

Jena

Wiki Project Proposal  
Megan Williams  
July 10, 2008

1. Which questions will you analyze as a group?
  - What evidence indicates that identities are socially constructed?
  - How does popular culture shape and reflect American cultural ideas and values?
  - How do popular representations of a group affect how members of that group see themselves and how others see them?
  
2. What sources will you consult?

**Unit 1:**  
Anderson & Taylor Chapter 2, Culture

**Unit 2:**  
Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*  
(New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2000)  
Anderson and Taylor, Chapter 9, "Race and Ethnicity" in *Sociology*, 232-259  
*Leave it to Beaver*

**Unit 3:**  
Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995)  
*Imitation of Life*

**Unit 4:**  
Marita Golden, *Don't Play in the Sun: One Woman's Journey Through the Color Complex* (New York: Doubleday, 2004)  
Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall, *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color Among African Americans* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992), 1-35.  
*Ethnic Notions*  
*Color Adjustments*  
Benshoff and Griffin, "African Americans and American Film" in *America on Film*, 75-95  
McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"

**Unit 5:**  
Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), ix-xxi, 3-60  
Anderson and Taylor, Chapter 7, "Social Class and Social Stratification," in *Sociology*, 176-207

3. Working thesis statement –

A stereotype invented by the dominant white status quo, the representation of the “mammy” in popular culture contributes to a system of racial oppression which has, and continues to, adversely affect societal perceptions and self-perceptions of black American females.

Now  
write  
thesis

4. Each team member will examine the sources as they relate to the thesis statement and will complete the section (A, B, or C) they have chosen to write. Each team member will then write two and a half or three pages on this topic, including footnotes. We will then submit our parts using the Wiki tool. Lastly, we will review each other’s papers and suggest changes.

5. To complete the editing process, one team member will tie together the body of the paper, one will write the introductory paragraph, and one will write the conclusion.

**Rough Outline of Paper**

- I. Intro
- II. Body
  - A. Introduce “Mammy” character
    - 1. possible quote from *Ethnic Notions*
    - 2. social construction of race (Anderson & Taylor)
    - 3. Historical context of Mammy, why it appeared (African Americans and American Film)
  - B. Mammy stereotype as an instrument of oppression.
    - 1. Why it is oppressive
    - 2. Examples of the Mammy character (*Imitation of Life*)
    - 3. How Mammy affects how black people see themselves (*Color Adjustment* and *Don't Play in the Sun*)
    - 4. The mammy's place in the dominant power hierarchy (*Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*)
  - C. The mammy vs. the middle-class housewife & domestic worker
    - 1. domestic role of housewife as oppressive position (*Where the Girls Are*)
    - 2. Latina domestic workers (*Doméstica*)
    - 3. Compare with the mammy stereotype
- III. Conclusion

What will each team member write?

Introduction \_\_\_\_\_

Transitions \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion \_\_\_\_\_

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  - C. The mammy vs. the middle-class housewife & domestic worker
    - 1. domestic role of housewife as oppressive position (*Where the Girls Are*)
    - 2. Latina domestic workers (*Doméstica*)
    - 3. Compare with the mammy stereotype
    - 4. The typical white housewife ( *Leave It to Beaver*)
- III. Conclusion

What will each team member write?

Introduction \_\_\_\_\_

Transitions \_\_\_\_\_

Conclusion \_\_\_\_\_

Part A \_\_\_\_\_

Part B \_\_\_\_\_

Part C \_\_\_\_\_

Contributions to the Proposal: Maud brainstormed initial "mammy" ideas and wrote a draft proposal. Chongxi offered source ideas, topic ideas and gave feedback on draft. Jena wrote final proposal (mostly just added a rough outline).

Feedback for Jena Hartman.

Overall, this looks great. Here is some feedback on specific sections of the proposal:

**Working thesis:**

“A stereotype invented by the dominant white status quo, the representation of the ‘mammy’ in popular culture contributes to a system of racial oppression which has, and continues to, adversely affect societal perceptions and self-perceptions of black American females.”

