Washington in the millennial years is a city of warring racial and ethnic groups fighting for recognition, protection, and entitlements. This war has been fought throughout the second half of the twentieth century largely by black Americans. How much this contest has widened, how bitter it has turned, how complex and baffling it is, and how far-reaching its consequences are became evident in a series of congressional hearings that began last year in the obscure House Sub-committee on Census, Statistics, and Postal Personnel, which is chaired by Representative Thomas C. Sawyer, Democrat of Ohio, and concluded in November, 1993. Although the Sawyer hearings were scarcely reported in the news and were sparsely attended even by other members of the subcommittee, with the exception of Representative Thomas E. Petri, Republican of Wisconsin, they opened what may become the most searching examination of racial questions in this country since the sixties. Related federal agency hearings, and meetings that will be held in Washington and other cities around the country to prepare for the 2000 census, are considering not only modifications of existing racial categories but also the larger question of whether it is proper for the government to classify people according to arbitrary distinctions of skin color and ancestry. This discussion arises at a time when profound debates are occurring in minority communities about the rightfulness of group entitlements, some government officials are questioning the usefulness of race data, and scientists are debating whether race exists at all. Tom Sawyer, forty-eight, a former English teacher and a former mayor of Akron, is now in his fourth term representing the Fourteenth District of Ohio. It would be fair to say that neither the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service nor the subcommittee that Sawyer chairs is the kind of assignment that members of Congress would willingly shed blood for. Indeed, the attitude of most elected officials in Washington toward the census is polite loathing, because it is the census, as much as any other force in the country, that determines their political futures. Congressional districts rise and fall with the shifting demography of the country, yet census matters rarely seize the front pages of home-town newspapers, except briefly, once every ten years. Much of the subcommittee's business has to do with addressing the safety concerns of postal workers and overseeing federal statistical measurements. The subcommittee has an additional responsibility: it reviews the executive branch's policy about which racial and ethnic groups should be officially recognized by the United States government.

"We are unique in this country in the way we describe and define race and ascribe to it characteristics that other cultures view very differently," Sawyer, who is a friendly man with an open, boyish face and graying black hair, says. He points out that the country is in the midst of its most profound demographic shift since the eighteen-nineties—a time that opened a period of the greatest immigration we have ever seen, whose numbers have not been matched until right now. A deluge of new Americans from every part of the world is overwhelming our traditional racial distinctions, Sawyer believes. "The categories themselves inevitably reflect the temporal bias of every age," he says. "That becomes a problem when..."
Looming over the shoulder of Sawyer's subcommittee is the Office of Management and Budget, the federal agency that happens to be responsible for determining standard classifications of racial and ethnic data. Since 1977, those categories have been set by O.M.B. Statistical Directive 15, which controls the racial and ethnic standards on all federal forms and statistics. Directive 15 acknowledges four general racial groups in the United States: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black; and White. Directive 15 also breaks down ethnicity into Hispanic Origin and Not of Hispanic Origin. These categories, or versions of them, are present on enrollment forms for schoolchildren; on application forms for jobs, scholarships, loans, and mortgages; and, of course, on United States census forms. The categories ask that every American fit himself or herself into one racial and one ethnic box. From this comes the information that is used to monitor and enforce civil-rights legislation, most notably the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but also a smorgasbord of set-asides and entitlements and affirmative-action programs. "The numbers drive the dollars," Sawyer observes, repeating a well-worn Washington adage.

The truth of that statement was abundantly evident in the hearings, in which a variety of racial and ethnic groups were bidding to increase their portions of the federal pot. The National Coalition for an Accurate Count of Asian Pacific Americans lobbied to add Cambodians and Lao to the nine different nationalities already listed on the census forms under the heading of Asian or Pacific Islander. The National Council of La Raza proposed that Hispanics be considered a race, not just an ethnic group. The Arab American Institute asked that persons from the Middle East, now counted as white, be given a separate, protected category of their own. Senator Daniel K. Akaka, a Native Hawaiian, urged that his people be moved from the Asian or Pacific Islander box to the American Indian or Alaskan Native box. "There is the misperception that Native Hawaiians, who number well over two hundred thousand, somehow 'immigrated' to the United States like other Asian or Pacific Island groups," the Senator testified. "This leads to the erroneous impression that Native Hawaiians, the original inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands, no longer exist." In the Senator's opinion, being placed in the same category as other Native Americans would help rectify that situation. (He did not mention that certain American Indian tribes enjoy privileges concerning gambling concessions that Native Hawaiians currently don't enjoy.) The National Congress of American Indians would like the Hawaiians to stay where they are. In every case, issues of money, but also of identity, are at stake.

In this battle over racial turf, a disturbing new contender has appeared. "When I received my 1990 census form, I realized that there was no race category for my children," Susan Graham, who is a white woman married to a black man in Roswell, Georgia, testified. "I called the Census Bureau. After checking with supervisors, the bureau finally gave me their answer: The children should take the race of their mother. When I objected and asked why my children should be classified as their mother's race only, the Census Bureau representative said to me, in a very hushed voice, 'Because, in cases like these, we always know who the mother is and not always the father.'"

Graham went on to say, "I could not make a race choice from the basic categories when I enrolled my son in kindergarten in Georgia. The only choice I had, like most other parents of multiracial children, was to leave race blank. I later found that my child's teacher was instructed to choose for him based on her knowledge and observation of my child. Ironically, my child has been white on the United States census, black at school, and multiracial at home—all at the same time."

Graham and others were asking that a "Multiracial" box be added to the racial categories specified by Directive 15—a proposal that alarmed representatives of the other racial groups for a number of reasons, not the least of which was that multiracialism threatened to undermine the concept of racial classification altogether.

According to various estimates, at least seventy-five to more than ninety per cent of the people who now check the Black box could check Multiracial, because of their mixed genetic heritage. If a certain proportion of those people say, ten per cent should elect to identify themselves as Multiracial, legislative districts in many parts of the country might need to be redrawn. The entire civil-rights regulatory program concerning housing, employment, and education would have to be reassessed. School desegregation plans would be thrown into the air. Of course, it is possible that only a small number of Americans will elect to choose the Multiracial option, if it is offered, with little social effect. Merely placing such an option on the census invites people to consider choosing it, however. When the census listed "Cajun" as one of several examples under the ancestry question, the number of Cajuns jumped nearly two thousand per cent. To remind people of the possibility is to encourage enormous change.

Those who are charged with enforcing civil-rights laws see the Multiracial box as a wrecking ball aimed at affirmative action, and they hold those in the mixed-race movement responsible. "There's no concern on any of these people's part about the effect on policy it's just a subjective feeling that their identity needs to be stroked," one government analyst said. "What they don't understand is that it's going to cost their own groups"—by losing the advantages that accrue to minorities by way of affirmative-action programs, for instance. Graham contends that the object of her movement is not to create another protected category. In any case, she said, multiracial people know "to check the right box to get the goodies."

Of course, races have been mixing in America since Columbus arrived. Visitors to Colonial America found plantation slaves who were as light-skinned as their masters. Patrick Henry actually proposed, in 1784, that the State of Virginia encourage intermarriage between whites and Indians, through the use of tax incentives and cash stipends. The legacy of this intermingling is that Americans who are descendants of early settlers, of slaves, or of Indians often have ancestors of different races in their family tree.

Thomas Jefferson supervised the original census, in 1790. The population then was broken down into free white males, free white females, other persons (these included free blacks and "taxable Indians," which meant those living in or around white settlements), and slaves. How unsettled this country has always been about its racial categories is evident in the fact that nearly every census since has measured race differently. For most of the nineteenth century, the census reflected an American obsession with miscegenation. The color of slaves was to be specified as "B," for black, and "M," for mulatto. In the 1890 census, gradations of mulattos were further broken down into quadroons and octoroons. After 1920, however, the
Actual interracial marriages, however, were historically rare. Multiracial children were often marginalized as illegitimate half-breeds who didn’t fit comfortably into any racial community. This was particularly true of the offspring of black-white unions. “In my family, like many families with African-American ancestry, there is a history of multiracial offspring associated with rape and concubinage,” G. Reginald Daniel, who teaches a course in multiracial identity at the University of California at Los Angeles, says. “I was reared in the segregationist South. Both sides of my family have been mixed for at least three generations. I struggled as a child over the question of why I had to exclude my East Indian and Irish and Native American and French ancestry, and could include only African.”

Until recently, people like Daniel were identified simply as black because of a peculiarly American institution known informally as “the one-drop rule,” which defines as black a person with as little as a single drop of “black blood.” This notion derives from a long discredited belief that each race had its own blood type, which was correlated with physical appearance and social behavior. The antebellum South promoted the rule as a way of enlisting the slave population with the children of slave holders. By the nineteen-twenties, in Jim Crow America the one-drop rule was well established as the law of the land. It still is, according to a United States Supreme Court decision as late as 1986, which refused to review a lower court’s ruling that a Louisiana woman whose great-great-great-grandmother had been the mistress of a French planter was black—even though that proportion of her ancestry amounted to no more than three thirty-seconds of her genetic heritage. “We are the only country in the world that applies the one-drop rule, and the only group that the one-drop rule applies to is people of African descent,” Daniel observes.

People of mixed black-and-white ancestry were rejected by whites and found acceptance by blacks. Many of the most notable “black” leaders over the last century and a half were “white” to some extent, from Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass (both of whom had white fathers) to W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (who had an Irish grandmother and some American Indian ancestry as well). The fact that Lani Guinier, Louis Farrakhan, and Virginia’s former governor Douglas Wilder are defined as black, and define themselves that way, though they have light skin or “European” features, demonstrates how enduring the one-drop rule has proved to be in America, not only among whites but among blacks as well. Daniel sees this as “a double-edged sword.” While the one-drop rule encouraged racism, it also galvanized the black community.

