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Going to Meet the Man and the White Supremacist Obsession With Racial Purity

White supremacy has always rested on the need to maintain a “purity” of being white, as any miscegenation would lead to a “mongrelization” of the white race. To call this just an obsession would be an understatement, their entire idea of existence relies on the need to prevent any loss of “white blood.” The way to prevent this loss is through the obvious exclusion of anyone who isn’t white, and this exclusion is mostly targeted at people of color. White supremacists may state that they want to keep their “race pure” and such due to their pride in it, but as James Baldwin explores in *Going to Meet the Man* it is less pride and more fear. In *Going to Meet the Man* the main character, Jesse, shows the hypocrisy of how white supremacy is based on racial purity but that purity is contingent on the presence of black men.

A clear example of this is the beginning of the story with Jesse in bed, trying to initiate intercourse with his wife while ruminating about the previous day’s protest. After proclaiming “Goddamn the niggers,” he then explicitly has “one hand between his legs” and looks at the “frail sanctuary of his wife” (Gates 454). Jesse quite clearly has become aroused and protective of his wife at the thought of “the black stinking coons” (Gates 454). This seemingly reactive action is a telling sign of “need” for black men to evoke the fear of losing racial purity, and “the white father’s anxiety about reproducing race and thereby sustaining the white parental order” (Brim 1). Understanding these fears is crucial to understanding how systemic racism continues to exist (Taylor 4).

This tie between the sexual performance of a white man and the presence of the black

man is formed, as many things are, in childhood. Jesse was witness to a lynching at a very young age, one that was, at least to him, very sexually charged. A black man was tortured and eventually castrated during this “party” the white neighborhood held. The most important event within this is the castration, before the act is carried out we receive a very graphic description:

“In the cradle of the one white hand, the nigger’s privates seemed as remote as meat being weighed in the scales; but seemed heavier, bigger than his father’s, flaccid, hairless, the largest thing he had ever seen till then, and the blackest.” (Gates 464)

Jesse’s father then goes on to say, “‘Well, I told you,’ said his father, ‘you wasn’t never going to forget *this* picnic’” (Gates 464). This is further ingrained by Jesse believing that this would be “the key to his life forever.” Furthermore the comments on how it is “bigger than his father’s” bring forward his views of his main fraternal role model, his father, who Jesse quite clearly hears having sex with his mother. So in a sense, black masculinity is a threat to white masculinity, because the black penis is seen as larger than the white one and more specifically, the father’s. Jesse’s masculinity is built off of this and because part of the base it is built off of is black masculinity “the black man is remade, made whole again both in and as the white man’s body, castration gets translated into procreation” (Brim 19).

Returning to the bedroom we can contextualize Jesse’s actions and thoughts more accurately. The act of intercourse has been built into him as one of racial oppression and as we see with him torturing the black man in jail, racial oppression is turned into an erotic act. Jesse “put the prod to him” and gained a “peculiar excitement” from that act (Gates 455). He eventually also prods the black man’s testicles, his “prod” acting as an extension of his masculinity, and starts to feel “very close to a very peculiar, particular joy” which also sparks the memory of the lynching, where Jesse’s masculinity, and sexuality, was born (Gates 456). When

the black man eventually speaks, Jesse instinctively grabbed his genitals as if this “challenge” could be a threat to his masculinity. This challenge is also externalized in the greater conflict of the protest, which while not explicitly said, is about integration, a major issue of the 1960’s. A white supremacist pamphlet titled *Jews Behind Race Mixing*, created and distributed in the 60’s and 70’s quotes Theodore G. Bilbo at the end:

“If our buildings, our highways, our railroads should be wrecked, we could rebuild them. If our cities should be destroyed, out of the very ruins we could erect newer and greater ones. Even if our armed might should be crushed, we could rear sons who would redeem our power. But if the blood of our White race should become corrupted and mingled with the blood of Africa, then the present greatness of the United States of America would be destroyed and all hope for civilization would be as impossible for a negroid America as would be redemption and restoration of the White man’s blood which has been mixed with that of the negro.” (Fields 14)

This echoes the sentiment of people like Jesse who have a fear of losing “the white race.” Their ideas of a “white race” are fanciful for many reasons, but here it is very problematic as we discuss American ideas of racial purity and masculinity. The white masculinity has been borne out of their assertion of dominance over black people, and more specifically black men. So Jesse’s conflict with the singular black man is a microcosm of the current world, a white man with power is asserting dominance over a black man physically and sexually because of a fear of black masculinity despite the obvious power difference.

When Jesse is eventually able to overcome his impotence it is after he has recalled those previous memories of oppressing black men he tells his wife that he is “going to do you like a nigger” and that he wants her to “love me just like you’d love a nigger” (Gates 465). This explicit exclamation of how he wants to have sex reveals how “Jesse...cannot know complete sexual gratification which is not accompanied by either fantasy or the reality of racial torture and

mutilation.” His dependence upon the oppression of the black man has made black masculinity a part of his identity. As Sara Taylor puts it:

“This, as Jesse feels the hypersexualized black masculinity white patriarchy has created for its own control slipping away, he desperately tries to embody that identity in order to preserve it and, by extension, his own identity.” (Taylor 16)

If Jesse now partly embodies black masculinity then any of his children would then not be purely white.

White supremacy now has an issue. How can they truly be white in all meanings of the word, if their entire paternal lineage contains black masculinity. Jesse is terrified of “this black suspicion” and believes that it should be stopped, but him and his identity only exist because of that “black suspicion.” The construct of pure white masculinity has been shown to be a farce, and while white women are not taken into consideration within all this, it is because they exist as part of that white masculinity as simply vessels to create more “white” children. The very notion of white supremacy is built upon the flawed notion of white masculine reproduction which requires black masculinity, i.e. the black man, and as such is at its core hypocritical.

Works Cited

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