Suggested changes, something like:

The popular stereotype of the ‘mammy,’ invented to uphold a system of racial oppression, has adversely affected societal perceptions and self-perceptions of women of color both historically and today.

In particular, I’d suggest that you change “black American females” to “women of color” so that you are able to discuss the “transference” of the mammy stereotype to Latina domestic workers and nannies in the 1990s.

How is the mammy a ‘racialized’ image? And, what does it mean when “black” and “brown” women care for “white” children? What ideological work does this stereotype of the woman of color who cares for her white charges more than her own children do? What inequalities does it obscure?

**Organizing writing the essay:**

Make sure that you construct your essay using the Wiki. Everything that you do from now on should be done on the Wiki so that I can see your individual contributions and collective progress. You should use this tool rather than email or Word documents to communicate and approve each others’ work.

Grade:

Which questions will you answer as a group?	5/5
Which sources will you consult?	5/5
What is your working thesis?	5/5
<u>How do you foresee organizing parts of the essay/editing and approval?</u>	<u>5/5</u>
TOTAL	20/20 – A+

Courses &gt; American Identities (Summer '08) &gt; Groups B &amp; D



## American Identities (Summer '08)

### Groups B & D ([permalink](#))

last edited by Jena Hartman on Monday, 07/28/2008 1:47 PM

"Oh no you ain't! If you don't care what folks says about this family, I does. And I done told you and told you, you can always tell a lady by the way she eats in front of people like a bird. And I ain't aimin' to have you go over to Mista John Wilkes' house and eat like a field hand and gobble like a hog."

-Mammy, *Gone with the Wind* (1939)

Hattie McDaniel's character in *Gone with the Wind* is an example of one of the most problematic stereotypes in American culture: Mammy. The Mammy is portrayed as an obese and ebony black middle-aged woman who acts docile, loyal, and protective of the white family that she serves. The Mammy is an important stereotype to understand because it is powerful in many ways. According to Benshoff and Griffin, "varying images are in many ways reflective of changing social climate of twentieth-century America, and those images have, in turn, contributed to the ways in which all Americans understand the meaning of 'African-American-ness'." (1) The popular stereotype of the Mammy, invented to uphold a system of racial oppression, has adversely affected societal perceptions and self-perceptions of women of color both historically and today.

The problem with these stereotypes is that they are unrealistic representations of the African American race. We now know that race itself is a socially constructed category. Anderson and Taylor argue "It is not the biological characteristics per se that define racial groups but how groups have been treated historically and socially" (234). Biological determinism and later cultural determinism are visible in the stereotypes of Black people in popular culture. Further analysis of the Mammy image is necessary to understand how it is historically and socially constructed.

In all situations, the Mammy had a large smile on her face. She was content in her position. A faithful worker, she devoted her entire life to her white master's family. Although she may have had a family of her own, there was no mention of it. Happy as the surrogate mother, the Mammy loved her white children more than her own and therefore never needed a network of family or friends. In reality, the white family considered the Black female servant their property. However, in popular culture, the Mammy always seemed to be part of the family. In the popular 1950's TV show *Beulah*, Hattie McDaniel, who played Beulah the Mammy character, exclaimed, "I'm not gonna serve -my family coldcuts on Saturday night" (Color Adjustment). This comment seems to exaggerate the black domestic's pride in her work.

The Mammy's desexualization was another exaggeration. She was quite unattractive, very coarse, and laughed in a hearty, masculine chuckle. Although she was a nurturing nanny, she was not dainty or lady-like. She was often portrayed as a strong, controlling type contrasting with the black man as a weak counterpart. Therefore white culture sought to depict Black culture as exhibiting the opposite of "normal" gender roles. In fact, the Mammy was the exact opposite of the image of the white woman in the plantation house (Ethnic Notions).