“But the one-drop rule is racist,” Daniel says. “There’s no way you can get away from the fact that it was historically implemented to create as many slaves as possible. No one leap[ed] over to the white community—that was simply the mentality of the nation, and people of African descent internalized it. What this current discourse is about is lifting the lid of racial oppression in our institutions and letting people identity with the totality of their heritage. We have created a nightmare for human dignity. Multiracialism has the potential for undermining the very basis of racism, which is its categories.”

But multiracialism introduces nightmares of its own. If people are to be counted as something other than completely black, for instance, how will affirmative-action programs be implemented? Suppose a court orders a city to hire additional black police officers to make up for past discrimination. Will mixed race officers count? Will they count wholly or partly? Far from solving the problem of fragmented identities, multiracialism could open the door to fractional races, such as we already have in the case of the American Indians. In order to be eligible for certain federal benefits, such as housing-improvement programs, a person must prove that he or she either is a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe or has fifty per cent “Indian blood.” One can envision a situation in which nonwhiteness itself becomes the only valued quality, to be compensated in various ways depending on a person’s pedigree.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, of Harvard’s Philosophy and Afro-American Studies Departments, says, “What the Multiracial category aims for is not people of mixed ancestry, because a majority of Americans are actually products of mixed ancestry. This category goes after people who have parents who are socially recognized as belonging to different races. That’s O.K.—that’s an interesting social category. But then you have to ask what happens to their children. Do we want to have more boxes, depending upon whether they marry back into one group or the other? What are the children of these people supposed to say? I think about these things because—look, my mother is English; my father is Ghanaian. My sisters are married to a Nigerian and a Norwegian. I have nephews who range from blond-haired kids to very black kids. They are all first cousins. Now, according to the American scheme of things, they’re all black—even the guy with blond hair who skis in Oslo. That’s what the one drop rule says. The Multiracial scheme, which is meant to solve anomalies, simply creates more anomalies of its own, and that’s because the fundamental concept—that you should be able to assign every American to one of three or four races reliably—is crazy.”

These are sentiments that Representative Sawyer agrees with profoundly. He says of the one-drop rule, “It is so embedded in our perception and policy, but it doesn’t allow for the blurring that is the reality of our population. Just look at—What are the numbers?” he said in his congressional office as he leafed through a briefing book “Thirty-eight per cent of American Japanese females and eighteen per cent of American Japanese males marry outside their traditional ethnic and nationality group. Seventy per cent of American Indians marry outside. I grant you that the enormous growth potential of multiracial marriages starts from a relatively small base, but the truth is it starts from a fiction to begin with; that is, what we think of as black-and-white marriages are not marriages between people who come from anything like a clearly defined ethnic, racial, or genetic base.”

The United States Supreme Court struck down the last vestige of anti-miscegenation laws in 1967, in Loving v. Virginia. At that time, interracial marriages were rare; only sixty-five thousand marriages between blacks and whites were recorded in the 1970 census. Marriages between Asians and non-Asian Americans tended to be between soldiers and war brides. Since then, mixed marriages occurring between many racial and ethnic groups have risen to the point where they have eroded the distinctions between such peoples. Among American Indians, people are more likely to
The final classification, Hispanic, was the most problematic of all. In the 1960 census, people whose ancestry was Latin-American were counted as Asian Indians and various other darker-skinned peoples with any African heritage at all, the range of actual skin colors covered the entire spectrum, as did the White category, which included Arabs and Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, or the Indian subcontinent”– everybody else, in other words. Because the Black category contained anyone person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa,” and White, initially, as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Mongoloid stock as many of these peoples did not stop the committee from putting them in a separate racial category. Black was defined as “a Pacific Islander, thus sweeping into one massive basket Chinese, Samoans, Cambodians, Filipinos, and others–peoples who had little or nothing in highly diverse peoples who originated in the Far East, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands, the committee proposed a category called Asian or origin, but the distinction that this category was seeking was so-called “Federal Indians,” who were eligible for government benefits; to include of the committee wanted the category to be called Original Peoples of the Western Hemisphere, in order to include Indians of South American grid that would sort all Americans into five racial and ethnic categories. The first category was American Indian or Alaskan Native. Some members (FICE) to develop some standards for classifying race and ethnicity. An ad-hoc committee sprang into being and proposed to create an intellectual intensifiers, with the aim of justifying the exploitation of one group by another. One can trace the ominous example of Jews in prewar Germany, who were counted as “Israelites,” a religious group, until the Nazis came to power and turned them into a race. Mixtures of first- and second-degree Jewishness were distinguished, much as quadroons and octoroons had been in the United States. In fact, the Nazi experience ultimately caused a widespread reexamination of the idea of race. Canada dropped the race question from its census in 1951 and has so far resisted all attempts to reinstitute it. People who were working in the United States Bureau of the Census in the fifties and early sixties remember that there was speculation that the race question would soon be phased out in America as well. The American Civil Liberties Union tried to get the race question reinstated. People who were working in the United States Bureau of the Census in the fifties and early sixties remember that there was race data were fundamental to monitoring and enforcing desegregation. The census soon acquired a political importance that it had never had in the past.

Unfortunately, the sloppiness and multiplicity of certain racial and ethnic categories rendered them practically meaningless for statistical purposes. In 1973, Caspar Weinberger, who was then Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, asked the Federal Inter-agency Committee on Education (FICE) to develop some standards for classifying race and ethnicity. An ad-hoc committee sprang into being and proposed to create an intellectual grid that would sort all Americans into five racial and ethnic categories. The first category was American Indian or Alaskan Native. Some members of the committee wanted the category to be called Original Peoples of the Western Hemisphere, in order to include Indians of South American origin, but the distinction that this category was seeking was so-called “Federal Indians,” who were eligible for government benefits; to include Indians of any other origin, even though they might be genetically quite similar, would confuse the collecting of data. To accommodate the various, highly diverse peoples who originated in the Far East, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands, the committee proposed a category called Asian or Pacific Islander, thus sweeping into one massive basket Chinese, Samoans, Cambodians, Filipinos, and others-peoples who had little or nothing in common, and many of whom were, indeed, traditional enemies. The fact that American Indians and Alaskan Natives originated from the same Mongoloid stock as many of these peoples did not stop the committee from putting them in a separate racial category. Black was defined as “a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa,” and White, initially, as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, or the Indian subcontinent”– everybody else, in other words. Because the Black category contained anyone with any African heritage at all, the range of actual skin colors covered the entire spectrum, as did the White category, which included Arabs and Asian Indians and various other darker-skinned peoples.

The final classification, Hispanic, was the most problematic of all. In the 1960 census, people whose ancestry was Latin-American were counted as...
The greatest dilemma was that there was no conceivable justification for calling Hispanics a race. There were black Hispanics from the Dominican Republic, Argentines who were almost entirely European whites, Mexicans who would have been counted as American Indians if they had been born north of the Rio Grande. The great preponderance of Hispanics are mestizos—a continuum of many different genetic backgrounds. Moreover, the rigid Latin-American concept of race differs from the rigid United States idea of biologically determined and highly distinct human divisions. In most Latin cultures, skin color is an individual variable—not a group marker—so that within the same family one sibling might be considered white and another black. By 1960, the United States census, which counts the population of Puerto Rico, gave up asking the race question on the island, because race did not carry the same distinction there that it did on the mainland. The ad-hoc committee decided to dodge riddles like these by calling Hispanics an ethnic group, not a race.

In 1977, O.M.B. Statistical Directive 15 adopted the FICE suggestions practically verbatim, with one principal exception: Asian Indians were moved to the Asian or Pacific Islander category. Thus, with little political discussion, the identities of Americans were fixed in five broad groupings. Those racial and ethnic categories that were dreamed up almost twenty years ago were not neutral in their effect. By attempting to provide a way for Americans to describe themselves, the categories actually began to shape those identities. The categories became political entities, with their own constituencies, lobbies, and vested interests. What was even more significant, they caused people to think of themselves in new ways members of “races” that were little more than statistical devices. In 1974, the year the ad-hoc committee set to work, few people referred to themselves as Hispanic; rather, people who fell into that grouping tended to identify themselves by nationality—Mexican or Dominican, for instance. Such small categories, however, are inconvenient for statistics and politics, and the creation of the meta-concept “Hispanic” has resulted in the formation of a peculiarly American group. “It is a mixture of ethnicity, culture, history, birth, and a presumption of language,” Sawyer contends. Largely because of immigration, the Asian or Pacific Islander group is considered the fastest-growing racial group in the United States, but it is a “racial” category that in all likelihood exists nowhere else in the world. The third-fastest-growing category is Other—made up of the nearly ten million people, most of them Hispanics, who refused to check any of the prescribed racial boxes. American Indian groups are also growing at a rate that far exceeds the growth of the population as a whole: from about half a million people in 1960 to nearly two million in 1990—a two-hundred-and-fifty-nine-per-cent increase, which was demographically impossible. It seemed to be accounted for by improvements in the census-taking procedure and also by the fact that Native Americans had become fashionable, and people now wished to identity with them. To make matters even more confusing, only seventy-four per cent of those who identified themselves as American Indian by race reported having Indian ancestry.

Whatever the word “race” may mean elsewhere in the world, or to the world of science, it is clear that in America the categories are arbitrary, confused, and hopelessly intermingled. In many cases, Americans don’t know who they are, racially speaking. A National Center for Health Statistics study found that 5.8 per cent of the people who called themselves Black were seen as White by a census interviewer. Nearly a third of the people identifying themselves as Asian were classified as White or Black by independent observers. That was also true of seventy per cent of people who identified themselves as American Indians. Robert A. Hahn, an epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, analyzed deaths of infants born from 1983 through 1985. In an astounding number of cases, the infant had a different race on its death certificate from the one on its birth certificate, and this finding led to staggering increases in the infant-mortality rate for minority populations—46.9 per cent greater for American Indians, 48.8 per cent greater for Japanese-Americans, 78.7 per cent greater for Filipinos—over what had been previously recorded. Such disparities cast doubt on the dependability of race as a criterion for any statistical survey. “It seems to me that we have to go back and reevaluate the whole system,” Hahn says. “We have to ask, ‘What do these categories mean?’ We are not talking about race in the way that geneticists might use the term, because we’re not making any kind of biological assessment. It’s closer to self-perceived membership in a population—which is essentially what ethnicity is.” There are genetic variations in disease patterns, Hahn points out, and he goes on to say, “But these variations don’t always correspond to so-called races. What’s really important is, essentially, two things. One, people from different ancestral backgrounds have different behaviors—diets, ideas about what to do when you’re sick—that lead them to different health statuses. Two, people are discriminated against because of other people’s perception of who they are and how they should be treated. There’s still a lot of discrimination in the health-care system.”

