicnic.com speaks to that loss as it is written in a vocabulary—i.e. videogames—produced and dominated by men. It proves the authors of the website are authentically male, being able to first mentally locate and then reproduce the image on demand; conversely, it serves as a reminder that the shared culture it represents is an ideal one, ripe for allegory (*Donkey Kong* as idiomatic to male-gendered speech), alleviating any anxiety a male reader might have that he is not being directly spoken to as part of that gendered category. Men’s fear of becoming immaterial is so strong that even so-called lesbian pornography is ultimately about men.

Although many of the white men participating in the “Where the White Women at” discussion are likely on the level when it comes to their anti-racist stance (thepoorman.net’s founder, Andrew Northrup, is the son of a Boston College professor and prominent writer on the issue of the Atlantic slave trade), the polemic itself is a lightning rod for the expression latent misogyny.

Though most of the content at thepoornman.net is now simply credited to “the editors,” rather than Northrup alone, the original piece included a joke about “Girls Gone Wild” type antics by white women, sandwiching it carelessly in a text primarily concerning violence perpetrated against them: this was later followed up by another quip, delivered while bragging about NPR’s notice of his site, that he was “currently negotiating a very lucrative deal to host pop-up advertising for naked pictures of Mara Liason,” an NPR anchor.

Liason’s female status singled her out among the cast of NPR and made her vulnerable to the joke, reducing her personality at the precise moment when he viewed his own power as increasing, if only marginally given the ironic tone of the celebration. Northrup’s statements were hardly the most outrageous of those offered but then writers today can often get away with merely affording the occasion for sexism, allowing their readers—fostered by the more interactive element of the internet—to step in and “cross the line” for them, after conveniently drawing its outline. The anonymous have little to lose and make convenient foot soldiers for patriarchy, especially when they are able to paint misogyny-by-number. A great part of the appeal of “Where the White Women at” rhetoric is the ability to surreptitiously blame women.

Sometimes this blame is for specific, alleged, or even potential licentious crimes: reviews of the documentaries *Born into Brothels* and *Inside Deep Throat* were released on Roger Ebert’s website on the same day. While the children of prostitutes in the Red Light district of Calcutta are worthy of liberal sympathy (though their mothers considerably less so), and thus the win at the Oscars, prostituted white women in America are clearly deserving of whatever befalls them: the evidence that Ebert presents to prove that Linda (Lovelace) Marchiano was never really raped or under duress was “By the time she was 50, she was posing for *Leg Show Magazine* and saying she thought she looked pretty good for her age.” Other times, the blame is purely for these women being white, their race making them the safest targets for expressions of misogyny.

While white women are hardly the primary benefactors of white privilege, indeed, patriarchy rules that a woman’s connection to such privilege is through her relation—and hence subjugation—

to a white man who can choose to dispense the benefits of his own racial privilege to her according to his own vagaries, the archetypal role of women as caregivers makes their betrayals of humanity sting all the worse. The haunting images of grinning white women in photographs of lynchings stir powerful emotions, even though in most scenarios it was white men with both the rope and the tales of black men’s rapaciousness towards white women; tales white men continue to propagate today in their pornography. (A fact disguised by white liberal America through its crediting of Larry Flynt as a fighter against racism and not an opportunistic trafficker of it through people’s ignorance of the magazine’s actual content.) However, such feelings of betrayal, the uneasiness that comes with women stepping outside of their traditional roles of caregivers, are promoted, harbored, and exploited by the true beneficiaries of racism.

A frequent tactic of liberal white men, when confronted by their own failings by feminists, is to turn the tables and cite the racist and eugenic associations of Margaret Sanger, the feminist icon and founder of Planned Parenthood. While minority populations in the Americas, not just blacks in the southern states but indigenous peoples in both continents, have good reason to be suspicious of social planning and have complicated relationships to birth control, abortion, and surgical sterilization, the focused attention paid to Sanger’s racism is more often the result of efforts concocted by white men. Sanger is at a distinct disadvantage given her female status: No one ever bothers to speak of the eugenic beliefs of Winston Churchill as he had Adolph Hitler as a foil. Because there always exists a worse or more racist man for comparison, all white men benefit, while the dearth of influential women in history makes those who do stand out significant targets for degradation. This is often to the disadvantage of their contemporary daughters, no matter their ethnic heritage.

While all white people in the West are privileged and are likely universally racist to some degree or another, an uncontested fact among those considering themselves on the Radical Left or part of the general progressive movement, it is interesting to note that no white feminist who supports the “sex-industry” has ever had a serious accusation of racism leveled against her. On the other hand, it is

those women who are least of use to men—Mary Daly and other separatists of various sorts—who become embroiled in such matters. When feminists saw the widespread publication of photographs taken at Abu Ghraib as a launch pad for discussions of how the same humiliation is often visited upon women in mainstream pornography, and how that is an equally political crisis, they were told by the male Left that such concerns were ill-timed and inappropriate, tantamount to racism given the privileged positions of the white women voicing them: indicating that they should instead concern themselves with the plight of minority men rather than their own selfish “special-interest” topic. However, self-avowed feminists who support the sex industry, such as Dr. Susan Block, were given free reign by white liberal male publications such as *Counter-Punch* to write on “Bush’s POW Porn” given that they did not threaten men’s general right to use women in pornography and yet were willing to be used as a weapon against their conservative peers and rivals on the Right.

