

Rescue Black Americana by Iyaba Ibo Mandingo

To be Black in this world is to know firsthand some sort of stereotype about you as a Human Being. They permeate every aspect of our lives from local colloquialisms to generational assumptions. All of it can be traced back to the beginning of Europe's domination of the planet following the age of



exploration. Europeans were quick to usurp the ideas and natural resources of the black world while at the same time repudiating the people.

Colonization brought with it the need to justify the barbaric treatment of the native people encountered and in many cases, destroyed. The King James bible was probably the first piece of propaganda used. Europeans used passages that spoke of slaves and masters to explain the new conditions they were forcing upon everyone and every place they encountered.

America emerged from this age of colonization/imperialism to become the leader of the new age, and she like Europe rose to power on the treasures of Africa, her minerals and her people. Europe was able to step cleanly into the 20th century without the shadow of slavery walking her streets daily, because they were securely tucked away in colonies around the planet, in the Caribbean and in Asia. America had to deal with her now freed Africans, and her failure to transition from slavery to freedom, as promised by the Reconstructions laws after the civil war that made them freedmen.

Reconstruction failed and with the withdrawal of the northern army, many if not all the rights gained by freedman were eradicated, with the help of the newly formed kkk. Though President Grant's campaigned to reunite the states removed most of the early kkk lead resistance. The new century saw David Wark (D.W) Griffith, born in rural Kentucky to Jacob "Roaring Jake" Griffith, a former Confederate Army colonel) give the world, Birth of a nation, a propaganda movie about the virtues of Dixieland and slavery, and more importantly the definition of these newly freed "sub-humans". It was debuted in Woodrow Wilson's white house to his rave reviews.

And that led to the image of black folks that became the definition of Black people to many white people even to today; and the flood of propaganda that followed in new papers magazines and eventually television. Vaudeville, early American theater brought us blackface, where white and black actors rubbed a charcoal based mixture on their faces and parodied the everyday movements and speech patterns of black folks. Walt Disney gave us cartoons with big lipped native Africans cooking white men in pots, and his greatest creation Mickey Mouse, which clearly harkened back to the blackface era. Newspapers and magazines gave us satirical cartoons that depicted black folks as everything from monkeys and gorillas to scary raping pillaging monsters. Toy companies and household goods gave us nigger piggybanks, Mamie Jemimah salt and pepper shakers and pikinini/goliwog dolls. White folks collected these items and displayed them proudly around their homes. Even the beloved circus clown with his made-up face, oversized shoes and self-deprivation buffoonery, can trace their origins to blackface.

By the time, the civil rights movement and America's first battle with her past arrived, these items had become symbols of racism and racist points of views. Those who celebrated that backward view kept their propaganda on display and used them as teaching aides. Others looking to grow past the madness got rid of theirs in garage sales, antiques fairs and flea markets.

Now for the people of my grandparent's generation these objects can have a visceral effect, for them. These things are firsthand reminders of how they were viewed by an entire country, teased in school and sports teams, labelings in workplaces and public places; of how they were expected and reminded to be. For me they are a part of us to be rescued and re-defined.

So, over a decade ago when my girlfriend, Jacinth and I were road tripping through western Virginia on my poetry tour we stopped at an indoor flea market in an enormous, re-appropriated factory to explore. The entire place was filled with black Americana; enough to rush your senses with the hatred still imbued in these items. Many of the people were merchants with a product, looking to make a few bucks; but there were several booths where you could instantly feel that the pieces on the table belonged to the owner of the booth. With them you felt the guilt in their eye contactless explanations, hear it in the pass the buck rationalization of how these pieces came to be in their possession.

We rescued several Aunt Jemima salt and pepper shakers, three Golliwog dolls and a very intricate piggy bank, with a blackface character that lifted the coins placed in his hand into his mouth. These objects are a part of America's story, the energy and sentiment they were created with and for still haunts this place.