Racial statistics do serve an important purpose in the monitoring and enforcement of civil-rights laws; indeed, that has become the main justification for such data. A routine example is the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act. Because of race questions on loan applications, the federal government has been able to document the continued practice of redlining by financial institutions. The Federal Reserve found that, for conventional mortgages, in 1992 the denial rate for blacks and Hispanics was roughly double the rate for whites. Hiring practices, jury selection, discriminatory housing patterns, apportionment of political power—indeed in all these areas, and more, the government patrol society, armed with little more than statistical information to insure equal an fair treatment. “We need these categories essentially to get rid of them,” Hahn says.

The unwanted corollary of slotting people by race is that such officially sanctioned classifications may actually worsen racial strife. By creating social-welfare programs based on race rather than on need, the government sets citizens against one another precisely because of perceived racial differences. “It is not ‘race’ but a practice of racial classification that bedevils the society,” writes Yehudi Webster, a sociologist at California State University, Los Angeles, and the author of “The Racialization of America.” The use of racial statistics, he and others have argued, creates a reality of racial divisions, which then require solutions, such as busing, affirmative action, and multicultural education, all of which are bound to fail, because
they heighten the racial awareness that leads to contention. Webster believes that adding a Multiracial box would be “another leap into absurdity,” because it reinforces the concept of race in the first place. “In a way, it’s a continuation of the one-drop principle. Anybody can say, ‘I’ve got one drop of something I must be multiracial.’ It may be a good thing. It may finally convince Americans of the absurdity of racial classification.”

In 1990, Itabari Njeri, who writes about interethnic relations for the Los Angeles Times, organized a symposium for the National Association of Black Journalists. She recounts a presentation given by Charles Stewart, a Democratic Party activist: “If you consider yourself black for political reasons, raise your hand.” The vast majority raised their hands. When Stewart then asked how many people present believed they were of pure African descent, without any mixture, no one raised his hand. Stewart commented later, “If you advocate a category that includes people who are multiracial to the detriment of their black identification, you will replicate what you saw- an empty room. We can not afford to have an empty room.”

Njeri maintains that the social and economic gap between light-skinned blacks and dark-skinned blacks is as great as the gap between all blacks and all whites in America. If people of more obviously mixed backgrounds were to migrate to a Multiracial box, she says, they would be politically abandoning their former allies and the people who needed their help the most. In stead of draining the established categories of their influence, Njeri and others believe, it would be better to eliminate racial categories altogether.

That possibility is actually being discussed in the corridors of government. “It’s quite strange–the original idea of O.M.B. Directive 15 has nothing to do with current efforts to ‘define’ race,” says Sally Katzen, the director of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs at O.M.B., who has the onerous responsibility of making the final recommendation on revising the racial categories. “When O.M.B. got into the business of establishing categories, it was purely statistical, not programmatic—purely for the purpose of data gathering, not for defining or protecting different categories. It was certainly never meant to define a race.” And yet for more than twenty years Directive 15 did exactly that, with relatively little outcry. “Recently, a question has been raised about the increasing number of multiracial children. I personally have received pictures of beautiful children who are part Asian and part black, or part American Indian and part Asian, with these letters saying, ‘I don’t want to check just one box. I don’t want to deny part of my heritage.’ It’s very compelling.”

This year, Katzen convened a new interagency committee to consider how races should be categorized, and even whether racial information should be sought at all. “To me it’s offensive because I think of the Holocaust— for someone to say what a Jew is,” says Katzen. “I don’t think a government agency should be defining racial and ethnic categories—that certainly was not what was ever intended by these standards.”

Is it any accident that racial and ethnic categories should come under attack now, when being a member of a minority group brings certain advantages? The white colonizers of North America conquered the indigenous people, imported African slaves, brought in Asians as laborers and then excluded them with prejudicial immigration laws, and appropriated Mexican land and the people who were living on it. In short, the nonwhite population of America has historically been subjugated and treated as second-class citizens by the white majority. It is to redress the social and economic inequalities of our history that We have civil-rights laws and affirmative-action plans in the first place. Advocates of various racial and ethnic groups point out that many of the people now calling for a race-blind society are political conservatives, who may have an interest in undermining the advancement of nonwhites in our society. Suddenly, the conservatives have adopted the language of integration, it seems, and the left-leaning racial-identity advocates have adopted the language of separatism. It amounts to a polar reversal of political rhetoric.

Jon Michael Spencer, a professor in the African and Afro-American Studies Curriculum at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, recently wrote an article in The Black Scholar lamenting what he calls “the postmodern conspiracy to explode racial identity.” The article ignited a passionate debate in the magazine over the nature and the future of race. Spencer believes that race is a useful metaphor for cultural and historic difference, because it permits a level of social cohesion among oppressed classes. “To relinquish the notion of race—even though it’s a cruel hoax—at this particular time is to relinquish our fortress against the powers and principalities that still try to undermine us,” he says. He sees the Multi-racial box as politically damaging to “those who need to galvanize peoples around the racial idea of black.”

There are some black cultural nationalists who might welcome the Multiracial category. “In terms of the African-American population, it could be very, very useful, because there is a need to clarify who is in and who is not,” Molefi Kete Asante, who is the chairperson of the Department of African-American Studies at Temple University, says. “In fact, I would think they should go further than that—identify those people who are in interracial marriages.”

Spencer, however, thinks that it might be better to eliminate racial categories altogether than to create an additional category that empties the others of meaning. “If you had who knows how many thousands or tens of thousands or millions of people claiming to be multiracial, you would lessen the number who are black,” Spencer says. “There’s no end in sight. There’s no limit to which one can go in claiming to be multiracial. For instance, I happen to be very brown in complexion, but when I go to the continent of Africa, blacks and whites there claim that I would be ‘colored’ rather than black, which means that somewhere in my distant past- probably during the era of slavery-I could have one or more white ancestors. So does that mean that I, too, could check Multiracial? Certainly light-skinned black people might perhaps see this as a way out of being included among a despised racial group. The result could be the creation of another class of people, who are betwixt and between black and white.”

Whatever comes out of this discussion, the nation is likely to engage in the most profound debate of racial questions in decades. “We recognize the importance of racial categories in correcting clear injustices under the law,” Representative Sawyer says. “The dilemma we face is trying to assure the fundamental guarantees of equality of opportunity while at the same time recognizing that the populations themselves are changing as we seek to categorize them. It reaches the point where it becomes an absurd counting game. Part of the difficulty is that we are dealing with the illusion of precision. We wind up with precise counts of everybody in the country, and they are precisely wrong. They don’t reflect who we are as a people. To
be effective, the concepts of individual and group identity need to reflect not only who we have been but who we are becoming. The more these categories distort our perception of reality, the less useful they are. We act as if we knew what we’re talking about when we talk about race, and we don’t.”

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THE ENTMAN-ROJECKI INDEX OF RACE AND THE MEDIA

By Robert N. Entman and Andrew Rojecki, authors of “The Black Image in the White Mind”

1. While Black actors are now more numerous in film, it’s an open question as to how well they’re being represented. In the top movies of 1996:

- Black female movie characters shown using vulgar profanity: 89%.
- White female movie characters shown using vulgar profanity: 17%.
- Black female movie characters shown being physically violent: 56%.
- White female movie characters shown being physically violent: 11%.
- Black female movie characters shown being restrained: 55%.
- White female movie characters shown being restrained: 6%.

2. Television ads now show many Blacks and eschew stereotypes. However, hidden patterns of differentiation and distance emerge on close analysis. Not surprisingly, for instance, Blacks do not touch Whites in the ads, but (unlike Whites) they rarely even touch each other, conveying a subtle message of Black skin as taboo. A hierarchy of racial preference is embedded within the casting of commercials. Consider these figures from a large prime time sample:

- Of the 105 commercials for autos or trucks that showed only one race, the percentage all-White: 100%.
- Of the 74 commercials for perfumes that showed only one race, the percentage all-White: 98%.
- Of the 47 commercials for jewelry or cosmetics that showed only one race, the percentage all-White: 100%.

3. Over 70% of Black characters in the most highly rated TV entertainment shows have professional or management positions. However well-intentioned, this utopian reversal imposes a formal distance between Black and White actors, hobbling the audience's sympathetic imagination. Blacks’ supervisory roles isolate their characters from close peer relationships. Among these actors, 92% of interactions with Whites are restricted to job-related tasks.

4. Network news tends to “ghettoize” Blacks. Increasingly, African Americans appear mostly in crime, sports and entertainment stories. Rarely are Blacks shown making an important contribution to the serious business of the nation. Sampling network news shows:

- Number of soundbites on foreign affairs uttered by Whites: 99; by Blacks: 1.
- Number of soundbites on economics uttered by Whites: 86; by Blacks: 1.
- Number of soundbites on electoral politics uttered by Whites: 79; by Blacks: 0.
- Number of soundbites on sports and entertainment uttered by Whites: 35; by Blacks: 11.
- Number of soundbites on crime uttered by Whites: 149; by Blacks: 24.

5. Black defendants are simply treated differently on local TV news from their White counterparts:

- Times more likely that a mug shot of the accused will appear in a local TV news report when the defendant is Black rather than White: 4.
- Times more likely that the accused will be shown physically restrained in a local TV news report when the defendant is Black rather than
White: 2.

