

## MISOGYNY:

### *And The Anatomy of Sexpolitation: "Hos", Pimps & Global Sex Trafficking*

New York City's iconic white morning radio/tv talk show host, Don Imus, rudely awakened a critical mass of "America" when, while describing the Rutgers University women's basketball team (most of whom are black), commented contemptuously on the tattoos on some of the players. Then Bernard Mcguirk, Imus' studio side-kick and producer off-camera, banter that the Rutgers players are "some hardcore hos." Imus rejoins with, "That's some nappy-headed hos there, I'm gonna tell you that now." Imus' preemptive defense, in deflection of the unforeseen tsunami of criticisms to come, was that people should get over themselves and not be concerned about "some idiot comment meant to be amusing." For such "amusement", which not only includes invectives based on ethnicity, race, and gender, but also sexual orientation, Imus, and his doppelganger—drugs and alcohol, earns his networks hundreds of millions of advertising dollars every year.

For the uninitiated, in black vernacular the words "ho", "hoe" and "whoe" are all derivation of the word "whore," not unlike the Germanic/Middle-English/Anglo-Saxon "hore" or the Old Saxon/Frisian "hor," or the Gothic "hors," or the Old Norse "horr" and "hor," or the Swedish "Hora," or the Norwegian/ Danish "hore." In black nomenclature "hoe" can mean: someone of loose morals; someone who participates in promiscuous or illicit sexual activity or, depending on the context, "hoe" can be a reference to women singularly or women *en masse*.

But it was uniquely Imus' "nappy-headed hos" epithet that became "the news" above all the "news" clutter of the U.S. mass media for that week. The following Sunday, I watched with anticipation and, as it turns out, justifiable angst, several of the morning roundtable television "news" talk shows. Of course as *status quo* and in *pro forma* most of the talking heads were conspicuously and omnisciously white male "journalist" and commentators discussing, presumably, with authority but certainly with audacity, the African American women's experience as nappy headed "hos".

My *awe* (by which I mean my dread), because I now am numb to the *shock* of these media phenomena, was that each "news" show allowed the discourse, and thereby the focus, to shift quickly away from Imus' personal responsibility and culpability to the defense of Imus, versus the misogyny of black hip-hop artists. The argument proffered by these white male "talking head experts" was that rappers and other major black entertainers use terms like "hos" to degrade women incessantly in their music and performances with no condemnation exacted by society or civil rights leaders. I watched hopelessly, helplessly and at times hilariously as white men sat comfortably in-the-round defending other white men's misogynistic behavior while citing black men as the true social pariah—all at the expense of black women and, for that matter, all women.

To be clear, misogyny as I define it here as hostility towards women in the forms of: dehumanization, objectification, chattelization, sexualization and commodification, is

detestable and indefensible in any form, whether from black hip-hop artist or a white Don Imus “shock jock”. Indeed, misogyny in black music, dance and film is especially appalling, as it exemplifies a self-perpetuating nihilistic destruction in classic Frierian style of the oppressed oppressing the oppressed. Hip-hop and gangsta rap artist acting out, in exaggerated form, the dominant culture’s conspicuous consumption *via* narcissistic, hedonistic and pornographic behavior, is abhorrent to me and like-minded black folks. There is no capital in deny that some, not all, black hip-hop/gangsta rap is pornographic. Nonetheless, black hip-hop/gangsta rap misogyny is merely a subgenre of the greater pornographic ideology. Nevertheless, black folks should know better, we should be better and we are better than the images portrayed of us.

But to place the origins, the onus, and the omni-oppression of women on black hip-hop artist as the *alpha* and *omega* of misogyny is just as racist, sexist and misplaced as Imus. Absent a contextualized critical analysis of the multi-billion dollar, predominately white-owned pornography industry, and its omnipresent and omnipotent misogyny of all women, any dialogue about hip-hop misogyny is fraudulent. Writing for *Z-Magazine* in her 1994 essay, *Sexism and Misogyny: Who Takes the Rap?* Black feminist, author and professor, bell hooks, theorizes that,

“The sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking and behaving that are glorified in gangsta rap are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy...[but] young black males are forced to take the "heat" for encouraging, via their music, the hatred of and violence against women that is a central core of patriarchy.”

As much as black hip-hop and gangsta rap music needs to be called to task for its misogyny, there is an urgent need to harness and deconstruct the *Dr. Frankenstein* among us, the creator of this monster—“American” values, as reflected in the way women are generally socialized, portrayed and profiteered.

