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Birth of a Notion: Caricature, Black Female Images, and Rap Music Video 1985-1996

Redell R. Hearn

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“From 19th century print advertisements to contemporary music video advertisements, caricatured images have been used to promote ethnic notions to the masses.”

High-profile opponents of rap music are popularizing the notion that the Black female image is being held hostage to the misogynistic whims of male rappers and rap music industry executives. While this is being addressed as a recent phenomenon, it is perhaps more a case of popular entertainment history reinventing itself for a new generation. Throughout United States history, caricatured images of Blacks in popular culture have been defended, sheltered, and maintained under the umbrella of artistic entertainment. From 19th century print advertisements to contemporary music video advertisements, caricatured images have been used to promote ethnic notions to the masses. Frequently, artists themselves have served as allies in the creation and perpetration of such imagery. The objectives of this paper are to (1) identify Black female images in popular rap music videos; (2) interpret the use of caricature in the images; (3) analyze the implications of the images; and (4) trace the existence of the images in music video between 1985 and 1996.

PRESENTER

Redell R. Hearn, a native of Los Angeles, is a Ph.D. Candidate in the humanities doctoral program at Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y. She lives in Hammond, La., where she is the Interim Associate Director of the Center for Regional Studies, Archives, and Special Collections and an Assistant Professor in the Visual Arts and History Departments at Southeastern Louisiana University.