- Times less likely that the name of the accused will be shown on screen in a local TV news report when the defendant is Black rather than White: 2

6. “Telegenic” figures aren’t always the most representative leaders. Some statistics from 1994:

- Black adults stating that Jesse Jackson represents Black people “very well”: 40%.
- Black adults stating that Louis Farrakhan represents Black people “very well”: 11%.
- Black adults stating they had “never heard of” Jesse Jackson: 0%.
- Black adults stating they had “never heard of” Louis Farrakhan: 22%.
- Stories about, or soundbites from, Jesse Jackson on ABC World News: 13.
- Stories about, or soundbites from, Louis Farrakhan on ABC World News: 25.

7. The media sowed discord during the affirmative action debate of the 1990s despite the considerable common ground between Blacks and Whites. Reporters often predicted affirmative action would be one of the key issues in the 1996 election because of the “rage” among Whites.

- Percentage of survey respondents naming affirmative action as their top priority in voting against a presidential candidate, 1996: 1%.
- Percentage of White men (“angry” or not) surveyed who favored affirmative action programs as is or with reforms: 61%.
- Percentage of White women surveyed who favored affirmative action programs as is or with reforms: 76%.
- Percentage of White “persons on the street” supporting affirmative action in a sample of network news: 12.5%. Percentage opposing: 87.5%.

Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki
*The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*
©2000, 324 pages
Paper $17.00 ISBN: 978-0-226-21076-6
http://www.press.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/hfs.cgi/00/13999.ctl

SOURCE
NEW YORK CITY IS BECOMING FOREIGN

Cindy Adams

September 30, 2007 — FORGET that telephone hookup, we who pay New York City taxes are actually living in PragueIraqParisDC. We think we're the capital of the world, center of the Universe? No. We are Planet Earth.

Walk our streets. English is the second language. And if you count New Yorkese – “Yo, man . . . whassup” – it's the third.

Two days ago a lady, speaking some gibberish that Berlitz doesn't teach, asked me directions to someplace. I tried but couldn't understand her. When I wasn't able to help, she turned in disgust and mumbled to her companion: “She no know English.”

Anyone notice that our previous 7 p.m. dining hour has crept to 7:30? Then 8? Why? South Americans have swarmed in. Their normal dining hour is 11. Now you go into a restaurant and it crowds up at 10 o'clock.

And conversation between New Yorkers going out for dinner? “So how about we do Turkish. We did Turkish last week. OK, French. Why French? We need something different for a change. So let's have Indian. I don't know, I was thinking maybe Mexican.” The thought of an Idaho baked potato/Maine lobster/New York sirloin/Georgia peach/California orange/Louisiana gumbo/Texas chili/Maryland crab cake/Iowa corn/New England clam chowder/Southern fried chicken never occurred to them.

Never mind the housing and mortgage situation. Look for a condo in Manhattan and you'll learn everything's taken by Europeans. With America's currency having hiccups, they think $12 million two-bedroom apartments are bargains.

Walk our shopping areas. Check the names – Gucci, Pucci, Fiorucci, Fendi, Ricci, Armani, Missoni, Givenchy, Versace, Miyake, Mori, Prada, Zegna, Burberry, Bally, Chanel, Dior, Vuitton, McCartney, McQueen, St. Laurent, Louboutin, Rykiel, Cardin, Courreges, Gaultier, Dolce & Gabbana, Kenzo, Manolo, Etro, Ferragamo, Valentino, Galliano, Yamamoto, Lacroix, La-dee-dah, La-what ever. And talk to their sales help in English, they don't even turn around. If you sound American the only language they speak is dollars.

Add to that our influx last week for the U.N. (Useless Nations). A local citizen, who pays taxes here and owns a super-expensive apartment here and had a bad leg, discovered his car was waved blocks away so some yutz from Uruguay surrounded by a detail straight out of a Bruce Willis B-movie could commandeer the whole front of his building. He fumed: “Why kill our whole city? Why not stick this nonproductive organization out in a field someplace – like in Utah – where it doesn’t bother anybody?”
Sen. Chuck Schumer's office arranged for my first-ever visit to the Federal Reserve Bank downtown, where they store a few thousand billion in gold bullion. I wasn't planning to make a deposit or anything. Just that periodically I enjoy experiencing the history of my country, my state, my city and whatever makes us what we are. I arrived at the appointed time Friday. Boy, could the Fed not have cared less. Liberty Street was filled with black SUVs and dudes wearing black shades and black clothes behind windows tinted black. Menacing guys with guns and earpieces, all whispering into their shirt cuffs, ringed the block. And all for some jerk in an ill-fitting suit with plastic gum-soled shoes from some fourth-rate country so small it's standing in line to dare shake its fist at the United States.

Last Sunday friends tried a restaurant in the Theater District. They're Yanks. Born here. No immigration hangups. Lou Dobbs wouldn't have tried to deport them. They have valid driver's licenses, Social Security cards, passports, subscriptions to Reader's Digest and CDs of Kate Smith singing "God Bless America."

They were nearly frisked and slammed against a wall when they wanted to use the men's room. Why? Because the Bruce Willis extras were protecting some ambassador who probably lives in a tent in his native city and comes from some junk place that pays his salary with money borrowed from us. Why? What is that?!

They screw up traffic so we who live here have been late for every appointment. They park in our parking spots, pay no taxes, are immune from all illegalities, live free, eat free, smoke free, are partied and feted and lauded and stay - on the arm - in the best, greatest, thrillingest, most exciting city in the whole world with the sole job of then peeing on us.

And our cops protect them? Our city guards them? Our officials bow to them? Our citizens place second to them? Our TV gives them prime time? Our universities give their madmen a platform? What the hell for? How is this possible? Can you remotely imagine that working in reverse?

How about we find a way to keep them out of here forever. Or at least out of New York. Or at least out of Manhattan. Or at least out of Midtown. Or at least off the street where my hairdresser is.

(Article courtesy of the New York Post)
A FRENCH PRINT:

http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Hott.html

COMING HOME:

By Chris McGreal

In 1810, Saartjie Baartman was brought to Europe from South Africa to be displayed as a sexual freak and example of the inferiority of the black race. Now the remains of the ‘Hottentot Venus’ are finally being returned to her homeland. Chris McGreal reports.

The first time Saartjie Baartman was dragged out to squat before the mob at 225 Piccadilly, the show's promoters billed her genitals as resembling the skin that hangs from a turkey's throat. For several years, working-class Londoners crowded in to shout vulgarities at the protruding buttocks and large vulva of the unfortunate woman made famous across Europe as the “Hottentot Venus”. The aristocracy were no less fascinated at what they saw as a sexual freak, but they had private showings. Death in Paris a few years later treated the young woman from South Africa's Eastern Cape little better than life. She was carved up by Napoleon's surgeon, who made a cast of her body, pickled her genitals and brain, and put her skeleton on display in a museum. But now, nearly two centuries after Baartman was lured on to a ship for England with the promise that she would make her fortune, the Hottentot Venus is to go home. The French senate has voted to release Baartman's remains from the Musé de l'Homme, where they were on public display until shame caught up with the administrators in 1976. The senate debate was an emotional affair, with the crucial question posed by the man who sponsored the bill, Nicolas About. "This young woman was treated as if she was something monstrous. But where in this affair is the true monstrosity?" he asked. It is a question to which the Khoisan – the first people to inhabit the southern tip of Africa – have a ready answer, and the return of Baartman's remains is giving them the opportunity to make it heard. "Saartjie Baartman became a symbol of our suffering, and all the misery she went through was a manifestation of how the Khoisan people were treated during that period and beyond," says Cecil le Fleur, chairman of the National Khoisan Consultative Conference Council. "But the sad thing is that although we knew of Saartjie Baartman when we were growing up, we didn't really know what happened to her. We only found out a few years ago that her skeleton was in a museum in Paris. The French knew but we didn't, her own people. They never thought to tell us." Baartman was born in 1789 in what is now the Eastern Cape – the year of the French revolution, with its ideals of equality and liberty. She was from a clan of Quena people who were among those derided by white settlers as "Hottentots". Today, the Quena fall under the collective label of Khoisan – grouping all the first peoples of southern Africa. In her late teens, Baartman migrated to Cape Town. Colonial records show that in 1810 she was living in a small shack when a British ship's doctor, William Dunlop, took an interest in her. He was fascinated by her large backside and genitalia – common to Khoisan people. Dunlop persuaded her to sail with him to London by telling her that she would become rich by displaying her body. No doubt she saw the opportunity to live like the white colonialists in the Cape. Her fate was to be much worse even than that of the Elephant Man.

Baartman was first displayed in Piccadilly. A contemporary account describes how she was paraded on a "stage two feet high, along which she was led by her keeper and exhibited like a wild beast, being obliged to walk, stand or sit as he ordered". The crowd viewed her as little different from an animal. From Piccadilly she was moved to Bartholomew Fair and Haymarket.

Slavery was a hot topic of the time. A young Jamaican, Robert Wedderburn, who founded the African Association to campaign against racism, pressured the government to end the daily spectacle on the grounds that it amounted to slavery. The attorney general backed him, but the courts ruled that Baartman had entered into a contract of her own free will and the show went on. It is doubtful the Hottentot Venus ever saw a contract.

Four years after her arrival in London, she was moved to Paris – probably sold – where she fell under the control of a "showman of wild animals" at a travelling circus. When she was not being paraded for the mob, Baartman was displayed at society functions. It was at a ball for France's new establishment – where she arrived dressed in nothing but a few feathers – that Napoleon's surgeon general, George Cuvier, spotted her and claimed a scientific interest. Over the following year she was repeatedly studied by doctors and anthropologists, who invariably concluded that she was evidence of the superiority of the white race.

The abuse took its toll on her, driving her into prostitution and alcoholism. She died in 1815, just five years after arriving in Europe. It's not certain what claimed her but the descriptions of her death point to syphilis and tuberculosis. Then Napoleon's surgeon got hold of her again.

