

Nate Parker's Tango with White Masculinity and Anonymous Black Male Co-Signers.

Recently I was tagged in a link on Facebook. The link directed me to an article which quickly showed a picture of Nate Parker standing next to his wife Sarah DiSanto. For many the wife of the man who played in *The Great Debaters* and *Birth of a Nation* was a shock as DiSanto is white. While some twitter users expressed a discordance between Parker the film maker and Nate the man, others flat-out expressed disappointment over another Black man married to a white woman; however, one obvious feeling for many was clear: ambivalence.

Nate Parker, for many Black individuals represents the next generation of great Black actors, having played significant roles in more than five major films at just 36 years of age. Moreover, Parker is the picture of Black masculinity; he is not only hetero-presenting, but also heterosexual. He also represents the dreams of what could be, he is not working or middle class; rather he is among the wealthy for whom living paycheck to paycheck is not a concern. But there is an underside to Nate Park which makes his masculinity more prominent, more accepting, more “manly” if you will.

In a recent interview about the film *Beyond the Lights* Parker stated that in an effort to preserve the Black man that he would never play a gay character. What Parker was getting at was clear: he would never play a gay character because to do so as a Black man, not only misrepresents who Black men are, but moreover would include same sex love and desire in the fabric of masculinity. Parker's position takes on heightened concern and has steep implications when we consider tweet's that he has released such as this:



The question becomes clear: which Black lives matter? It is here where Parker's position finds resonance in many Black hetero-males across the United States, indeed the African Diaspora as a whole. Recently when DeRay Mckesson, a Black Lives Matter activist, was arrested numerous Black men (and women) took to twitter, as well as other social media and web platforms, to discuss and express their lack of concern for Mckesson due to his sexuality. The statement was obvious: Mckesson's sexuality, negated his blackness. Seemingly for Nate Parker this is also the case: that Black and non-hetero identities cannot exist in the same body. As a result, here is what we know to be true of the masculine male in the twenty-first century: that he is birth out of womaness and non-hetero identities; that the hetero-performing and heterosexual male is able to forge his identity (and its resulting privileges and recognition) out of who he is not as opposed to who he is.



Parker's recent statements and the seemingly new revelation of his wife being white are in a sort of 'perfect timing' as Korryn Gaines, a young black woman, was recently killed by Baltimore County Police. Gaines' State execution resulted in a heated debate primarily among Black hetero men. Such comments offered were "she should have done this," "she was too combative," "she should have submitted," "Black women need to learn to listen"—all these and more were used to not only shape and further vilify Korryn Gaines by Black hetero men, but also to justify her death. Interestingly, all of these comments placed

Korryn Gaines beyond the pale of respectable womanhood: obedience, agreeable, submission, attentive. Yet, interestingly, all of these adjectives and ideals have their root in white womanhood. In other words, as Sarah Haley argues in her text *No Mercy Here*, "in the white imaginary 'black woman' [is] an oxymoronic formulation because the

modifier 'black' reject[s] everything associated with the universal [term] 'woman'." What I am saying here is that in likeness to Parker insisting that the modifier black rejects (or excludes) gay, is the same way in which Black men insisted that Gaines' was not a 'true' woman per se say because she did not conform to the dictates of womanhood and thus was underserving of their advocacy. The underlying commonality here is important: both exclusionary approaches insist on a norm of whiteness—in particular white able-bodied male heteronormativity/sexuality.

What does this mean? It means that just like race informs gender, white manhood also informs masculinity—meaning the right to perform the colonial-like tactics of claiming, excluding, killing, and justifying. The only difference between Nate Parker and the men who have problems with his decision is that Parker is married to the standard which informs all aspects of American social life (as the Black men who are not in agreement with his relationship attempt to locate the white in the Black—insisting that Black women conform to an ethic of white womanhood, and simultaneously agreeing with Parker that Black males who are non-hetero normative are beyond the reach of Blackness).

What am I saying? I am saying that very few Black hetero identifying males should stand in the place of critic as it relates to Parker because they desire the same thing, however, only in Black form. In this light, one of Parker's more recent tweets perhaps makes more sense:



Indeed this thought of Nate Parker, for himself and many Black hetero men, is true: it does not mean white hate; because that would necessarily mean a complete reshaping of their world, a redefining of manhood and gender as a whole that does not depend on the exclusion and relegation of others. It doesn't mean white hate, simply because for many justice means inclusion in a discriminating system so that Black men may perform the same power as their white male counterparts. Who we are looking to empower, why we are looking to empower them, and how we are seeking to empower that subject is important. One cannot be upset with Nate Parker when one is looking for the same thing--Black skin, white hearts.