

# Extended Inquiry Project: Final Version.



*"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun..."*

*If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun...*

*If hairs are wires, black wires grow on her head...*

*And in some perfumes is there more delight...*

*Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks".*

A portion of William Shakespeare's Famous Dark Lady Sonnets- Sonnet 130.

My inquiry has led me to interesting places and forced me to contend with shocking opinions. Initially, I was out to find sources who agreed with me so when I wrote this paper, I would be able to convince the audience that I was right and many sources supported me. I tried for hours, but I could not write a compelling argument, answer my own questions or objectively present my findings with only one side of the story. So I set out, with my pen and paper, to find sources who told the other side of the story and used them in my writing to answer my question: where do stereotypes get their power from anyway?

I have found my answer to this question in one word, belief. If a stereotype is believed to be true, you will find any means to defend that opinion. Initially it may be a healthy opinion that you have formed from experience or simply what you believe to be true. From there it may evolve to the more ugly extremism we find today. Assumptions of any kind are only so powerful because it is actually believed and people use those assumptions to judge other people, situations and use them to make decisions everyday. Case in point, an assumption that a man is much more intellectually inclined/academically oriented than a woman. If you simply thought it ridiculous and did not believe it, then you have no faith in that assumption, that stereotype and its implications are not included in the formation of your opinions, your decision making and your observations of men or women and their intellect. With all that in mind, I found that question "*where do stereotypes get their power from anyway?*" didn't truly address the problem. The answer to that is fairly obvious: people believe it, that's why. So in an attempt to truly answer the problem, I added this question to my inquiry, *What are the*

*origin of stereotypes?* This new question did not give me the answers I thought it would. Stereotypes are extremely old, they have existed since the fifteenth century, perhaps even longer.

The definition of black before the sixteenth century in the Oxford English Dictionary included :

*"Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul. ... Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister .... Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked. . . . Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc."*  
*Black was an emotionally partisan color, the handmaid and symbol of baseness and evil, a sign..of repulsion".*

You see, for these Europeans(the Portuguese to be specific) who first discovered Africans, they were puzzled, they could not comprehend the life and culture of these foreigners. And as human beings, what we fail to understand, we hate. These 'Negroes' ,they represented the other end of the spectrum, the complete opposite of Elizabethan men, white and black, good and evil, pure and tainted. Completely opposite sides of the spectrum. These were the very first impressions of explorers regarding Africans and for generations to come, these impressions will play a big role in the inhumane treatment Africans face. Unfortunately, these stereotypes, (as a function of the time they lived in) were readily believed. Even the father of Literature, William Shakespeare wrote unapologetically to his black mistress regarding her features:

*"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;*

*Coral is far more red, than her lips red:*

*If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;*

*I have seen roses damasked, red and white,*

*But no such roses see I in her cheeks;*

*And in some perfumes is there more delight*

*Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks".*

The rest of the poem calls his 'Black Lady' a goddess and professes his love to her so some may argue that these lines are taken out of context however, it cannot be ignored that for about three quarters of the poem he seems to agree with the assessment that her features are unattractive and makes several comparisons to the features of a European woman. This poem is clearly a product of the times that Shakespeare's lived in and the world's assessment of African beauty at the time. Opinions such as Africans are dirty and unattractive may stem from sources like these, or even more modern sources, like the news( their portrayal is unfortunately not much different).