This is similar to how feminists who claim that pornography (and even drag shows) are the equivalent to blackface and minstrel shows are routinely hushed, often with patriarchal apologists making note of a feminist’s white status whenever applicable. These same liberal white men have no compunction about speaking of racial matters themselves, thinking their sensitivity and dutiful attention to the topic frees them from the straightjacket of silence they would prefer for less sympathetic and informed conservatives. Yet somehow the most radical of Left wing women are equally restricted in their discussion. Liberal white men often claim that sexism has justifiably biological components and is thus infinitely more complex than the cut and dry issue of racism—which is always wrong—making any parallels untenable.

If all whites are racist, this discrepancy in society’s reaction to feminists of various stripes must exist because of male power. Indeed, the “Second Wave” of feminism (encompassing the era of the 1960s and 1970s) as a whole is routinely painted as racist, or at least more racist than the current era of “Third Wave” feminism, even though it is hard to find quantifiable evidence to support such a claim or even the necessity of the appellative division into waves. While there have certainly been many improvements in social justice over the course of the past three decades, both within feminism and

Western culture in general, it can often be hard to discern if they are more than superficial given the heightened level of fetish accorded to minority groups by whites and the increased reliance on “Noble” caricatures.

Again, it is interesting to note that the most frequent occasion for the citation of “Second Wavers as racists” is also in the defense of white males; those who, in this case, consider themselves to be women of a sort. The discussion of identity and authenticity surrounding the medical transsexualism industry (and the more nebulous transgendered or genderqueer designations) is often defined by the relationship of those declared male at birth and their subsequent right to enter into separatist space set aside for women, making such arenas the ultimate test of “passing” or presenting as a member of a sexed or gendered class. While such spaces were politically carved out by the “Second Wave,” charges of racism against the feminists responsible for the construction and maintenance of these spaces (who often view efforts toward trans-inclusion as a colonialist act on the part of those born male), not only tie into similar indictments of “transphobia,” they work on an ahistoric paradigm: good-feminism was literally born yesterday, conceived by careful collaboration with the white males (“...to females”) who have controlled the discourse on gender to suit their own sensibilities and requirements.

In that vein, despite the liberal community’s angry response to the media’s preponderance of coverage for missing and murdered white women—never mind that these same liberal satirists and bloggers have themselves next to completely ignored the hundreds of Latina women murdered in the Ciudad Juárez region of Mexico, the similar crimes occurring in Guatemala, and those against aboriginal women in Canada—there have been other groups of women who have also been overrepresented in such matters: women born with penises. Even as Take Back the Night rallies have become passé, endlessly occupied by males seeking to invisibilize their sex’s perpetration of violence with the rhetoric of equality in victim hood (or survivorship for that matter) through the same campaigns of slander that forced even the Ms. Foundation to change “Take Your Daughter to Work Day” into a blasé gender-neutral event, Leftists in college campuses have readily taken to the “Transgender Day of Remembrance.”

While literature cites a murder rate of one person a month (“Although not every person represented during the Day of Remembrance self-identified as transgendered ... each was a victim of violence based on bias against transgendered people.”), few have argued that this is privileging the lives of male-women above that of female-women, the life of a transsexual woman being of more interest than thousands or even tens-of-thousands of females. One could even conclude that the material conditions of the transwomen being murdered, often of minority status, are a far cry from that of the largely white (not to mention older, more educated, and post sexual reassignment surgery) contingent who hold the services in their remembrance. Yet white women, white female women anyway, are somehow to blame for the media’s exploitation of violence against them.

Although “hierarchizing oppressions” is one of the most maligned acts according to contemporary feminism—which prefers a more multifaceted “web of oppressions” acting upon a person’s subjectivity—such hierarchies inevitably occur, and when they do, women lose. Patriarchy affords males (however they might self-identify along a gender-spectrum) the right to define the intersectional. This happens even within minority communities: in an oft-transcribed 1999 “Thanksgiving/Day of Mourning” speech at Plymouth, Moonanum James, Co-Leader of United American Indians of New England, said, “We will not stop until the oppression of our Two-Spirited sisters and brothers is a thing of the past.” Two-Spirited, a designation that has been generically lumped with “transgendered” by white people (who appreciate the more mystical component as a fetish and treat it as a Pan-Indian term, endemic to “red people” as a whole), typically refers to those born male, even in historic indigenous societies. While James refers to the earth as his “mother,” no mention of sexism against native women is mentioned in the laundry list of sins America has perpetrated against his people: instead, he lists Mumia Abu Jamal alongside Leonard Peltier, uniting men of color as his “true” people; those that he is speaking for; his intended audience.