As with all stereotypes, the Mammy was formulated upon lies and little truth. In reality, the slave women that worked as servants and nannies, were probably younger and thinner. They were definitely thought of as sexual beings by their white masters. Sex had everything to do with why the Mammy caricature was so different than the real-life black female maid. Unfortunately, during slavery times, white slaveholders often raped their female slaves. In order to hide this occurrence, the Mammy stereotype was invented. Because the Mammy was asexual, she was unthreatening to the white master's wife and therefore unthreatening to white Americans.

In addition to diffusing the sexual threat, the Mammy image was formulated by white men as evidence that Black people were happy and even thrived as slaves. The caricature may have been produced in opposition to the criticism Southern slave owners were receiving from abolitionists during the antebellum years. By depicting the black servant as always grinning and well-fed, white slave-owners demonstrated how slavery was beneficial to America and to the slave (Benshoff and Griffin 2).

One might think that after the abolition of slavery, the Mammy would disappear from popular culture. However, because the "American cinema for the most part functions under the dominant ideology of white patriarchal capitalism, it should not be surprising to discover that most popular film helps maintain dominant cultural attitudes

toward African Americans (and issues of race in general)" (Benshoff and Griffin 1). The Mammy continually appeared in films and on TV modified slightly as the housekeeper or nanny to the white family. Especially during the Jim Crow years, the Mammy appeared in many advertising campaigns for cleaning items and breakfast foods. The Mammy was a wholesome and trustworthy woman and therefore was the perfect face for products. Why, though, has the Mammy stereotype been allowed to persist? What detriment has it caused that is visible today?

As stated above, the Mammy stereotype was a creation of the dominant white patriarchal culture in America. Because it has control over mass-consumed products, such as American television, film, magazines, and advertisements, this dominant culture has great power to influence public opinion. For generations, the white male-controlled mass media has bombarded the viewing public with race and gender stereotypes, such as the Mammy. Not surprisingly, the American audience buys into the idea that these are realistic and natural portrayals of Black women. Why would the audience accept these narrow characterizations as reality? Because people tend to spend most of their time with members of their own race and class and they create their understandings of others from media portrayals of different races and classes (Anderson and Taylor 57). Therefore, those who control the media have used the Mammy myth's message of black female inferiority as a tool to maintain its own dominance.

However, though stereotypes such as the Mammy assist white culture in maintaining its dominance, these negative racial and gendered portrayals subjugate another segment of the population. Influenced by the dominant culture, the public tends to justify the oppression of a group of people by falsely applying to the group a perceived set of behaviors that are derived from the stereotype. The characteristics and behaviors associated with the Mammy construction have perpetuated a systematic and pervasive economic, social, and psychological oppression of Black women.

Though the incessantly cheerful Mammy figure seemed indifferent to her poverty and subjugation, the reality is that Black women have been positioned on, and still remain on, the lowest rung of the economic ladder in the United States. In the entertainment industry, for example, dark-skinned actresses have traditionally had few roles available to them. As Susan Douglas states, "...black women, when they got TV or movie roles at all, could only be selfless earth mothers who spoke in malapropisms and loved white children more than their own (Douglas 36). Marita Golden also stresses that a dark actress was only considered for Aunt Jemima or mammy roles (Golden 75). Even in the present day, dark-skinned black actresses have rarely been able to find employment except in the roles of desexualized, selfless nurturers, in a sense serving as unwilling agents their own continued oppression. In other areas of employment, dark-skinned women were reminded "if you're black, get back." (Golden 7) Even during the employment boom of World War II, Black women had trouble breaking out of their culturally-assigned roles. Though some Black women left their jobs as domestics to find employment in the defense industry, Ronald Takaaki states, "even after the doors were open to black women, however, they often found themselves assigned to non-skilled jobs such as janitors and cafeteria workers." (46) Entrenched in the working class, Black women, even now, have little control over their working situations, usually taking orders from others. Though the myth of upward mobility persists in our nation, the fact is that few Black women have the resources to climb the economic ladder to financial success. In general, Black employees earn 26 cents for every dollar earned by white workers. Add to this the fact that, according to the Bureau of Statistics, black women are twice as likely as black men to be poor. (Anderson and Taylor 187)