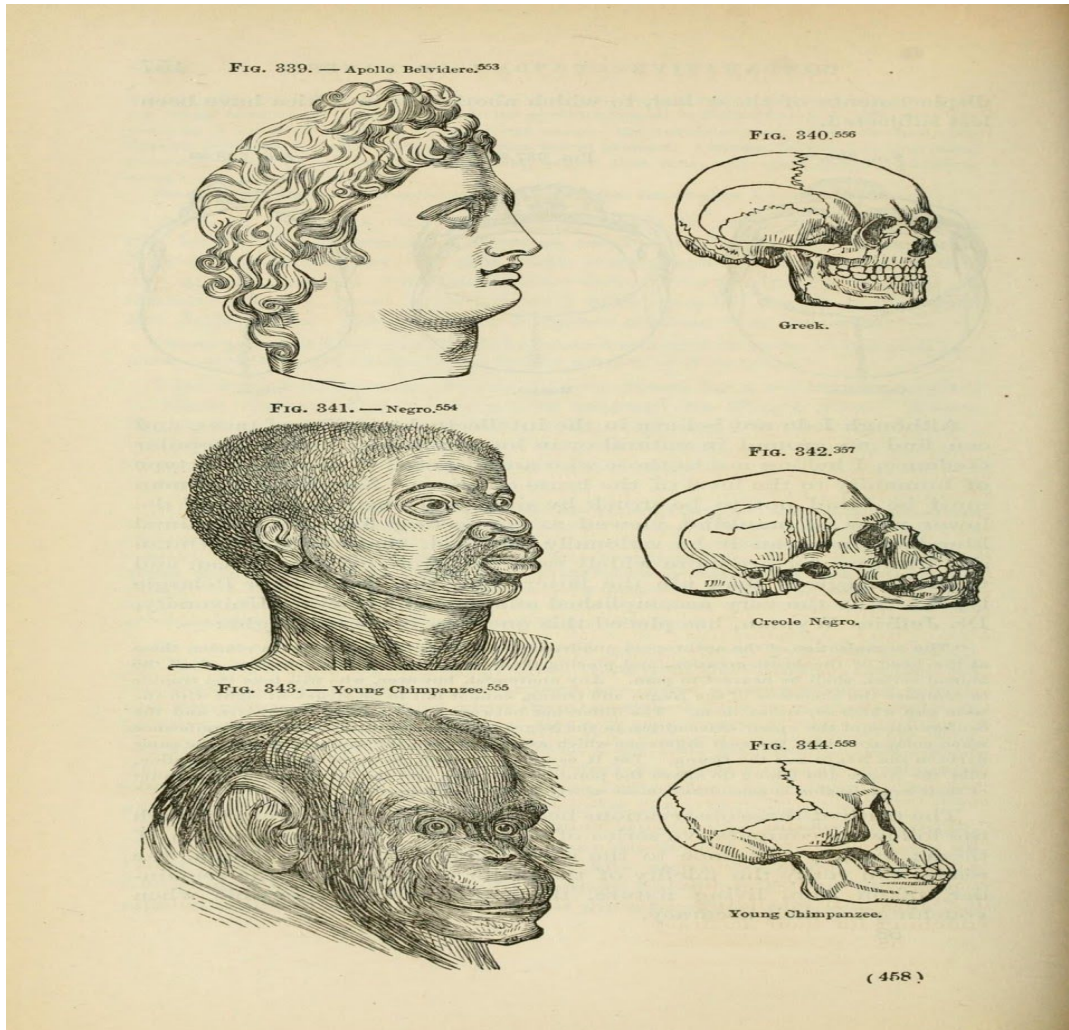
Perhaps, one may believe in the field of Poetry and Literature you are permitted to write as you wish, while your portrayal isn't necessarily accurate, it's your interpretation anyway. However, in the field of science(which should be fact) specifically taxonomy(the science of naming) and physiology( the science studying how an organism's shape/ characteristics relates to function) there were some findings that in the late sixteenth century "proved" that there was some connotation between the race of

an individual and their intellect, behavior and by extension, place in the hierarchy of the world. Many scientists at the time were probably of similar opinion but perhaps the most notable claim in scientific Racism was proposed by Carl Linnaeus: a Swedish Biologist in the late sixteenth century who is considered the father of Taxonomy. Linnaeus is responsible for developing the Binomial System of Classification: a biological system used to name organisms by their characteristics. Just like plants and invertebrates, Linnaeus also believed he could classify human beings, and to him, the perfect criteria was to classify them according to their race.

# Black History Month

## Scientific Racism - Carl Linnaeus

Amerinds (yellow bile, angry)	Europeans (blood, optimistic)	East Asians (black bile, melancholy, sad)	Africans (phlem, sluggish)	Monstrosus
copper-colored, eager, combative, governed by customs.	pale, muscular, swift, clever, inventive, governed by laws	yellow, inflexible, severe, avaricious, dark-eyed, governed by opinions.	black, slow, relaxed, negligent, governed by impulse.	(dwarfs of the Alps, the Patagonian giant, the monorchid Hottentot): agile, fainthearted.



1854, Clark, Robbins: Types of Mankind.

Comparisons between the skulls of a Greek, a "Negro" and a chimpanzee.

He(Linnaeus) made observations of the different races and the former image above is the abridged version of his conclusions. It is obvious that he is very generous to his own race, while towards the other races he seems especially harsh. He also made comparisons between the skull of a chimpanzee, an African and a European and concluded that since the shape and size of the skull of the chimpanzee and the African were nearly identical, Africans must be a "lower species" than the humans. His most famous proposals inspired even more race based classification of evolution and

intelligence. Another famous proposal by the 17th century authors Josiah Clark and George Robbins in *Types of Mankind* (1854) was that the African 'species' is the intermediate step between the primitive primates such as the Chimpanzee and the polished finished product that was Europeans.

Obviously, these observations and "findings" are a hoax. Africans are not an intermediate or lower species, every single human being is a part of the same species. People with different skin colors have simply evolved differently, changes in phenotype and morphological variation because of the environment in which they lived. But it is still interesting to see the lengths that Linnaeus went to prove that his speculations were accurate. As great a scientist as he was, he was still a product of his time, clearly manipulating his findings to align with the political agenda, societal assessments and beliefs of his time. Sources as old and seemingly authentic like these are the sources that now taint modern society with unhealthy opinions. Even though on paper (the constitution) all seems well, centuries of opinions and beliefs aren't just going to disappear, transatlantic slave trade began in the fifteenth century and the Civil Rights Act was just passed in 1964: 56 years ago. Fifty six years is simply not enough time for everything to miraculously be alright. The Apartheid in South Africa ended officially in 1994 and the nation is still feeling its ripple effects, with some mainly black regions still struggling with poverty and Xenophobia. Mass incarcerations, racial profiling, discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, faith/religion, lack of faith/religion, country of origin, race, appearance are all social problems the modern society still grapples with.