Even as white women often bear the children of black men, something that might presumably put their interests in close align-

ment, it is white and black men who typically believe themselves to have a closer bond through the patriarchal ethic of male-competition that requires shared notions of honor and valor; so Dr. Julianne Malveaux argues in her “Why Are the Black Conservatives All Men?” (*Ms. Magazine*, vol. 1, no. 5, 1991). “Urban Culture,” as a capitalist marketing euphemism, works to unite men across color lines but not women. Eminem and Dr. Dre might be encouraging racial harmony under the guise of making money, but male society is continually working to fragment women as a class and play them off against each other. In a 2005 article for the *San Francisco Sun Reporter*, Malveaux writes in “Jeers for Katie [Kouric] and the Runaway Bride [Jennifer Wilbanks]”:

The *Chicago Defender’s* Roland Martin deserves big props for putting a name on an amazing American phenomenon, the missing white woman syndrome. All a white girl has to do is cough too hard and the national media are camped on her doorstep wondering what happened. Don’t let her come home from work late.

....

So Jennifer Wilbanks, who needs to be serving time for using up public resources, bolted from her 28 bridesmaid, 600 person wedding, then lied and said a Hispanic man in a white van had abducted her. She shows no contrition for her racism, nor for her use of scarce public services. Instead, she finds herself an agent who sells her story to Judith Regan to the tune of half a million dollars. Then she gives Katie Couric an “exclusive” interview to talk about her plight.

....

Why do I care so much about the missing white woman syndrome? Mostly because words Sojourner Truth uttered more than a century and a half ago still ring true. Ain’t I a woman? The media shapes images of white

women's vulnerability and sensitivity, but African American women are utterly ignored, whether we are present or absent. This approach is an abomination to egalitarian sensibilities and erosion on our public consciousness. It reminds me of the way white women were perceived in lynching days. People were obsessed with their "virtue", and indeed, black men were randomly killed simply to protect white women's virtue. Ida B. Wells opined that if white folks had to worry so much about white women's virtue that raised questions about the actuality of that virtue. These days, all these missing white women stories make me wonder if these women are missing or fleeing, and what vicarious energy or pleasure others get from having these tales retold.

Wilbanks got a slap on the wrist—probation and a fine that amounted to a fraction of the money her small Georgia town spent looking for her. And she is getting paid, big time. But she imperiled the well being of men of color with her wacky and random accusations, and she sucked up public energy that might have been sued for something else.

Malveaux's invocation of "Ain't I a woman" is hard to contextualize: something that should be obvious given the amount of interlocking factors she seeks to account for simultaneously, being a woman of color. At once she seems to be arguing for a universal female experience, one unfortunately normalized to whiteness, at the same time she questions the meaningfulness of that whiteness—do white women really belong to white folks, "folks" normalized to mean males—and yet this is countered by her own, and perhaps primary, allegiance to people of color, which is often normalized to mean men of color; thus the quintessential anthology title *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men: But Some Of Us Are Brave* (Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, Barbara Smith). While Malveaux inhabits a complex space, being pulled in two directions by sex and race, her foregrounding of Jennifer Wilbank's racist act and Katie Couric's tacit acceptance of it invisibles the participation of white men in that chain of events, the men that run both the police departments and Couric's television network. Indeed, she writes "It reminds me of the way white women were perceived in lynching

days" as if it were white women at fault for being perceived in a certain way.

Missing white women were not the only category of soft news in recent memory: the congressional obsession with steroids in baseball and its subsequent media coverage certainly qualifies. Yet it was harder for the male Left to grow outraged at its triviality. Jokes were made, but the same amount of calculated malice could not be infused into the humor. The same opportunities for misogyny were not present, nor were there any intervening factors such as race that would protect the expression of it from censure, spoiled white women making convenient targets. Despite being ostensibly valued, these women are so little cared for that the most despised black male in the world of sports at the moment is not a rapist of white women (Kobe Bryant all but admitted to it after the closing of his civil trial), nor even a murderer of white women (the chips are still stacked against O.J. Simpson), but a man who merely broke the rules of male honor and valor, Terrel Owens (who badmouthed his teammates), a salient point made by Malveaux over a decade ago.

When Bob Costas walked off of Larry King, refusing to cover the Holloway case, the Associated Press likened it to Keith Olbermann leaving his position at MSNBC in the late 1990s because he did not deem the Monica Lewinsky story worthy of repeated coverage: it was the original "news lite," at least according to the Left. As a result, white and black Democrats can now congratulate each other over having a "pimp president." Comedy Central and BET have each decided that jokes about what object was put into a white cunt are not only fair game but still uproariously funny after all of this time. Wisecracks about "lies about getting laid" are used as the counterpoint to lies about weapons of mass destruction and are in turn printed as slogans that on banners and billboards at protests. Freewayblogger.com, a website devoted to affixing political signs to highway overpasses, offers the following: "Nobody died when Clinton Lied," "If we'd gone after Bin Ladin the way we went after Bill Clinton, he'd be dead by now," and "We're all wearing the blue dress now." A Norwegian "death metal" band, Thulsa Doom, even has an album bearing the image of Clinton, a speech bubble exclaiming "She fucks me!"