After her remains were pulled from public display at the Musé de l'Homme 26 years ago, they were consigned to a shelf in a back room and largely forgotten until interest in her fate revived with the end of apartheid in South Africa and the Khoisan peoples attempts to reassert their identity.

Le Fleur sees Baartman's suffering as representative of the entire Khoisan people. "All through the colonial period and the decades of apartheid, our people were robbed of their lives and identity," he says. "It was one of the master plans of the colonial powers to alienate us from our culture, language and traditions so they could rob us of our land. In the apartheid era they reclassified us as being merely a so-called coloured (mixed-race) person so we could not be distinguished from people with white or black blood."
Yet Baartman’s return has a greater symbolism than acknowledging past atrocities. There is a sense among many of the estimated 100,000 or more people who claim Khoisan descent that even in the new, democratic South Africa, they are still marginalised. “The Khoisan definitely don’t feel that they are accommodated in the broader South African society as a people,” says Le Fleur. “According to the constitution, we enjoy the same individual rights, but as a group we are not yet recognised as a people. We are not recognised as the first indigenous peoples of South Africa.” But that is changing, and not just because of Baartman’s imminent return.

Many South Africans classified as “coloured” under apartheid feel that affirmative action for black people has once again left them behind, just as white “job reservation” and other apartheid measures did in the old days. To claim their place at the head of the queue, growing numbers of people in the Cape are identifying themselves as “Khoisan”.

Baartman nearly did not come back at all. Nelson Mandela took up the cause when he became president in 1994, pressing François Mitterand to release her remains. But the French were initially reluctant to open what they saw as a Pandora’s box that could lead to plundered artefacts from across the globe, and now filling museums, being returned. Besides which, there was an instinctive desire not to face up to Baartman’s inhumane treatment.

French bureaucrats looked for reasons to shelve the issue. According to the senate’s own report, officials at one point said that since South Africa had not raised the Baartman issue for a few months, there was no need to do anything. But the report brushed aside the doubts by describing the delays in returning her to South Africa as “grave management dysfunction” and “incompetence fighting with absurdity”.

But what of Baartman’s fate now? Who will claim her? Where will she be buried? Some want her interned in the Gamtoos Valley where she is believed to have been born. Others want a grander affair that evokes the national suffering of so many generations of all South Africans.

“That is the million-dollar question,” says Le Fleur. “Irrespective of the fact that she is Khoisan descent, we don’t want to create the impression that we claim her as Khoisan property. Mostly, we want her to have a decent burial and to treat her in death how she was never treated in life.”

Sarah Baartman – AT REST, AT LAST:

By Lucille Davie

12 August 2002

Sarah Baartman, displayed as a freak because of her unusual physical features, has finally been laid to rest, 187 years after she left Cape Town for London. Her remains were buried on Women’s Day, 9 August 2002, in the area of her birth, the Gamtoos River Valley in the Eastern Cape.

Baartman was born in 1789. She was working as a slave in Cape Town when she was “discovered” by British ship’s doctor William Dunlop, who persuaded her to travel with him to England. We’ll never know what she had in mind when she stepped on board – of her own free will – a ship for London.

But it’s clear what Dunlop had in mind – to display her as a “freak”, a “scientific curiosity”, and make money from these shows, some of which he promised to give to her.

Baartman had unusually large buttocks and genitals, and in the early 1800s Europeans were arrogantly obsessed with their own superiority, and with proving that others, particularly blacks, were inferior and oversexed.

Baartman’s physical characteristics, not unusual for Khoisan women, although her features were larger than normal, were “evidence” of this prejudice, and she was treated like a freak exhibit in London.

The ‘Hottentot Venus’

She was called the “Hottentot Venus”, ‘Hottentot’ being a name given to people with cattle. They had acquired these cattle by migrating northwards to Angola and returned to South Africa with them, some 2 000 years before the first European settlement at the Cape in 1652. Prior to this, they were indistinguishable from the Bushmen or San, the first inhabitants of South Africa, who had been in the region for around 100 000 years as hunter-gatherers.

Khoisan is used to denote their relationship to the San people. The label Hottentot took on derogatory connotations, and is no longer used.

Venus is the Roman goddess of love, a cruel reference to Baartman being an object of admiration and adoration instead of the object of leering and abuse that she became.

She spent four years in London, then moved to Paris, where she continued her degrading round of shows and exhibitions. In Paris she attracted the attention of French scientists, in particular Georges Cuvier.

No one knows if Dunlop was true to his word and paid Baartman for her “services”, but if he did pay her, it wasn’t sufficient to buy herself out of the life she was living.

Once the Parisians got tired of the Baartman show, she was forced to turn to prostitution. She didn’t last the ravages of a foreign culture and climate,
or the further abuse of her body. She died in 1815 at the age of 25.

The cause of death was given as “inflammatory and eruptive sickness”, possibly syphilis. Others suggest she was an alcoholic. Whatever the cause, she lived and died thousands of kilometres from home and family, in a hostile city, with no means of getting herself home again.

Cuvier made a plaster cast of her body, then removed her skeleton and, after removing her brain and genitals, pickled them and displayed them in bottles at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris.

Some 160 years later they were still on display, but were finally removed from public view in 1974. In 1994, then president Nelson Mandela suggested that her remains be brought home.

Other representations were made, but it took the French government eight years to pass a bill – apparently worded so as to prevent other countries from claiming the return of their stolen treasures – to allow their small piece of “scientific curiosity” to be returned to South Africa.

In January 2002, Sarah Baartman's remains were finally returned, and remained in Cape Town pending a decision on her final burial place.

Marang Setshwaelo, writing for Africana.com, says that Dr Willa Boezak, a Khoisan rights activist, believes that a poem written by Khoisan descendant Diana Ferrus in 1998 played a major role in helping bring Baartman home. Boezak says: “It took the power of a woman, through a simple, loving poem, to move hard politicians into action.”

Whatever the reason, Sarah Baartman is home, and has finally had her dignity restored by being buried where she belongs – far away from where her race and gender were so cruelly exploited.
A poem for Sarah Baartman

By Diana Ferrus

"I've come to take you home –
home, remember the veld?
the lush green grass beneath the big oak trees
the air is cool there and the sun does not burn.
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,
the proteas stand in yellow and white
and the water in the stream chuckle sing-songs
as it hobbles along over little stones.I have come to wretch you away –
away from the poking eyes
of the man-made monster
with his clutches of imperialism
who dissects your body bit by bit
who likens your soul to that of Satan
and declares himself the ultimate god! I have come to soothe your heavy heart
I offer my bosom to your weary soul
I will cover your face with the palms of my hands
I will run my lips over lines in your neck
I will feast my eyes on the beauty of you
and I will sing for you
for I have come to bring you peace.I have come to take you home
where the ancient mountains shout your name.
I have made your bed at the foot of the hill,
your blankets are covered in buchu and mint,
the proteas stand in yellow and white –
I have come to take you home
where I will sing for you
for you have brought me peace." Diana Ferrus

Diana Ferrus, of Khoisan descent, wrote “A poem for Sarah Baartman” while studying in Utrecht, Holland, in 1998. She told Marang Setshwaelo: “One evening I was looking at the stars and I thought to myself, ‘They’re so far away. But if I were home, I’d be able to touch every one of them.’ My heart just went out to Sarah, and I thought, ‘Oh, god, she died of heartbreak, she longed for her country. What did she feel?’ That’s why the first line of the poem was ‘I’ve come to take you home.’”

For decades she has been referred to as “Saartjie”, a Afrikaans diminutive form of “Sara”. The diminutive form “tjie” is thought nowadays to be patronising, hence the renaming “Sarah”.

Are the floodgates now open?
Will the floodgates of the issue of returning artefacts and treasures to their countries of origin, be opened by the return of Sarah Baartman? Ethiopia is fighting for the return of the 1 700-year-old Aksum Obelisk, taken by the Italians in the early 20th century.

A film
Zola Maseko’s documentary, The life and times of Sara Baartman, has won half-a-dozen awards, including Best African Documentary. See also Gabeba Baderoon’s article The imagined Black body, published by the University of Cape Town’s African Gender Institute.

More Sarah Baartman links
- Zapiro cartoon on the return of Sarah Baartman
- Fetching Saartjie (Mail & Guardian)
- The Return of the ‘Hottentot Venus’ (Africana.com)

SOURCE

http://www.hottentotvenus.com/index2.htm
DOCUMENTARY “THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SARA BAARTMAN” by ZOLA MASEKO:


RELATED LINKS:

YOUTUBE VIDEO:  http://youtube.com/watch?v=iQ7mmMe4kIQ&feature=related

http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Exhibition.html

EVA:


SARAH:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2183271.stm

OTA BENG A:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ota_Benga

http://www.onehumanrace.com/docs/ota_benga.asp

http://www.concentric.net/~pyb/otabenga.html

http://www.creationresearch.org/crsq/articles/30/otabenga.html

THE RETURN OF THE HOTTENTOT VENUS – AFRICANA.COM:


ETHIOPIA'S LOBBYING FOR THE RETURN OF THE ITALIAN THEFT OF THE 1,700-YEAR-OLD AKSUM OBELISK:

http://www.addistribune.com/Archives/2000/02/04-02-00/His.htm

THE RETURN OF PART OF THE AKSUM OBELISK:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4472259.stm

REFERENCES:


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Joanne Chesimard escaped from prison in 1979.

Joanne Chesimard, an African-American militant on the FBI's most-wanted list who has lived in Cuba since 1984, has started to create curiosity among island residents, even if the official news media doesn't mention her.

Chesimard, one of about 70 U.S. fugitives who live protected in Cuba, escaped from prison in 1979 while serving a life sentence for the murder of a police officer in New Jersey. The reward for her capture was increased to $1 million in May 2005.

The several hundred people who daily visit the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana can see her FBI wanted poster, distributed more than two years ago, on display there.