The Mammy myth has also wreaked havoc with the social standing of the dark-skinned black women and, more recently, the Latina domestic worker - the latest to be stereotyped within the Mammy role. The Mammy, as constructed by the dominant culture, was a servant who was expected to be seen and not heard - a woman who devoted her life to the family of her master, and who had no apparent family ties of her own or other outside interests. Several generations of Black women were unable to escape the Mammy stigma and were generally able to find employment only as domestic workers. In her memoir, author Jane Lazarre talks about the Black domestics who worked for her family when she was young. She recalls that the Blacks she saw most often in her youth were "the women who worked for some of the families as housekeepers and caregivers." (26) Lazarre also admits that her family did not really know anything about the lives or histories of their Black maids. However, her father insisted on calling one of the domestic workers "a member of the family." According to Lazarre, the woman politely corrected him. "I love you girls, and I love your father, but I work for him." (27) The lack of social respect accorded to Black domestics has prevailed, but has been transferred to the newest group cast into the Mammy role, Latina women.

When interviewed, many Latina housekeepers and nannies said that they felt dehumanized by their employers. Live-in employees, in particular, report 24-hour work schedules, sleeping accommodations in with children of employers, and leftover scraps for meals. According to those interviewed, the most devastating aspect of their jobs is the total disregard by their employers of their personal lives, interests, or families they are supporting back home. Because of the perpetuation of the Mammy myth, "Inequalities of race, class, and gender have long characterized private, paid domestic work." (Domestica 24)

Another way in which the Mammy myth continues to oppress is the way in which Black women view themselves. According to the Marx's theory of false consciousness, the dominant culture controls subordinate cultures by controlling their psyche. If a subordinate culture believes that their inequality is justified, they may be easily coerced into accepting their inferior role (Anderson and Taylor 195). It is clear that the White, European standard of beauty is the choice of the dominant culture. In the Black community, this has created a "pigmentocracy" (Golden 9) that values light skin, white facial features, and straight hair over dark-skinned African looks. Those with dark skin and features are constantly reminded that they are not considered pretty, or desirable, or destined for success. Most Black men, even among the Black Panthers, make clear their preference for light, bright women. Marita Golden talks at length about the color complex as a psychologically damaging phenomenon. As Golden says, "We judge color not with our eyes but with our emotions. Our prejudices. Our longings. Our fears. Our hearts." (13)

There are numerous ways, in the mass media, in which the dark-skinned Black woman has been reminded of her inferiority to her white and light counterparts. The image of the white middle-class housewife, a 50's and 60's mass-media standard, was bolstered by contrasting images of mid-century mummies such as TV's *Beulah*, advertising's Aunt Jemima, and *Imitation of Life's* Annie.

Television of 1950s created stereotypes of the housewife and the mammy to perpetuate racism, white power, and the conception that white is beautiful. The typical white housewife stereotype, represented by June in "Leave It to Beaver," had an extremely attractive appearance. She has a sexy body like a model, white skin, blonde hair and a gorgeous face. In contrast, television and Hollywood portrayed the black mammy, as an ugly, overweight black woman, who took care of her white master's children, without concern for her own (Benshoff and Griffin 76). In *Imitation of Life* (1959), for example, although Lora is Susie's biological mother, Susie, a white child, has a better relationship with Annie Johnson--a dark, black-skinned character with mammy-like qualities-- than with Lora, her white mother. Throughout the film, it is obvious that Annie Johnson likes to take care of Susie.