Yet for all of the liberal male obsession with an act of consensual sex between the Leader of the Free World and a young intern (it must be noted that men's use of "consensual" does not presume equal, given the consistent equation of the female role signified by the "blue dress" with abject humiliation), Juanita Broderick's accusation of rape was allowed to fall between the cracks, never to resurface. By focusing on Lewinsky, capitalizing on men's objectification of the white female (desired, envied, despised), to the point of keeping the gaze upon her years—years beyond reason—after her sex with Clinton, an alleged crime against a woman of color could safely be dismissed; the male Left closed ranks across color lines, simultaneously affirming themselves peers, their own status vis-à-vis women, and protecting their own interests against their conservative rivals. Thus every joke told about Monica Lewinsky in 2005, or 2050 for that matter, is part of the rape and virtual disappearance of Juanita Broderick, a woman the "Where the White Women at" participants are not keen on reintroducing to the public discourse.

As white and minority women, compared to men of all backgrounds, have fewer opportunities for commercial cooperation—and thus there is less of a need for the same sort of mythology that white capitalists have used to unite men across color lines into demographics—white women tend to be much more defensive about their contribution to racism and are far more affected by accusations of it than their male counterparts. Not only are men more able to readily present the "My best friend is a minority" defense, one often grounded in the above capitalist mythology, men are also far more apt to receive accolades for racist speech, ironic or otherwise, as in doing so they are standing up to "Political Correctness," credit for which is more likely to be bestowed upon masculine agents. Conversely, women are recognized more for taking care of the feelings of others. This can be seen in the customer reviews at Amazon.com for Sara Cone Bryant's *Epaminondas and His Auntie*, originally published in 1926 but reissued by Buccaneer Books in 1976. The story is often referred to as a "Southern Nonsense Tale" though any resemblance to African American folklore is likely, at this time, itself folklore.

Told in wildly fabricated dialect, Epaminondas is a simple and ill mannered boy who follows his "mammy's" instructions in a literal manner with disastrous results. While penned and illustrated (Inez Hogan) by white women, it should be remembered that their ability to enter into public discourse depended upon them both serving as feminine agents in a feminine role, in this case as educators of young children, and in aligning themselves with the racist beliefs of dominant males. As abhorrent as their work was in many cases, blame must be accorded in a way that reflects both those power structures and those that exist today: reviews of the book by customers at Amazon.com are split neatly across gender lines. Nearly all of the women responding, currently with one exception, state that that they arrived at the book's page searching for a childhood favorite only to discover its shockingly racist associations, indicating that they would never recommend the book to anyone upon the realization. Men align similarly in defense of the book, arguing it is part of "Southern Culture," that it must be forgiven for its time period, and it is ultimately a great story speaking to universal values and deserving of admiration.

As guilty as Bryant was of perpetuating racism, the men who published her were more so, as are the contemporary men who seek to protect its legacy: Stephen Roy Lewis views his British Empire themed website, Sterling Times, as a project to connect conservatives in England and the United States. To accomplish this, he relies upon the shared vocabulary of racist memorabilia, using the art and literature of imperialism (golliwogs, Epaminondas, and Sambo) to bridge the cultural gap between the two groups of white men. Liberal men typically lack—though not always—that same bonding agent and often rely on sexist memorabilia in its place; this includes the less flagrant utilization of masculine dialects such as the imagery employed by bigpicnic.com to the outright use of pornography and gender-specific epithets.

Aaron McGruder took on the coverage of the Holloway case in the July 29th, 2005 edition of *The Boondocks*, one that was ultimately censored by the *Washington Post*. The three panels read, "I haven't watched the news very much lately. It's too much like reality TV."

‘Whatever happened to that white girl in Aruba?’ ‘I dunno. I stopped watching before the season finale.’” In an internet discussion site for the comic, not run by or associated with McGruder, one fan (a male University of Florida student and a member of a “Show Your Boobs” internet site) commented on Beth Twitty’s blame of men of color for her daughter’s disappearance, “And not to discount her pain, but the girl’s mom is totally a bitch,” that word being freely available in his vocabulary for use against her. Others took occasion to make light of the situation: an “I’m thinking it was Col. Mustard in the Library with a Candlestick...” was followed by an “It was totally a knife! A knife!”

White women, increasingly fragmented from their counterparts among minority populations, often bear disproportionate responsibility for their white privilege (continuously billed as the foremost benefactors of the despised Affirmative Action, an institution that, as Malveaux pointed out in 1991, that even many black men are against because of its “dishonor,” an impracticality that black women have little patience for) and are uniquely vulnerable to accusations of racism. Furthermore, white feminists often have unreasonable standards of perfection to live up to in order to “legitimately” pursue their own objectives, standards enforced by the help of male watchdogs, necessitating that they often put others before themselves: thus they often endure the sexism of groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and find themselves, due to “white guilt,” sometimes excusing misogyny from black men that they would readily object to from white men. The balkanization of feminist groups has also been widely exploited by male interests, who have worked hard to publicly promote esoteric feuds such as “Mary Daly vs. Audre Lorde.” As such, the white men behind the “Where the White Women at” phenomenon could count on white women to partake in the festivities, even at their own expense.