Some Cubans have been asking themselves who this woman is, according to residents. Others have searched the Web for information about her, and still others have contacted U.S. publications for details on her case.

On Nov. 13, Havana independent journalist Santiago Du'Bouchet sent a report to the Miami-based New Cuban Press with Chesimard's phone number and street address in the capital's Playa municipality.

"This woman strolls unnoticed through the streets of Havana, driving a VW and a black Volvo," Du'Bouchet reported.

El Nuevo Herald made numerous calls to the number, but it was always busy. Many years ago, Chesimard's phone number was listed in the Havana directory under the name she uses in Cuba, Assata Shakur. But the listing was later withdrawn.

RECENT PHOTO

New Cuban Press director Nancy Pérez Crespo noted what while the Chesimard photographs in her FBI wanted poster are more than 20 years old, her group's magazine, Enepecé, published a photo that claims to be of Chesimard, taken in February 2005.

The photo was taken when Chesimard was participating in an event for the XIV International Book Fair in Havana, Pérez Crespo said. The photographer, who asked that his name not be disclosed, sent it to New Cuban Press, which published it in mid-2005.

"We published it immediately, but no one [from the FBI] has called me to verify its authenticity or its origin," Pérez Crespo said.

Chesimard, now 60 years old, is the most notorious of the U.S. fugitives known to be living in Cuba. According to her own testimony, she was welcomed to the island with the personal consent of Fidel Castro, who considered her a fighter for racial equality in the United States.

"To make her look like a terrorist is an injustice, a brutality, an infamous lie. This woman was a role model," Castro said in a television broadcast in 2005.

Chesimard was joined in Cuba in 1985 by her daughter Kakuya, who had been under her grandmother's care in New York. She wrote a book, Assata: An Autobiography, in 1987 and is known to have worked as an English-language editor for Radio Habana.

In 1997, she told her experience in a documentary, The Eyes of the Rainbow, by Gloria Rolando. The film was officially premiered in Havana in 2004, in an event promoted by Casa de las Américas, the Cuban government's main cultural forum.

The status of Chesimard and the other U.S. fugitives in Cuba has come under increased speculation since Castro surrendered power to his brother Raúl in mid-2006.

"They have protection only by . . . Fidel Castro's decision" said a former Interior Ministry official who was involved in cases of foreigners' protection in Cuba. "It is probable that things will remain the same if their main supporter disappears, but nobody can guarantee them that once the change
PETITIONS IGNORED

The latest U.S. State Department report on countries that sponsor terrorism, dated in April, noted that the Cuban government permits the presence of U.S. fugitives on the island and does not respond to periodic petitions for their extradition.

"However, Cuba has declared that it won't be a shelter for new American fugitives who seek refuge there," the report added.

Since October of last year, Cuba has surrendered to Washington three American fugitives who had apparently arrived recently in Havana.

LINKS:

~ASSATA SHAKUR SPEAKS IN HER OWN WORDS:

http://thetalkingdrum.com/bla.html

~ASSATA SHAKUR SPEAKS: “HANDS OFF ASSATA!”

http://www.assatashakur.org/

Assata: Exile since 1979

On May 2 1973, Black Panther activist Assata Shakur (fsn) JoAnne Chesimard, was pulled over by the New Jersey State Police, shot twice and then charged with murder of a police officer. Assata spent six and a half years in prison under brutal circumstances before escaping out of the maximum security wing of the Clinton Correctional Facility for Women in New Jersey in 1979 and moving to Cuba.

Assata: In her own words

My name is Assata (“she who struggles”) Shakur (“the thankful one”), and I am a 20th century escaped slave. Because of government persecution, I was left with no other choice than to flee from the political repression, racism and violence that dominate the US government’s policy towards people of color. I am an ex political prisoner, and I have been living in exile in Cuba since 1984. I have been a political activist most of my life, and although the U.S. government has done everything in its power to criminalize me, I am not a criminal, nor have I ever been one. In the 1960s, I participated in various struggles: the black liberation movement, the student rights movement, and the movement to end the war in Vietnam. I joined the Black Panther Party. By 1969 the Black Panther Party had become the number one organization targeted by the FBI’s COINTELPRO program. because the Black Panther Party demanded the total liberation of black people, J. Edgar Hoover called it “greatest threat to the internal security of the country” and vowed to destroy it and its leaders and activists.

~ASSATA SHAKUR AFRO-CUBA WEBSITE:

http://afrocubaweb.com/assata.htm

~ASSATA SHAKUR: THE INTERVIEW:

http://www.thetalkingdrum.com/bla4.html

~ASSATA SHAKUR: WANTED BY THE FBI:

http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/fugitives/dt/chesimard_jd.htm

~ASSATA SHAKUR: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

http://www.kersplebedeb.com/mystuff/profiles/assata/

ASSATA SHAKUR DOCUMENTARY: “THE EYES OF THE RAINBOW”:

http://www.afrocubaweb.com/rainbow.htm

http://happybirthdayassata.org/sales.html

ASSATA SHAKUR:

http://youtube.com/user/TTDCWebBrotha

Assata shakur2.jpg

PHOTO OF ASSATA
THE GREAT DEBATERS: A TRUE TEXAS STORY OF TRIUMPH

Henrietta Bell Wells, a retired social worker living in Houston, was the Wiley College debate team’s only female member.

KEVIN FUJII: CHRONICLE

INSPIRING TALE AS GOOD AS THEIR WORDS

One of the real students was from Houston

December 22, 2007

By ERIC HARRISON
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MARSHALL — Jurnee Smollett, a 21-year-old actress with Louisiana roots, had never heard of Wiley College when she got the script last year for the movie that just might change her life. She knew nothing of Wiley’s greatest moment, the day in 1935 when a debate team from the struggling black school beat the defending national champions from the University of Southern California in a nationally broadcast debate. ’I was ashamed that I
didn't know that story," she said recently while promoting the film, *The Great Debaters*, in Dallas. "I didn't know anyone who did know the story. Why didn't I know?" Smollett shouldn't feel bad. Few Texans know it, either. "There are people who live here in Marshall who don't know the story," said Haywood L. Strickland, the president of the tiny school. With the release Tuesday of *The Great Debaters*, that is about to change. The movie, which stars Denzel Washington and Forest Whitaker, has been nominated for a Golden Globe award for best drama. With its inspirational message and strong support from Oprah Winfrey, who produced it, it has a good chance of finding an audience. If so, its success would echo the surprise triumph of the 1935 debate team. Strickland is hoping it also heralds the rebirth of the Methodist Church-affiliated college, which has faced decades of dwindling enrollment and finances. "It's the Goliath and David story in a different kind of setting," Strickland said. He was describing the appeal of the movie, but he could've been talking about Wiley College. The school, a collection of red-brick buildings in Marshall, 150 miles east of Dallas near the Louisiana border, began its decline less than a decade after its debate team's greatest success. Melvin B. Tolson, the brilliant teacher that Washington portrays, resigned in 1947 to teach at Langston University in Oklahoma. The football program collapsed in the 1960s. The Methodist Church considered closing the school. One of the Wiley students Tolson taught and inspired was Heman Sweat, who would go on to win a lawsuit in 1950 that forced the University of Texas law school to admit African-Americans. Ironically, integration hurt schools such as Wiley as many of the best students and teachers migrated to better-funded white schools. Wiley officials hope the increased visibility the movie brings will help fundraising and recruitment, but Strickland said the school actually began rebounding several years ago because of renewed emphasis on fundraising and better fiscal management.

"We're very fortunate that the movie happens to be coming out at a very critical juncture for us," he said.

For the first time in years, Wiley will end 2007 in the black. Enrollment has increased to 926 today from 520 in 2000 — the highest it has been in decades.

A sign on the campus’ main street boasts: “Home of the Great Debaters.” Similar words greet callers to the school, even though the school hasn't had a debate program since the 1940s.

Hollywood comes calling

When Washington and three young actors from the movie came to town to host premiere screenings Dec. 13, the actor-director said he wanted to make the boast true again. "We'll try to help the school and get the debate team back on its feet," he told journalists. "It seems like the right thing to do."

The next day, Strickland divulged that the actor had pledged $1 million but asked him to delay announcing it.

Attention drawn to the school because of the movie also was key to Wal-Mart pledging $100,000 for a scholarship fund and a Dallas businessman promising $300,000.

The movie's local premiere was the biggest event most people here could recall. Politicians and dignitaries from surrounding counties attended a cocktail reception for Washington, who also is the director. People arrived more than an hour early to catch a glimpse of the actor and filmmaker at the town's only movie theater, where *The Great Debaters* showed on four screens.

Screams erupted in waves as the purple Wiley College cap Washington wore bobbed into view as he slowly made his way down the red carpet.

“He's so cute,” one woman gushed, even before she'd had a chance to see him.

The movie fictionalizes the story somewhat. The school defeats Harvard in the movie, for one thing. Also, of the three main debaters, only one represents a real person.

Denzel Whitaker, a 17-year-old actor whose parents named him after Washington, portrays James Farmer Jr., a Wiley debater who went on to found the Congress of Racial Equality, a prominent civil rights organization.

Actors trained at TSU

The other two debaters are fictionalized though they each are largely based on a single person. Smollett, for example, portrays a character named Samantha Booke, but she paid several visits to Houston to get to know Henrietta Bell Wells, a retired 95-year-old social worker who was the debate team's only female member.

"I visited her, I stayed with her, I sang in her church choir," Smollett said of Wells.

She recalled Wells stressing how important education was to her as a young woman. "She inspired me greatly," Smollett said.

Washington also brought the young actors to Houston to train with Texas Southern University's debate team in a two-day debate camp.

“The first day was training, and then on the second day we debated against TSU's freshman debate team," said Nate Parker, who portrays the third debater.

Smollett said of Dr. Thomas F. Freeman, TSU's head debate coach who organized the program in 1949: "He's kind of their own Melvin Tolson."