I am confident however, that things are better than they were a decade ago, or the time before that. Slowly but surely, if we are making conscious efforts and educating ourselves on the stereotypes based on race and country of origin that exist, we may



succeed in bringing down the walls history has built. In 1694, there were people who believed in the equality of races such as Captain Thomas Phillip who said:

*"I could not imagine why they should be despised for their color, being what they cannot help, and the effect of the climate it has pleased God to appoint them".*

If there were progressive thinkers in 1694, we can all be progressive thinkers in 2020 and beyond.

One of the stereotypes I am not so optimistic will fade anytime soon are gender based stereotypes. Gender based stereotypes have been around for even longer than racial or country or origin based stereotypes and unlike gender based stereotypes they are subtle and difficult to pinpoint/observe. So hidden that many say they do not exist at all and that sentiments biased against any gender should be left in the past where they existed. Mary Wollstonecraft an English author in the late sixteenth century who is considered the first feminist, her groundbreaking book 'A vindication of the Rights of a Woman' was authored in 1792. Ironically, it is dedicated to a man: Maurice de Talleyrand a French politician and diplomat whose words inspired the authoring of 'A vindication of the Rights of a Woman'. Talleyrand says:

*"That to see one half of the human race excluded by the other from all participation in government is a political phenomenon...impossible to explain".*

Her entire work is spent criticizing the social system at the time and asserting the importance of considering women as equals who are competent and should be independent. She says in its early chapters,

*"my own sex, I hope will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures instead of flattering their fascinating graces and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone."(Wollstonecraft, 'A vindication of the rights of a woman'*

1792)

I think it is important to say that Wollstonecraft's words are still very much relevant in today's society. There are cultures even I am familiar with where there is still some resistance to send female children to school, where there are child brides, girls are forced to get married to much older men and have children at 16. People and places who believe that girls are accessories, not as good as boys and in a household where there are only female children, the woman is believed to be barren, she has failed as a wife.

The assessment that women and girls are weaker may have made some sense centuries ago when the key to survival was physical strength and hunting abilities. On average, men are more physically stronger than women so in that time and culture, that assessment may have been correct.

Fortunately, the human race is no longer in a time where brute strength is the key to survival, what is needed to survive now is intelligence, creativity, innovation and determination. None of which are more bestowed on men more than women. Why then are women still viewed as inferior? A business woman must be overly conscious of what she wears, how she carries herself and what she says or she may not be taken seriously by her colleagues. Worse, she may be sexualized. Everyone but women themselves get a say in how women must dress themselves or appear in public in order

to be viewed as 'acceptable' or 'decent'. The truth is the society we live in is a patriarchal one. One where men will always be viewed as superior. In 1792, Wollstonecraft wrote:

*"Dismissing then those pretty feminine phrases which the men condescendingly use to soften our slavish dependence and despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility and sweet docility of manners, supposed to be the sexual characteristics of the weaker vessel, I wish to shew that elegance is far inferior to virtue".*

Misogyny still exists, as much as some would like to deny, and it affects women everywhere everyday. Its roots, as we have seen, are equally as ancient as Scientific Racism.

Like all inquiry projects, I have been unable to find all the answers, and the answers I did find, have only led me to more questions. However, a basic knowledge has been formed. Where stereotypes come from and why they are so powerful.



**Nadine Gordon**

Sat, Apr 11, 1:10 PM (3 days ago)



to me ▾

Comments on your paper;

1. Why repeat the excerpts from sonnet 130?

2. Use MLA format

3. 1st paragraph--what is your "inquiry"? Not stated. And what is "the other side"?

4. No transition into definition of black

5. "These 'Negroes' ,they represented the other end of the spectrum, the complete opposite of Elizabethan men, white and black, good and evil, pure and tainted. Completely opposite sides of the spectrum." You're running these ideas together.

6. Why did you leap to conclusion that Shakespeare's Dark lady is Black? Where's your source???

7. Lack of transitions throughout.

8. Both beginning and end lack coherence. And lack of transitions undermines coherence of body of paper.



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UWRT 1104-029

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Peer Review feedback

I have always had issues portraying information sequentially and in order and that played a big part in the feedback I received from the draft. The draft "lacked comprehension" and "transition". Hearing all that helped me make some formatting/organizational adjustments. The fact that the project and document was meant to be in MLA format went over my head completely (I had forgotten). A particularly valuable comment received was a challenge towards my claim that the Shakespearean sonnet regarding 'The Dark Lady' being of African Origin. Claiming she is African is inaccurate and is only a hypothetical scenario under scholarly debate. The feedback helped me use the illustration from 'The Dark Lady' sonnets in a different way.