It is necessary to understand the contemporary masculine ownership of satire as a speech genre and the location of white women within “whiteness” in order to properly contextualize the “Where the White Women at” phenomenon as an event-process. Any discussion of motive, the phenomenon itself being driven by

white men, is also multivalent. There is the masculine umbrage at being doubly displaced by media that is, first, not only catering to a feminine audience, but is also—presumably—operated by political rivals who are concertedly employing such programming to take the focus off of an unjust war. Even beyond that there are additional facets of identity at play. By shifting “whiteness” onto the backs of white women, white men of the Left can imagine the white men of the cable news networks as “the other.” Though both sides of the debate have similar pedigrees and material situations, it allows for the presumption that there is actually a debate occurring; supposing that there are men out there who really believe that missing white women are the hot ticket when it comes to news.

If there actually is a plebian fan base with an authentic desire for programming about missing white women, especially conventionally attractive ones with normative existences, the publicity furnished upon personal dramas not only fulfills those desires but works in a double capacity in order to satiate patrician needs: “Where the White Women at” affords society’s elites—whether they read Arianna Huffington or the conservative Matt Drudge—the opportunity to look down upon their inferiors, real or imagined. Those subordinates are preemptively gendered feminine by the content of the material, the style with which it is presented, the sex of the paraded victims, the presumed mental faculties of the imagined audience who enjoys such content, and even the hostility of the response against it, cloaked in satire, one of the most masculine of genres.

Progressives, even white women, find themselves saying that it is white women who “should not matter so much”—and this is said about white women rather than white men. Whereas minorities are frequently people of color before they are gendered individuals (the classic example of a black man being “black” before “man” even arrived on the scene), now all people on the Left find themselves groaning “not another dead white woman” whenever another is exhibited on television, actively processing her racial identity in a way that white people rarely do to each other, oblivious of their normative status. Through this, not only do white males of all political affiliations become less white, projecting their own responsibil-

ity onto women, white women are forced to take a loyalty test to the kind of womanhood envisioned by male power: they must be feminine caregivers, willing to put others before themselves, or face the consequences of being called a racist, shouldering the blame for racial privilege on their own. Given the existence of patriarchy, it seems absurd to assume that this confluence is an accident, rather than the intended result of presenting those white women as victims for mass media entertainment. Defending institutional patriarchy is a more fundamental goal of corporate media than running interference for an unpopular war.

The focus on the illegitimacy of soft news is naively founded on a particular conceit of liberal men: that the failings of their own message to persuade the general public against the war was one of medium and not of content; as if their own rhetoric was deserving of direct translation to the nonstop forum of 24-hour cable news, a single format the Left itself is now glamorizing as “the media,” despite it still not possessing nearly the demographic numbers that even the old television networks continue to pull, despite their declining status. This supposes that the countless “Bush Lied to Us” editorials published by liberal publications—endlessly recycled to the point of plagiarism, often having more to do with competition between pundits to win status and paychecks than honest journalism—if writ large and in bright lights, would suddenly have the desired effect.

It is ironic that the same parties who endlessly promote the power of interactive forms of electronic communication, principally the weblog, are so quick to believe the grass is greener on the side of Rupert Murdoch. Undoubtedly, it is, and “Where the White Women at” (one of the few instances where white male bloggers are momentarily willing to deliberately undersell their own power and influence) has to do more with that male jealousy than feminist concern for women. That inter-male resentment is not necessarily petty; rather it has been given the epic name of “class struggle,” though framings such as feminism and anti-colonialism have revealed how analysis of that struggle has historically privileged certain parties and their interests.

The “Where the White Women at” phenomenon is designed by white men, those who run the cable news networks, to privilege white men: even those white men who protest against it. In fact, they are doubly privileged. Not only are they more likely to have their own wives and daughters featured in such programming if necessary (on the increasingly remote chance that the men did not kill them themselves), they are also afforded the possibility of receiving acclaim—sometimes from other white men, sometimes not—for their snide remarks about white women in peril, using their activism to cement their own position within subcultures on the Left. And for all of the talk about equal justice for women of color, “Where the White Women at” is itself racist given that missing black women are often treated as little more than chess pieces in a game played between white men, not valued for themselves but useful only as fodder in achieving “more important” goals like the removal of American troops—mostly male—from Iraq.