A TSU spokeswoman pointed out that while the movie's Harvard debate was fictionalized, “the TSU debate team actually did beat Harvard in 1956.
The Great Debaters, opening in theaters on Christmas Day, tells the story of the triumph of underdogs. It is also Henrietta Bell Wells’ story. Born in Houston’s Fourth Ward on the banks of Buffalo Bayou and raised by a struggling single mother from the West Indies, Wells became the only female member of the 1930 debate team from Wiley College who participated in the first collegiate interracial debate in the United States. She is the last surviving member of the 1930s team coached by Melvin B. Tolson. But for Wells, her involvement in the real life events that inspired the movie that stars Denzel Washington was just about living. "I was just lucky, that’s what I think," the 95-year-old Wells said at the Houston facility where she now lives. "I just thought I was living my life. I don’t think we thought we were doing any great job. We were in the debate team for fun, just doing our best.

Wells met Tolson, who would later become a role model throughout her college career, in freshman English. Hectic balancing act

He talked her into trying out for the debate team. Reluctant, she took the stage, stood behind the podium and read for him. Satisfied with her reading, Tolson put her on the team. "I told him I don’t know anything about debating and I don’t have any money to take off from class to be on the debate team," Wells said. "I was the only girl, and I was the only freshman. They (the boys) didn’t seem to mind me."

The schedule was hectic. She had to make night practices in addition to attending her day classes, all while working three jobs on campus. She worked at the Wildcat Inn, a student hangout, and did housekeeping in the dorm.

Life for a young black woman during the Jim Crow era presented Wells plenty of challenges.

She remembers her home being searched during the Camp Logan Riots of 1918, being unable to try on clothes in stores and failing a voter registration test in Louisiana.

The family didn’t have much money, but Wells was always a good student, finishing as valedictorian at Phyllis Wheatley High School. Her acumen for learning earned a scholarship to attend Wiley. Even with the scholarship, she had to work for her upkeep. During her time on the debate team, her friends covered her shifts while she traveled with the team. Her need to work eventually led Wells to leave the team.

Still a debater

Friends say that Wells, however, maintained that debating spirit. "If you listen to her, you can hear the debater," said Glenice Como, a lay minister at St. James Episcopal Church where Wells is a member. "She will hold her ground with you. If she thinks she hasn’t made her point, she’ll do her research."

There are those who won’t forget what Wells and others from the era contributed to breaking down barriers for black debaters.

Texas Southern University debate coach Thomas F. Freeman called Tolson’s decision to include a woman on his team courageous during a time when a woman’s role was limited. Barbara Jordan was the first woman to travel with the TSU team in 1954. Freeman recalled a time when TSU debaters were not allowed to stay in certain hotels or eat in restaurants when traveling to compete.

"Someone has to be courageous enough to become the first," said Freeman. "I hope they (students) get a sense of history from it and realization of the problems faced by young people who wanted to forge ahead."

Wells recalled that the team went up against law students from the University of Michigan in Chicago during that interracial debate. She once wrote of that experience: "It was a non-decision debate, but we felt at the time that it was a giant step toward desegregation."

She recalled that the judge was quoted in a newspaper as having said that the two teams were evenly matched, an idea she scoffs at.

"You’re talking about a debate team where one member was a freshman. They were all graduate law students. That was a whole lot we were going up against," she said.

Wells recalled that before the match, Tolson gave her pointers on how to punch up her speech. "He said, ‘You’ve got to put something in there to wake the people up,’ " she recalled.

The movie has sparked new interest in Wiley College, which has a student enrollment of 926. There is even discussion about revitalizing debating that tapered off after Tolson left the university.
Humbled by the attention

While friends were happy about the film being made, some were disappointed that the female character did not use Wells' name. Despite this, they knew Wells' contribution.

“It makes me feel very proud,” said J. Marie McCleary, who was also a student assistant for Tolson. “She wasn’t at all intimidated by working with young men. She just stood out. She spoke very well.”

As for Wells, who was unable to attend the recent screening at Wiley, she can now say that she's met Denzel Washington. Jurnee Smollett, the young actress who plays the female debater in the film, has come to Houston several times to visit her.

Wells has had the film privately screened for her in her room and gets requests for interviews.

When the movie opens in theaters Tuesday, she will spend it quietly with friends and family in her room. Como said they plan to fill her room with balloons.

Wells is humbled by the attention.

“I hope I live up to the ideals in it,” she said. “The movie is supposed to inspire young people to want to go to college, to try hard, to know it's not all easy but there's so much you gain from it.”

(Article courtesy of the Houston Chronicle)

DENZEL WASHINGTON DONATES $1 MILLION TO RESTART WILEY DEBATE TEAM

Tuesday, December 18, 2007

Associated Press  MARSHALL, Texas – Oscar winner Denzel Washington is donating $1 million to Wiley College to reestablish its famed debate team.

School officials Tuesday announced the gift by Washington, who last week was in Marshall to screen The Great Debaters.

His film about the school's 1930s debate team has been nominated for a Golden Globe as best drama.

Washington stars as educator and poet Melvin Tolson, who led the all-black college's elite debate team. He also directed the movie.

Washington, during last Thursday's appearance, vowed to help the college and get the debate team going again.

Washington won Academy Awards for Glory and Training Day.

LINKS:

http://www.wileyc.edu/

http://www.fandango.com/videos_2_367515/v394999

http://film.guardian.co.uk/news/story/0,,2224693,00.html

&

http://abclocal.go.com/wpvi/story?sectio...

From The Eloquent Woman:


Official “The Great Debaters” Website

Filed under Uncategorized
Whipping a Slave, Surinam, 1770s

Image Reference NW0204

Source John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Surinam . . . from the year 1772, to 1777 (London, 1796), vol. 1, facing p. 326. (Copy in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

Comments Caption, “Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave.” Shows woman hanging from a tree with deep lacerations; in background two white men and two black men, the latter with whips. Stedman witnessed this punishment in 1774. The woman being whipped was an eighteen-year old girl who was given 200 lashes for having refused to have intercourse with an overseer. She was “lacerated in such a shocking manner by the whips of two negro-drivers, that she was from her neck to her ankles literally dyed with blood.” For the definitive modern edition, with illustrations, see Richard and Sally Price, eds. Narrative of a five years expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam: transcribed for the first time from the original 1790 manuscript (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

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Punishment of Female Slave, Surinam, 1770s

African Slave Family, Surinam, 1770s

Image Reference NW0134

Source John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Surinam . . . from the year 1772, to 1777 (London, 1796), vol. 2, facing p. 280. (Copy in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

Comments Caption, “Family of Negro Slaves from Loango”; man heading basket of fish, woman heading fruits and vegetables with baby on her back, smoking a pipe and spinning cotton. For the definitive modern edition, with illustrations, see Richard and Sally Price, eds. Narrative of a five years expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam: transcribed for the first time from the original 1790 manuscript (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

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Punishment of Slaves, Madagascar, 1850s

Image Reference NW0214

Source John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative, of a Five Years' Expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Surinam . . . from the year 1772, to 1777 (London, 1796), vol. 1, p. 15. (Copy in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

Comments Shows a woman carrying a weight chained to her ankle; in background, a man tilling ground with a hoe. The woman was judged guilty of not speaking when spoken to by a white person; for this she received 200 lashes and was forced to carry a 100 lb. weight chained to her ankle for several months. For the definitive modern edition, with illustrations, see Richard and Sally Price, eds. Narrative of a five years expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam: transcribed for the first time from the original 1790 manuscript (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
In one of their houses . . . a number of female slaves were at work. Some of them were carrying baskets of cotton or other articles from one room to another . . . I saw one young girl who had a couple of boards fixed on her shoulders, each of them rather more than two feet long, and ten inches or a foot wide, fastened together by pieces of wood nailed on the under side. A piece had been cut out of each board in the middle, so that, when fixed together they fitted close to her neck, and the poor girl, while wearing this instrument of punishment and disgrace, was working with the rest. On another occasion I saw a boy, apparently about fifteen years of age, with a rough, heavy iron collar on his naked neck. It seemed to be formed by a square bar of iron, about three-quarters of an inch thick, being bent around his neck, and the two ends then joined together. Yet he was . . . employed in carrying fire-wood to the beach for shipping” (Ellis, 1888, p.145).

Caption: “Female Quadroon Slave of Surinam.” Dress of the woman suggests a house servant or some other domestic employment. For the definitive modern edition, with illustrations, see Richard and Sally Price, eds. Narrative of a five years expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam: transcribed for the first time from the original 1790 manuscript (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

Caption, “A Surinam Planter in His Morning Dress”; slave woman in background pouring him a drink. For the definitive modern edition, with illustrations, see Richard and Sally Price, eds. Narrative of a five years expedition against the revolted Negroes of Surinam: transcribed for the first time from the original 1790 manuscript (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
**Image Reference** Trujillo_E46


**Comments** Drawing simply identified as “Mulatta” shows woman dressed in billowing skirt, patterned sleeveless blouse, stockings, and buckled shoes. This and hundreds of other drawings were done by unidentified Indians during the 1780s and were commissioned by the Spanish Bishop Baltazar Jaime Martinez Companon during his pastoral visit to the region of Trujillo in northern Peru. The drawings, spread over nine volumes, are of Spaniards, Indians, plants and animals, as well plans and maps of the region. Only Vol. 2 contains a few pictures of blacks, the index to the volume giving very sparse information on each drawing. (See other images Trujillo on this website.)

**Image Reference** BEN6b

**Source** Pierre Jacques Benoit, Voyage a Surinam . . . cent dessins pris sur nature par l’auteur (Bruxelles, 1839), plate xiii, fig. 26. (Copy in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University)

**Comments** A young slave woman carrying a bouquet of flowers to a festival/party (center), an elaborately dressed domestic servant (left), and an elderly “missie” (former mistress of a white man, usually a free woman of color) walking with a cane and wearing a head tie under her straw hat (right).

