

Race Matters. Black Sexuality: the Taboo Subject (Cornel West).

- Americans are obsessed with sex and fear of black sexuality.

The obsession is motivated by the search for stimulation and meaning in a fast paced, market-driven culture.

The fear is grounded in visceral feelings about black bodies and fueled by sexual myths of black women and men.

According to these myths, the blacks are viewed as either having sexual power over whites or as harmless.

- Even if the number of white Americans to interact sexually *on an equal basis* with black Americans is increasing, the fundamental challenge of human interaction remains unmet.
- Demythologizing of black sexuality is connected with devaluation of black people. Slavery, institutionalized terrorism (segregation), lynching, etc., were aimed to devaluating black people and install white supremacy. Thus, white supremacy ideology is based on the degradation of black bodies to *control* them through *fear*. Demythologizing is

necessary

because the self-inflicted hatred and self-contempt cause many black Americans to love their own bodies.

- Acceptance and reevaluation of the black beauty and value. This gradual process took place in black social spaces (churches, mosques, schools, fraternities and sororities) and not only affirmed black humanity by supporting damaged black egos but also preserved their sanity. With other words these settings provided opportunities for black love to stay alive. One exception: black institutions *refused to engage a fundamental issue- black sexuality*.
- *Reasons:* black institutions put a premium on black survival in America. A Faustian pact was made and that assured black survival on the margins of American society.
- Social scientists have long acknowledged that interracial sex and marriage *is the most perceived source of white fear of black people*. Fear is weakness and white fear of black sexuality is a basic ingredient of white racism.
- Black sexuality is a taboo subject because *it is a form of black power over which whites have little control*. On one hand, black sexuality among blacks does not include whites and on the other hand, black sexuality between whites and blacks is founded on ground desire. This reason is very often ignored, dismissed or denied by Americans in public and laws have little control over it. *Thus, this taboo issue is rather a compromise having as purpose silencing talk about black power over whites*.
- Black male sexuality differs from black female sexuality because the black male has different self-images and strategies of acquiring power in the patriarchal structures of white America and black communities. Due to a society obsessed by sex and also to the Afro-Americanization process of white youth, the black male is viewed as desirable sexual partner versus female.

- Power is acquired by most young black by stylizing their bodies in such way to reflect their uniqueness and provide fear in others. This is a form of self-identification, resistance in a hostile white culture and maybe the reflection of a defensive system.
- *Reflection of the major stylistic option which is machismo-identity is a cause for most black gays to be marginalized in a white America and penalized in black America.*
- The status of the black lesbians is even more dramatic. *One reason is the degradation of black female heterosexuality and mainly lower economic status.*
- Consequences of challenging the taboo subject will result in sterile acknowledge and tragic psychocultural facts of American life (AIDS is one aspect).

Hearing Voices: Unearthing Evidence of Homosexuality in Precolonial Africa (Cary Alan Johnson)

Interpretation of an Akan maxim: Everyone has the right to pursue their unique destiny, and no one is a lesser person.

- African scholars have asserted that homosexuality is a Western phenomenon and not an indigenous element of African culture.
 - The purpose of this article: 1-male homosexuality has long existed within African culture (not imported but rooted in traditional African social patterns) and 2-male homosexuality and bisexuality have been viewed as acceptable sexual alternatives.
 - Knowledge of homosexual tradition in African cultures is limited by the lack of material but oral history and written documentation (mainly European and American) account it.
 - Metraux have stated that lesbian behavior in Africa was *abnormal but accepted and tolerated* on Easter Island (Blackwood, 1986).
 - Judith Gay noticed in a study of sexual play among girls and young women in Lesotho that *these relations stress privacy because of the fear of being stigmatized by outsiders* (Blackwood, 1986).
 - Among Sebei culture, homosexual behavior was considered sokoran (*illegal taboo*), but made no effort to deny transvestitism .
 - Male homosexual behavior in Africa is divided as follow:
 - 1-Type 1: between adults and youths (initiatory)
 - 2-Type 2: between men and biological males who have ``female`` or ``feminine`` male status
 - 3-Type 3: between men of different races or classes
 - 4-Type 4: between mean of equal age, status and class.
- ◇ Male-wives/ by-wives
- Institutionalized intergenerational sexual contact among men is as old as civilization itself and was documented by Greek, Chinese and Byzantine materials.
- Type 1 behavior is typical to Zande, Swahili, Arab/Bantu and Siwi cultures where men and boys participated into this alliances with family approval. Boy-wives were eventually married to women , their former husband paying the bride price.
 - Type 2 behavior was common among the Bara, Bitsileo and Tanala of Madagascar and transvestitism was usual.