As often as white liberal men object to conservative use of the terms such as the “race card,” men on the left can often be found dealing race cards of their own, appropriating things to which they have no right in order to preserve the patriarchal status quo. White feminists can be silenced using their own “privilege,” just as the voices of minority women can be safely ignored or co-opted, as when the State Department dispatched Lynne Cheney’s anti-feminist “feminist” group, the Independent Women’s Forum (IWF), to Iraq to train indigenous women in “democracy,” hoping to cement public opinion that the war is being fought to improve the status of women. Thus conservative men wish to position critics of the war as sexist in the same way that liberal men require their own critics to be racist, white males on both sides of the fence enjoying the use of “isms” to frame their opponents.

Accordingly, black men are frequently used to spread sexist propaganda enjoyed by white males, usually in artistic mediums such as music and comedy that, like satire, are harder for feminists to object to due to a measure of ambiguity. Humor about white women’s weakness, pliability (especially to sexual acts such as anal intercourse), and fragile emotional state are a common element

employed by black male entertainers, counterbalanced by mythology of black women existing as tough, no nonsense beings who will visit violence upon any man who looks at them wrongly; a pedestal that both requires black women to have a superhuman countenance, unable to ever experience a moment of weakness—allowing some measure of indifference to the pain they do endure—while deliberately obscuring the physical abuse that many women of color suffer in their daily lives from men of all races.

White women are used to spread racist messages because it serves to draw heightened attention for the cause, tapping into the misogyny of men of color and their white allies on the Left. Most people are much more uncomfortable with an overtly female racist than a male one: not only has she abandoned her role of a care giver, she has stepped outside into the discourse and upstaged male voices to do it. One such example is Prussian Blue, an act comprising two teenage sisters, Lamb and Lynx Gaede, the pair is often compared to the “Olsen Twins” with a white nationalist bent. The media circus around them has benefited white men of all political persuasions, whether racist or not, as the focus has been shifted upon white women, where bad mothers are equally to blame for the perpetuation of racism as the family patriarch.

These women need not even be female, if one examines the case of Chuck Knipp and his drag performance of “Shirley Q. Liquor,” where he dons blackface and portrays the quintessential “welfare queen.” Daniel Nardicio, a promoter for Knipp, defended the act by grounding it in satire, saying “If Shirley is misogynist, then every drag queen is,” taunting accusers with their own hypocrisy in ignoring radical feminist complaints about the genre of entertainment—where drag is seen always as “deconstructive” even if its ubiquity makes it far more likely to reinforce prototypes of femininity and masculinity—only to come out in droves to protest a performer that, clumsily, does the same with race. (It must be noted that Knipp intentionally works as a drag queen and thus does not find the category, as defined by the capitalist marketplace, to be problematic; he is decidedly *not* a political performance artist.) While many white men work to reinvigorate mythology about welfare queens, Knipp is seen as particularly dangerous because he

functions in a more unclear capacity, given his less than fully masculine construction (whether Knipp is to be taken as a provisional woman or a homosexual male), threatening to equally expose the internal sexism of the liberal Queer community.

Thus black men are indebted to a system of white patriarchy that allows minority males at least the privilege of domination over “their” women (and in many cases, over white women as well), while white women’s allegiance to a sexist society is also grounded in their own subordination to white men, vicariously benefiting from those men’s construction as white. While the political concept of “divide and conquer” is hardly unknown to liberal white men, as they are apt at accusing conservative power mongers of it throughout history, they regularly employ the same tactic themselves. As they believe themselves to have the best interest of others at heart (not unlike those Rightwing men they hold in contempt), such ploys invariably become “divide... and reunite under our guidance.”

As it is always minority groups who are in danger of splintering off from the main Leftist coalition (and never the white men who benefit the most from their own participation), whether they are tempted by some sort of deal from society’s elites—the bad kind on the Right, anyway—or are disturbed at their own lack of status within the progressive movement, unsubtle reminders of the hazards of disloyalty are necessary: at the 2004 March for Women’s Lives, a pro-choice rally in DC, white men with bullhorns shouted out at the crowd, thanking the women for attending, only to say that it would be all for naught if they did not go on to vote for the white man the Democrats were promoting at the presidential elections. As important as these messages of unity are, however, they are underscored by a need to foster rivalries on the Left in order to allow privileged white men the appearance of neutrality; forever existing as objective outsiders above the fray who can fairly referee and thus maintain control.

While “Where the White Women at” is ostensibly about women of color, it is they who are absent from the equation that informs it: white men fear both their minority counterparts and white women the most. The solution comes in pitting the two groups against each other, emphasizing the whiteness of white

women and the masculinity of minority men (despite differences in how that masculinity is constructed around different ethnicities) through the media, academics, and politics. Women of color exist as a third wheel. As most liberal white men have a harder time conceiving of their sexism, compared to that of their racism—often seeing their intimate relationships with women as proof enough that they are a good person—superficially more work, on both the personal and political level, is done in obtaining alliances with minority men. When successful, the imaginary of such “brotherhood” is a powerful one. Although the trial of O.J. Simpson is commonly explained as a triumph of socioeconomic class over race, taken to mean that Simpson was accidentally given a pass by the legal system of a racist society that did not anticipate the rise of powerful black men, patriarchy is hardly considered: whether he was responsible for the murder of Nicole Brown Simpson or not, her life was sacrificed in order to reinforce the bonds between all men as men. A patriarchal legal system had no incentive to convict him as an individual black man when through the trial all men of color were indicted as willing coconspirators, if not equal ones, in the patriarchy occupied by white men.