In *Sociology: The Essentials*, Anderson and Taylor write, "The principle of stereotype interchangeability holds that stereotypes, especially negative ones, are often interchangeable from one social class to another, from one racial or ethnic group to another, from a racial or ethnic group to a social class, or from a social class to a gender." ("Race and Ethnicity," 238-239). With regard to stereotype interchangeability, Latina domestic workers of the 1990s are stereotyped in the same way as black domestic workers of 1950s. Despite the 1950s stereotype of black women as mummies, the author of *Doméstica*, found that "while some of the older employers I interviewed had hired African American housecleaners and domestics in the past, none were now doing so." She reports of one white woman who admits with "hesitation, 'Um, ah, I would never hire a black woman. I'd be too scared to, and I'd especially scared if her boyfriend came around'" (56). Nowadays, white women prefer to hire Latina women to care for their children. They stereotype them in much the same way previous generations stereotyped black domestic workers, as "ideally suited to caring for children" (Doméstica, 57). In regard to social status, the white housewife has superior status than black domestic workers and the Latina domestic workers who are immigrants. The black domestic workers of the past and the Latina immigrant domestic workers of the present are discriminated against in this hierarchical society. In extreme circumstances, they are despised by their employers, and are victims of rape, insults, and sexual abuse.

In conclusion, Esther Rolle in *Color Adjustment* talks about how black domestic workers are not like Annie Johnson, who takes care of a white person's kid because she likes to take care of her. Rolle suggests that the stereotypes of black mummies and, later, Latina maids are untrue. In reality, black domestic nannies and Latina workers take care of white employers' children, not because they like doing it, but because they need the money. For example, Judith, a Latina maid working in the United States of America said that she works as a domestic worker so that she can take care of her children financially. Despite these realities, the stereotype of mammy is so powerful that it has been transferred from black women to Latina maids in order to continue inequality based on skin color, gender, and class. The Mammy is one of the most powerful racial stereotypes that continues to oppress women of color economically, socially, and psychologically.



Reflection Essay on Wiki Grading Criteria

The project is worth 200 points and 20% of your final AMS 110 grade. Papers will be evaluated in four areas or categories each worth 50 points. These categories are:

Category	Evaluation	Score
<b>Thesis and Content</b>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original and clear thesis with consistent, sufficient, persuasive, unified, and well-organized support and illustration. Ideas and points are original, significant, and well-developed. Answers one of the questions outlined in the project description. (50 - 47)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Clearly stated thesis, but the paper inadequately sustains the argument; thesis is unclear, but the paper sustains an argument; attempts to answer one of the questions outlined in the project description (46 - 44)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Poorly stated thesis, inadequately supports argument, poor organization; doesn't answer one of the questions outlined in the project description (43- 38)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No thesis or argument; does not answer one of the questions outlined in the project description (37 - 0)</p>	50
<b>Use of Sources</b>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Convincing analysis using quotes from at least six sources (these sources must meet the requirements outlined in the project description). Clear connections between points and supporting quotes (50 - 47)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Analysis using only four or five sources; or the connections between the points and supporting quotes are unclear (46 - 44)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Analysis using two or three sources; or only incorporates or analyzes two to three quotes from sources (43 - 38)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Paper uses no or one source to make argument; does not incorporate any quotes from sources (37 - 0)</p>	50
<b>Writing Style and Mechanics</b>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The paper has a tone and perspective appropriate to academic writing. The paper meets academic standards in punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, and overall appearance. The paper is typed in 12 pt., Times New Roman font, with 1" margins (50 - 47)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper lacks one of these conventions (46 - 44)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper lacks two of these conventions (43 - 38)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper is incomprehensible due to errors in language or usage (37 - 0)</p>	50
<b>Citation Format</b>	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The paper correctly and consistently uses MLA format - parenthetical citations - when citing (50 - 47)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper attempts to use MLA format when citing but does so incorrectly (46 - 44)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> The paper uses a citation style used in another discipline (43 - 38)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Citation is unclear or missing; <b>remember that lack of citation is plagiarism and may be grounds for failing the project or, in certain cases, the course</b> (37 - 0)  <u>*See "Citation Format" tab on Blackboard for more information on how to cite correctly using MLA</u></p>	50

200/200