The inference by the white male moral constabulary is that black hip-hop and gangsta rap culture, as the only purveyors of the exploitation of women, have an unfair special license to be misogynistic, while white people are not allowed such license resulting in a tolling of white freedom of speech and, in turn, the victimization of all of white people. (It’s like the classic query, “Why can they say *nigger* and we can’t?”). But what seems omitted from the debate, either in the “news” roundtable discourse or popular white discourse about hip-hop misogyny, is the contribution and predominance of the white male-owned misogynistic exploitation pornography’s to the denigration of women around the world. I argue here that pornography has achieved such normalcy status, mainstream acceptance and international institutionalization that, like the air we breathe, it is invisible and therefore goes unexamined as misogyny. Yet, any cursory examination of gender dynamics reveals the power elitism of white patriarchal media and its entrepreneurial institutions. And, either by omission or by tradition or both, this patriarchal media gets to define the world, and therefore what is or is not misogynistic, as it sees fit.

Consequently, pornography and not hip-hop performance, relative to women and their degradation, gets socially constructed as harmless *erotica* and not as misogyny as it is filtered through the lens and pens of those employed by white men like, Hugh Hefner, Larry Flynn and Bob Guccione (successfully sued for sexual harassment by Anneka DiLorenzo, a Penthouse Pet, after she proved she was sent out on the road and then pimped to his business associate), who finance, produce and publish pornographic media the likes of: *Playboy*, *Hustler* and *Penthouse*. It is the unremitting and relentless portrayal of women as anonymous bodies to be poked, prodded, primed, pumped and pommelled, that is lost in the analysis of hip-hop misogyny without its *parentis*--pornography. Anti-pornography activist, Andrea Dworkin, in her 1986 testimony before the *Attorney General's Commission on Pornography*, testified that pornography portrays women as passive victims, whose only identity is expressed in eroticized degradation, humiliation, and/or violence. I struggle to find the social outrage regarding pornography's contribution to misogyny. Accordingly, black hip-hop is constructed to become the *in locos parentis* in substitution for the free pass handed the pornography industry.

Although pornography creates a fantasy world of seemingly innocent mutually consenting adults having bawdy sexual adventures, the real-life socialization of the women performing the sexual acts could not be further from the fantasy. Mary Anne Layden, Ph. D., Director for Women's Psychological Health in Philadelphia states in her 1999 essay, *If Pornography Made Us Healthy, We Would Be Healthy By Now* that:

"Most strippers, as with other women who work in the sex industry, are adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Research indicates the number is between 60%-80%...The physical and visual invasion of little girl's bodies damages them psychologically and gives them a psychologically unhealthy view of sexuality. Often as adults they reenact their childhood trauma by working as strippers, Playboy models, and prostitutes. The men who, now as customers, physically and visually invade the adult women's bodies, reenact the role of the perpetrator. These women work in the sex industry because it feels like home."

Dr. Layden's research provides real-life victims of the real-life consequences of the society's consumption of pornography and the failure of continuous public debate about pornography.

The bridge between pornography and prostitution is structured in the lives impacted by the purchasers, profiteers, pimps and promoters. Pornography and prostitution often work in tandem in its denigration of women. In a 2005 article examining militarism and women titled, *Violence Against Women in the Military* Martin Donohoe, MD, wrote that:

Once in the armed services, recruits become part of a warrior culture. Bellicose military vocabulary is laden with denigrations of feminine traits, and gender slurs motivate men to act aggressively toward women. Until 1999, pornography could easily be purchased by servicemen at US

military base commissaries, which ranked among the largest purchasers of hard-core pornography. Military bases are commonly associated with prostitution, which is tacitly accepted by commanding officers and local authorities. For example, more than 5000 women, mainly from the Philippines and the former Soviet Union, were trafficked into South Korea in the mid 1990s, primarily to work as “entertainers” at bars near US military bases.<sup>[14]</sup> The use of rape as a weapon of war, including by US soldiers, marks one of the most extreme examples of interpersonal violence.

As an institution, U.S. military culture was established long before the influence of black hip-hop or gangsta rap which began in the mid-1970’s and late 1980’s respectfully, yet society’s racist gaze has turned to young black men as a scapegoat for greater ills of society in classic “*forest for the trees*” myopia.

The width and breath of the residue from pornography may overshadow and foreshadow our worse fears about misogyny. Robert Jensen, of The University of Texas at Austin, School of Journalism in his 2004 essay on *Pornography & Sexual Violence* wrote:

We understand that pornography alone doesn't make men [commit sexual violence], but that pornography is part of a world in which men do it, and therefore the production, content, and use of pornography are important to understand in the quest to eliminate sexual violence...My own studies and reviews of other examinations of content suggest there are a few basic themes in pornography: (1) All women at all times want sex from all men; (2) women enjoy all the sexual acts that men perform or demand, and; (3) any woman who does not at first realize this can be easily turned with a little force, though force is rarely necessary because most of the women in pornography are the imagined "nymphomaniacs" about whom many men fantasize.

In mainstream films like, *Pretty Woman* white film makers glorify prostitution where the character Vivian Ward, a streetwalking prostitute—for all practical purposes a “ho”—is played by “America’s” beloved sweetheart, Julia Roberts. Where is the white male accountability of this “ho”. *Pretty Woman* would eventually gross \$463 million worldwide and was at the time Disney's most successful live-action film. And then there is the stage and film musical of 1978 and 1982, *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, the title speaks volumes without my commentary.