Less political work of a conventional nature is done in securing the complicity of white women; instead, male culture finds it imperative to prevent the public from discerning the political component of such actions. What happens in the bedroom, even if transcribed from an enormous pornography industry and its lexicon (one that works to naturalize modes of dominance and willing submission) is required to stay private and thus beyond criticism, even when reports of various acts are continuously retransmitted back into the world at large forming a feedback loop. Scratch the surface, however, and white men are far more afraid of white women abandoning the cause than men of color: while the benefits of patriarchy are still seen as compelling by the overwhelming majority of males, the racial privilege that white women enjoy is paradoxically being eaten away as they become less subordinate to white men. Although even independent white women often find a racist society to be to their advantage, whether they are critical of that privilege or not, these gains are far less indispensable as in the era of compulsory

marriage where many white women were categorically reliant upon the leftover portions of their husband’s white privilege.

As such, it is now more important than ever for the patriarchy to hype the privilege of white women at every possible opportunity. Even publications typically esteemed as “liberal” contribute to this process. The *New York Times* has run a number of articles encouraging white women to feel guilty for working outside the home, juxtaposed with a similar series describing their remorse for “failing” at such work and returning to childcare. Rather than feminist in nature, the arguments present the double-blind solely as the creation of feminists, greedy and wanting to have it all, and these largely anecdotal stories are made even more effective by their extremely narrow focus on only the most elite of white women, graduating from Ivy League schools, framing white women as a class with a portrait of Paris Hilton. In an editorial about such work, Susan J. Douglas writes, “the *Times* seems bent on insisting there is an irrefutable ‘common sense’ out there among women that feminism has been bad for them. But women do not want to go back to 1957, with its legally enforced gender discrimination, its cultural misogyny and its insistence that women should be subservient to men.”

This concentration on the racial privilege of white women works to normalize white women as the face of racism, allowing men on the Left to escape their own responsibility for such privilege by ducking into the category of “other,” being able to further embrace the brotherhood they seek to establish with men of color: all equally disgusted by the selfishness of the spoiled white woman. This can be seen in men’s recollection of the “Where the White Women at” phenomenon, as witnessed in reporting of the subject at wikipedia.org, a collaborative dictionary project where masculinity rules; both in terms of what content is posted—with absurdly detailed accounts for videogame characters and the like—and in the pseudo-objectivity that is enforced for and by its mostly anonymous contributors.

The website defines it as the “missing white woman syndrome” and just as Dr. Julianne Malveaux desired to attribute the discovery of it to someone, Roland Martin, Wikipedia credits Gwen

Ifill, although the largely liberal contingent of men behind the project also take great care to point out that the conservative pundit, Michelle Malkin, a woman of color, refers to it more neutrally as the “missing pretty girl syndrome.” Thus Malkin is made to be more accountable for privilege than the numerous white men shaping the text: in a vote on whether or not the “syndrome” was worth including in the dictionary, as it might violate the “no point of view” (NPOV) rule, one respondent argued that accepting Malkin’s terminology might be better than abandoning the article wholesale and that “citing her as an authority makes my skin crawl, but at least it makes it less neologistic.”

Wikipedia’s account of the trend states that reports of missing white women “displaces reporting on other current events that some people consider more newsworthy” and lists a score of examples commonly given by “media critics” that breaks down whether or not a particular woman was not just murdered but “found murdered,” if her killer was convicted, and any ensuing social consequences of the case. A short segment on LaToyia Figueroa is appended, pointing out that the “major networks did not aid in breaking the story.” A list of external links about the syndrome are also given, including one to a white-supremacist take on the subject at the *National Vanguard*. A debate on whether or not that link should be supplied with a warning broke out, with two respondents arguing that it was necessary in order to be responsible to those harmed by racist rhetoric; it must be noted that sexist content never receives such warnings, instead, it is judged on whether it is “work safe” or not, in accordance with arbitrary rules about what level of pornographic material is considered past the line of good taste. Thus responsibility is to one’s employment and not women as a class.

One person arguing for the warning was the initial architect of the entry, one Lil’ Voka (or Gutta Boi from Dayton, Ohio), who might also be the owner of *whitewomeninperil.com*. The site is listed among the links on the entry’s page as a “tongue-in-cheek look at a media phenomenon which has redefined what qualifies as news.” While the response to the so-called syndrome vacillates wildly between worries about what is proper (and hence masculine) news reporting and concern for women of color, the entry itself doubly

categorized under “Criticism of journalism” and “Discrimination,” it would seem evident that the author is more concerned about the former—though the latter serves as an excellent justification. *Whitewomeninperil.com*’s frequently-asked-questions page directs traffic to a *rapdirt.com* (which in turn links to a *rockdirt.com*, *popdirt.com*, and *rnbdirty.com*, in addition to a paparazzi styled *abstracts.net* for celebrity gossip), a page that mostly serves as a portal for creating a brand-identity under the “dirt” nomenclature while generating revenue from banner advertising, all safely anonymous.