**Image Reference** HENDERSON2


**Comments** “A Brazilian sesta, or afternoon nap” shows black female fanning a white woman while she naps; a black child sitting on the floor.

**Image Reference** Dugan-1

**Source** Photograph by unidentified photographer, published in Ellen Dugan, ed., Picturing the South, 1860 to the Present (Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1996), p. 32; the photograph is held by a private collector.

**Comments** Shows female nursemaid holding white baby. The individuals are not identified, but the place is the town of New Market, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.
**Image Reference H006**

**Source** Brantz Mayer, Captain Canot; or, Twenty years an African slaver….(New York, 1854), facing p. 102. (Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library)

**Comments** Caption, “Branding a Negress”; shows two European men and a black woman, one of former is branding the latter on the back. It is unclear if this illustration is intended to depict an activity on the African coast or in the New World; in any case, it appears to be incorporated into a larger image, with additional figures added, published in William O. Blake, The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade (Columbus, Ohio, 1857; facing p. 97; see image Blake1 on this website). With respect to branding, Canot/Conneau wrote in 1827: “A few days before the embarkation takes place the head of every male and female are shaven. They are then marked . . . with a hot pipe sufficiently heated to blister the skin. Some [purchasers] use their initials made of silver wire. . . . . this disagreeable operation is done only when several persons ship slaves in one vessel . . . . [The branding] is done as lightly as possible, and just enough for the mark to remain only six months; when and if well done, it leaves the skin as smooth as ever. This scorching sign is generally made on the fleshy part of the arm to adults, to children on the posterior” (Theophilus Conneau, A Slaver’s Logbook or 20 Years’ Residence in Africa [Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976], pp. 81-82; for another version of this, see Henry Howe (ed.), Life and Death on the Ocean [Cincinnati, 1856], p.526). The British military officer, John Duncan, describes branding of enslaved captives in Dahomey in the mid-1840s. The people were led onto the beach, before being placed aboard canoes that would take them to the waiting slave ships, “and the gang on each [coffle] chain is in succession marched close to a fire previously kindled on the beach. Here marking-irons are heated, and when an iron is sufficiently hot, it is quickly dipped in palm-oil, in order to prevent its sticking to the flesh. It is then applied to the ribs or hip, and sometimes even to the breast. Each slave-dealer uses his own mark, so that when the vessel arrives at her destination, it is easily ascertained to whom those who died belonged” (Travels in Western Africa in 1845 & 1846 [London, 1847; reprinted London, 1968], vol. I, p. 143). Another version of this image is shown on the website of the Mary Evans Picture Library (London), with an attribution to The Pictorial Times (London), 9 August 1845.

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**Image Reference cass6**

**Source** Edmund Ollier, Cassell’s History of the United States (London, 1874-77), Vol.3, p. 199

**Comments** Captioned “A Slave Auction,” shows an enslaved mother and her daughter on the auction block; another enslaved mother with infant waiting to be sold; white onlookers and white auctioneer. An artist’s fabrication embedded in a discussion of the events preceding the Civil War; the illustration itself is not discussed. Sometimes reproduced, without citation to original source, and impression given that this is an eye-witness illustration, e.g., James Walvin, Slavery and the Slave Trade (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1983), p. 62.

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**Image Reference Trujillo_E44**

**Source** Martinez Companon y Bujanda, Trujillo de Peru (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispanica, 1978-1994; acsimile reproduction of manuscripts in the Biblioteca del Palacio Real de Madrid), vol. 2, plate E44

**Comments** Drawing simply identified as “Negra,” shows a black woman holding a bill hook or cutlass in one hand, a wooden staff in another; she appears to be wearing a long dress (or a skirt and chemise) that is sleeveless. This and hundreds of other drawings were done by unidentified Indians during the 1780s and were commissioned by the Spanish Bishop Baltazar Jaime Martinez Companon during his pastoral visit to the region of Trujillo in northern Peru. The drawings, spread over nine volumes, are of Spaniards, Indians, plants and animals, as well plans and maps of the region. Only Vol. 2 contains a few pictures of blacks, the index to the volume giving very sparse information on each drawing. (See other images Trujillo on this website.)
Effects of Punishment by Burning, Richmond, Virginia, 1866

Image Reference HW0045

Source Harper's Weekly (July 28, 1866), p.477. (Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library)

Comments Caption, "Marks of punishment inflicted upon a colored servant in Richmond, VA"; shows the back of woman with burn marks. The victim was thirteen years old when, for reasons unexplained in the article, she annoyed or upset her mistress. She was locked in a room by herself for over a week, during which time the mistress repeatedly burned her back. The mistress was arrested, but released on $5,000 bail. The original photograph is located in the Houghton Library at Harvard University (Wendell Phillips Papers, [bMSAm1953(942)]). In a letter from Richmond, dated July 6, 1866, which enclosed this photo, John Oliver wrote Wendell Phillips that although the photograph "is a very poor one . . . from it you will be able to see quite well the barbarism of Slavery [sic] as it now exist[s] in King William Co, Virginia in 1866. This girl with a twin Sister and their morthe [sic] Lucy [sic] Richardson were Slaves to a Mr Henry Abrams, his wife, one of the most cruel tyrant [sic] read of in any age put out the left eye of the mother, and her constant [sic] habit has been to take the Childr[e]n and burn their backs in the man[n]er which this picture explains, this child[d] is now 16 years old and when brought to me, at the freedmen's Court was too weak to walk with me 4 square to gete [sic] something to eate[sic]." We are grateful to Margaret Abruzzo for bringing this letter to our attention and to Zachary Matus for his assistance with the transcription.

Elizabeth Freeman (a.k.a. Mumbat, Mum Bet), 1811

Image Reference I021

Source Original painting in the Massachusetts Historical Society

Comments A miniature (approx. 2'x3') framed watercolor of face and upper torso. Born around 1742, it is unclear if Freemen was African, or born in New York state of African parents. She was purchased when young and became a servant in a Massachusetts household. After an incident of maltreatment, she left her owner and enlisted the aid of a Massachusetts antislavery lawyer, Thomas Sedgwick. He helped her win her freedom in 1772. She died in 1829 and was buried in a segregated section of the Stockbridge, Mass. graveyard. Her portrait was painted by Susan Sedgwick, Thomas's daughter. For biographical details on Freeman's life, see Harriet Martineau, Retrospect of Western Travel (New York, 1838), vol. 2, pp. 104-10. (slide of painting provided by the Massachusetts Historical Society)
(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-628/40054)

Comments Copperplate engraving. Caption reads: “Phillis Wheatley, Negro servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston.” Born in present-day Gambia around 1753, little is known of Wheatley's early life. When 7 or 8 years old, she was kidnapped and shipped from the Gambia to Boston; her purchasers named her Phillis after the ship that brought her to Massachusetts. Living in their household as a servant, she was permitted to learn to read, and not long after began writing poetry; her first published poem appeared in 1767. She left no account of her life in Africa or the middle passage, and her life ended sadly in Boston in 1784. Her portrait was done when she was about 20 years old.

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Source Painted by Augustus Earle (1793-1838); original in National Library of Australia, Canberra (nla.pic-an2822644)

Comments Water color on paper titled “Rita, a celebrated black beauty at Rio de Janeiro.” Rita may have been a free woman of color. The English painter, Earle, visited Rio de Janeiro in 1820.

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Source Painting held by McCord Museum, McGill University (slide M 12067)

Comments Oil painting by Francois Beaucourt, 1786. Although the portrait subject is not identified, she may have been the artist's slave. (slide of painting, courtesy of McCord Museum)

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Source Illustration by Thomas Rowlandson, published by William Holland (London, 1796); engraving held by the Barbados Museum.

Comments Engraving of Pringle at the age of about 36 sitting in front of her hotel/tavern/house of prostitution in Bridgetown, capital of Barbados; man on left has elephantiasis. Rachel Pringle was born a slave around 1753, the daughter of an African woman and her master, a Scottish schoolmaster. In the 1770s, she became the first free woman of color to own a hotel-tavern (and house of prostitution) in Barbados; when she died in 1792, at the age of 38, she was a relatively wealthy woman. See Jerome S. Handler, Joseph Rachell and Rachael Pringle-Polgreen: Petty Entrepreneurs, in D.G. Sweet and G. B. Nash, eds., Struggle and Survival in Colonial America (Univ. of California Press, 1981), pp. 376-391. Slide of engraving, courtesy of the late Neville Connell, Director of the Barbados Museum.)
Photo of oil painting (courtesy of Jon Sensbach) by Johann Valentin Haidt, held by the Moravian Archives (Unity Archives Archiv der Bruder-Unitat), Herrnhut (Germany). Christian Protten (1715-1769) and Rebecca (1718-1780), an ex-slave and Moravian convert were married in Germany in 1740; shown also is their child, Anna Maria Protten. For details on the lives of these people and this portrait in particular, see Jon Sensbach, Rebecca’s Revival (Harvard Univ. Press, 2005), 196-200 and passim; see also image reference Sensbach3

LINKS:
http://hitchcock.itc.virginia.edu/Slavery/search.html

Filed under Uncategorized

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THE BUS

STRIKING THE BOTTOM LINE OF BROTHELS

AT THE HANDS OF PERSONS UNKNOWN

FROM THE ARCHIVES: THE ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE MURDER OF MS. BRITTANY WILLIAMS
BEAUTIFUL, ALSO, ARE THE SOULS OF MY BLACK SISTERS: A BLOGSITE FOR THE PRAISING OF ALL THINGS BEAUTIFUL AND SUBLIME IN HONOR OF ALL BLACK WOMEN. "ONLY THE BLACK WOMAN CAN SAY WHEN AND WHERE I ENTER, IN THE QUIET, UNDISPUTED DIGNITY OF MY WOMANHOOD, WITHOUT VIOLENCE AND WITHOUT SUING OR SPECIAL PATRONAGE, THEN AND THERE THE WHOLE...RACE ENTERS WITH ME." ANNA JULIA COOPER, 1892

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