Still, not all institutions have turned a blind-eye to the greater social structural influences of misogyny as the so called “news” media. *Amnesty International* in a 2005 website press release proffers that:

There has been a marked growth of the trafficking of women and girls for forced sexual services throughout the world. Most of the victims come from Eastern Europe - in the Balkans it is estimated that some 60 per cent of trafficked women and girls come from Moldova, one of Europe's poorest countries. Many victims are lured by promises of work in Western Europe as waitresses or similar but are forced into sexual slavery and many are broken mentally and physically by rape and extreme brutality.

And at DePaul University College of Law's International Human Rights Law Institute conference on: *Demand Dynamics: The Forces of Demand in Global Sex Trafficking* held in October 2003 in Chicago, the IHRLI recognized that demand drives the trade in women and children's bodies and stated that:

[T]rafficking in women, as a broad umbrella concept, encompassed all practices of buying and selling women's and children's bodies. Trafficking, as we understood it, included American pornography, temple prostitution in India, military prostitution in the Philippines, street prostitution in Peru, and sex tourism from Europe to Asia. It moved from the micro-*"Trafficking within the Family"* to the macro-*"Trafficking in Women: A Global Perspective."* It exposed mainstream institutions that support and benefit from prostitution: *"Military, Government, and Corporate Trafficking in Women."* The conference looked at the sex industry as an instrument of the socialization of both men and women..."

In 2003, U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft stated those who traffic in human lives treat [women] as easily expendable and highly profitable. But behind each dollar sign is a human tragedy.

In their 1990 essay *Femicide: Speaking the Unspeakable* and 1992 book, *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* Drs. Jane Caputi, Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell write:

An FBI study of 36 sex killers found that pornography was ranked highest in a list of many sexual interests by an astonishing 81 percent. Such notorious killers as Edmund Kemper (the "Coed Killer"), Ted Bundy, David Berkowitz (the "Son of Sam"), and Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono (the "Hillside Stranglers") were all heavy pornography consumers. Bundy maintains that pornography "had an impact on me that was just so central to the development of the violent behavior that I engaged in." His assessment is consistent with testimony from many other sex offenders, as well as research on the effects of pornography.

Importantly, for this discussion, there is no clear correlation between engaging in pornography and deviant behavior by most men. I only offer these sources to add balance to the discourse that excludes pornography as misogynist and demonizes black hip-hop culture. Likewise, there is no clear correlation between engaging in hip-hop misogynistic art and deviant behavior by most men. In defense of all men do not miss the premise.

Here the focus is not so much on men's deviance as it is on the silence by the greater culture on women's sexualized exploitation by the white media industrial complex.

On April 21, 1999, one day after the Columbine, Littleton High School shooting massacre, Howard Stern another hugely successful "shock jock," discussed the tragedy on his nationally syndicated morning radio show. Stern reportedly commented:

"A bunch of good looking girls go to that school. There were, like, really good-looking girls running out of there with their hands over their heads. Did those kids try to have sex with any of the good-looking girls? They didn't even do that. At least if you're going to kill yourself and kill all the kids, why wouldn't you have some sex."

CBS, whose syndication arm Eyemark distributes Stern's weekly television show, said through a spokesman it would not comment on what Stern said. CBS, a member of the white media industrial complex, chose silence over discourse. And where was the nation's detestation? Did Mr. Stern only see these young women, running terrified from harms way, as sex objects—as "hoes"? Conversely, in the Imus mayhem there was a deluge of "discourse," but it was misplaced, wrong-headed and deflective discourse with no depth of analysis—hence, no real discourse.

In no uncertain terms black hip-hop and gangsta rap should cease and desist its use of misogyny, homophobia, and heterosexism in its performances. However, to single out and demonize black men is to let fester the greater malignancy harming society as a whole—the sexplorative ideologies of our culture, our values, our media and our business entrepreneurs all to the detriment of women who are dehumanized, objectified, chattelized, sexualized and commodified as result.

So we are all left with the question, "If all women are hos and serve at the pleasure of the patriarch then who are the pimps?" I suggest our society in general and we, each of us, in particular serve as pimps until we begin the work to

The wonderful possibilities of *The Imus Affair* was that this nation may have been poised and positioned for a broader debate on the contributions of sexploitation in the industries of pornography, prostitution and sex trafficking. Alas, the moment was gone when "the news" among all the "news" clutter, trumped Imus' for the week. It reported that yet another woman—Emily Jane Hilscher, also an athlete (with the Virginia Tech equestrian team), not unlike the women athlete's at Rutgers, was singled out as the first person who was fatally shot on Virginia Tech's campus. I wonder how would Howard Stern, or for that matter, Don Imus, or for that matter, *Playboy*, or for that matter, the world, reference Emily Jane Hilscher—hopefully not as a "ho"!!