- *Marriage to men provided instant status and an acceptable in the community for the homosexual male.*
- ◊ **Priests, Witches, and Mediums: Spirituality and the African Homosexual**
In Southern Africa and Uganda, spirit mediums were women and most of men who experienced possession and joined the cults evidenced homosexual orientation. Possessed males dressed as women, often spoke in high-pitched tones and reported dreams that were homosexual in nature. *Membership in a spirit cult or recognition as a skilled medium was a route to social empowerment for men who couldn't or wouldn't follow traditional avenues for marriage or fathering.*
In Tanzania and Zambia homosexual relations between boys and between boys and men were considered *accepted behavior and forcing one against will in such relation was witchcraft.*
- In Nigeria, *homosexuality is cult-oriented* and is making millionaires out of those who belong to it.
- ◊ **Homosexuality and Language in Africa**
Most African cultures use words that Western linguists found equivalent as ``homosexual``. These words indicate some androgyny characteristics.
In Ghana, where homosexuality was familiar, there are three principles: okra (*life principle*), mogya (*blood principle*) and sunsum (*personality principle*). Sunsum is not an entity but a manner of being. A ``light`` sunsum characterizes a female and ``heavy`` sunsum is referred to as a female man. Similarly, males with ``light`` sunsum are the cowards, sexual deviants, retarded mentally are male woman.
In Lango, Nilotic agricultural people, homosexual transvestites are referred as impotents and is believed that they adopted these roles out of necessity.
- ◊ **Same-sex environment**
Traditional African systems did not have facilities for detention but the modern Africa has. These are same sex environment and consensual sex between males, homosexual prostitution and rape are common. Homosexual liaisons occur in South Africa mine camps (type 1 and 2). These relations are quite common and predicated on grounds that ``mature men with authority... are entitled to regular sexual activity...`` (Moddie 1989,124). These camps provide an environment in which men with homosexual behavior are able to express hidden desires.
Age-group segregation reflects type 4 behavior.
- ◊ **``In the Life``: The Emergency of an African Gay Community**
Modern Western assumptions of homosexual lifestyles are antithetical to traditional African values.
The views of African leaders are slowly beginning to reflect changing attitudes toward homosexuality. The application for UN Economic and Social Committee consultative status submitted in 1991 by the International Lesbian and Gay Association was unsuccessful but was supported by Ethiopia and Lesotho.
- Men and women known to engage in homosexual behavior face significant prejudice in Africa. Most African nations have laws that prohibit sexual contact between men.
- In the last 10 years, bars frequented by African male homo/ bisexuals have existed in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Lagos, Nigeria, Nairobi. In North Africa, ``hammams`` or bathhouses serve as meeting grounds for homosexual and bisexual men.

- Gay and lesbian organizations are currently functioning in Ghana, Zimbabwe and South Africa.
- A pivotal role is played by the foreign gays, particularly Europeans and North Americans. The homes of Europeans serve as headquarters for homosexual nexus. Type 3 behavior emerged to service the appetite of an expatriate homosexual elite and the burgeoning tourist trade. However, homosexuality remains heavily stigmatized and those who adhere to it lead secretive lives.