One interesting component of *whitewomeninperil.com* is not just its statement arguing against the interpretation of the site as racist, affirming that whites are indeed privileged by media coverage and his commentary serves in defiance of that fact, but a further declaration that the website is not sexist—against men—either:

I don’t believe so; I’d say it’s a reflection of reality. It is safe to say there are aspects of media which have a bias towards men, such as cable news commentators, political analysts, military analysts, business analysts, etc., but a simple review of those who have received coverage for being missing would conclude the major media focus on women.

Thus all men, including white men, are underprivileged when it comes to this particular scenario, a sentiment also argued at Wikipedia. This bias against men is asserted both in the syndrome’s definition (“while virtually ignoring missing men and non-white women”) and in the margin notes (“Who knows, maybe someday in the year 2525 someone will care when it’s a man who disappears,” jokes one Antaeus Feldspar, a former Wikipedia editor particularly proud of his use of the dictionary to promote Candida Royal’s *Femme Films* pornographic company). Any critique of the missing white women syndrome or the “Where the White Women at” response to it must take into account white men’s beliefs about their own disenfranchisement, typically cribbed from such sources as Warren Farrell’s *The Myth of Male Power*, as it supplies the context for why white men are suddenly so concerned about racism and the

well being of women of color: it grants them the ability to strike back against the women they despise. Yet as such speech was packaged into an exigency (the emergency of discrimination against women like Latoya Figueroa) that did not allow for divisiveness or fragmentation that would have detracted from the immediate goal at hand, feminists—whose participation was taken for granted—were forced to allow patriarchal apologists their fantasies.

Although relatively few white women, feminist or not, found attacks against this sort of media coverage to be personally offensive, the condescending and sometimes hostile treatment of the small number who did underscores the precarious position that all women experience in being forced to displace their own requirements and desires for the benefit of others. Even as masculinity is supposed to be the glue of racial harmony, at least for men, women of all colors are not permitted to fight against sexism until the war against racism is complete, lest they be portrayed as selfish and their struggle illegitimate. This paradox, that women must abandon feminism to support a goal that is thought achievable only through misogyny (the one authority that can easily unify men as a bloc), is one that can be seen distinctly in an analysis of “Where the White Women at;” NPR might as well have called it their “Where the White Bitches at;” program.

If the agents behind the media desired a misogynist outcome for their coverage of missing white women—pitting women against each other for the benefit of men—rather than resisting that impulse, “Where the White Women at” instead resigns itself to it, aiding in the fulfillment of that conclusion. As the satire is rooted in its own cleverness and not anti-colonialist feminism, it works to desensitize us further to reports of violence against women, no matter their ethnicity. This can be compared to men’s popular satirizing of prison rape, ostensibly against it, though the authors of such content spend precious little time using other genres of speech to affirm that message, thus reinforcing its presence in male culture. Being that contemporary satire requires a sacrificial victim, even though writers might genuinely believe that they are setting their sites on institu-

tionalized big-media, their rhetoric is far more likely to harm women, people who are far more vulnerable than Rupert Murdoch, even those white women who believe they are along for the ride when it comes to the “Where the White Women at” campaign.

Leftist men have had other opportunities to come out in opposition to male violence against women, not only in Juarez, Guatemala, and Vancouver, but also in a variety of cases that would serve in a dual capacity in combating their peers and rivals on the Right—something they seem far more keen on concentrating on than becoming reliable allies of feminists. David Brame, the police chief of Tacoma who abused his wife, Crystal Judson, before murdering her and committing suicide, had an equally corrupt administration. Yet outside of local politics no further parallels were drawn. When four wives of servicemen at Fort Bragg were murdered by their husbands inside of a six week period, liberal men were content to let the mainstream media state the obvious and then abandon the issue, rather than sinking their teeth into it and forcing the same amount of traction that the “Where the White Women at” phenomenon has garnered.

Just as liberal male bloggers wish to imagine themselves different in station and nature than the milquetoast Democratic leadership that was browbeaten into going along with the plan to assault Iraq, they themselves were unwilling to risk coming out against masculinity in the case of Fort Bragg, preferring to support both “the troops” and gender-terrorism. This myopia is also necessary for them to treat the white men responsible for cable news programming as creatures utterly alien to themselves and their own existence, others, as if they are opponents and not brothers, when it is women who are pitted against their sisters—and in many cases, against their own personhood, as unpopular as the term “false consciousness” has become today. Yet the “Where the White Women at” phenomenon encourages this: both the agents behind the networks promoting this form of news and the critics of it are actually working in cohesion to achieve this effect; patriarchy does not need agreement among its conspirators, only their action.