

HARLEM

Here on the edge of hell
Stands Harlem —
Remembering the old lies,
The old kicks in the back,
The old "Be patient"
They told us before.

Sure, we remember.
Now when the man at the corner store
Says sugar's gone up another two cents,
And bread one,
And there's a new tax on cigarettes —
We remember the job we never had,
Never could get,
And can't have now
Because we're colored.

So we stand here
On the edge of hell
In Harlem
And look out on the world
And wonder
What we're gonna do
In the face of what
We remember.

Langston Hughes
(1902-1967)

Invasion of My Privacy: My Experience as a Young Black Woman

by Ann-Marie Woods

I think back to my first experience with racism. "Nigger!" they shouted as they whipped my sister with branches, poked and prodded her. I was only about five at the time. I ran all the way home scared to death and yelling, "They're killing my sister, they're killing my sister."

From that point on, things progressed. On our street there lived a family with two boys and a girl my sister's age. I was about six at the time, and my sister, eleven. They would bully us almost every day. I even got to the point where we were chased to our door at knife point. My sister being older than I, wound up wearing the worst of the brunt.

Years passed and I was still naive to what was taking place around me. Black people were few and far between in my elementary school. In school I excelled in sports, academics, and being a class clown. I was leading the "normal" life of a child.

I passed on to junior high where I studied history, never aware that anything was 'incorrect'. I believed what I had been taught. I never found it strange that there were no Black people in history other than slaves.

At this point in my life, my best friend was white, most of my friends were white, and I was quite comfortable with that.

I can't quite put into place when I became aware something was wrong. I was not originally from Nova Scotia, so I did not know many Nova Scotian Blacks. There was a major transition from elementary school to junior high. The Black population went from six to about thirty. I began to want to fit in more with my own

people. This was accomplished by one major thing, "WHEELIES". Yes, Wheelies Roller Skating Rink, that's where all the brothers and sisters went. Of course I still didn't really fit in, but I tried. I roller-skated every Saturday in a continuous never ending circle and then went to McDonald's where I hung out for hours. Eventually, I got to know more

Black Nova Scotians; I met people from Halifax, North Preston, and East Preston. I never understood then why I liked Wheelies so much, or the walk from McDonald's where everyone just hung out.

It was in grade nine that I discovered my culture, and some of my history. My brother had started a group called Voices, which was a theatre group dealing primarily with Black Nova Scotian culture. I sort of helped out and from there became more involved in Black functions. I went to a Cultural Awareness Youth group banquet. It was held at the George Dixon Centre up in the games room. It was a great time, a social time, for Black people like me. I had come to realize that I had something in common with these people. We shared a culture, a historical past, that no one else can relate to no matter how hard they try.

From that point on things took off. I started learning Black history.

Of course, not at school, but through a group that my brother started called the Cultural Awareness Youth Group of Nova Scotia. They used to have debates on Black history, and also quiz teams very similar to Reach For The Top on Cablevision 10. I learned so much that I truly began to love my people and appreciate myself. I also started to think of white people in a

more negative sense. I started to realize that some people just wanted to be with me because I was "different". It was cool to have a Black friend.

I remember working on a project in high school with one of my friends at the Dartmouth

Regional Library. Some Black guys had tried to pick her up when we went outside for a break. When we went back inside she looked in my face and said, "I hate those f---in' niggers." I took every book I had in my hand, threw them in her face, and stormed down the stairs. I could not believe it. She came after me to explain herself, get this; "Anne-Marie what's wrong? 'You're not a nigger, you're not Black, you don't act Black.' They just don't understand."

I recently had extensions in my hair or braids as some people might call them. I had people stare at me on the bus. I felt as though I just landed. White ladies would come up to me fascinated. Of course they had the

usual four comments and questions to make.

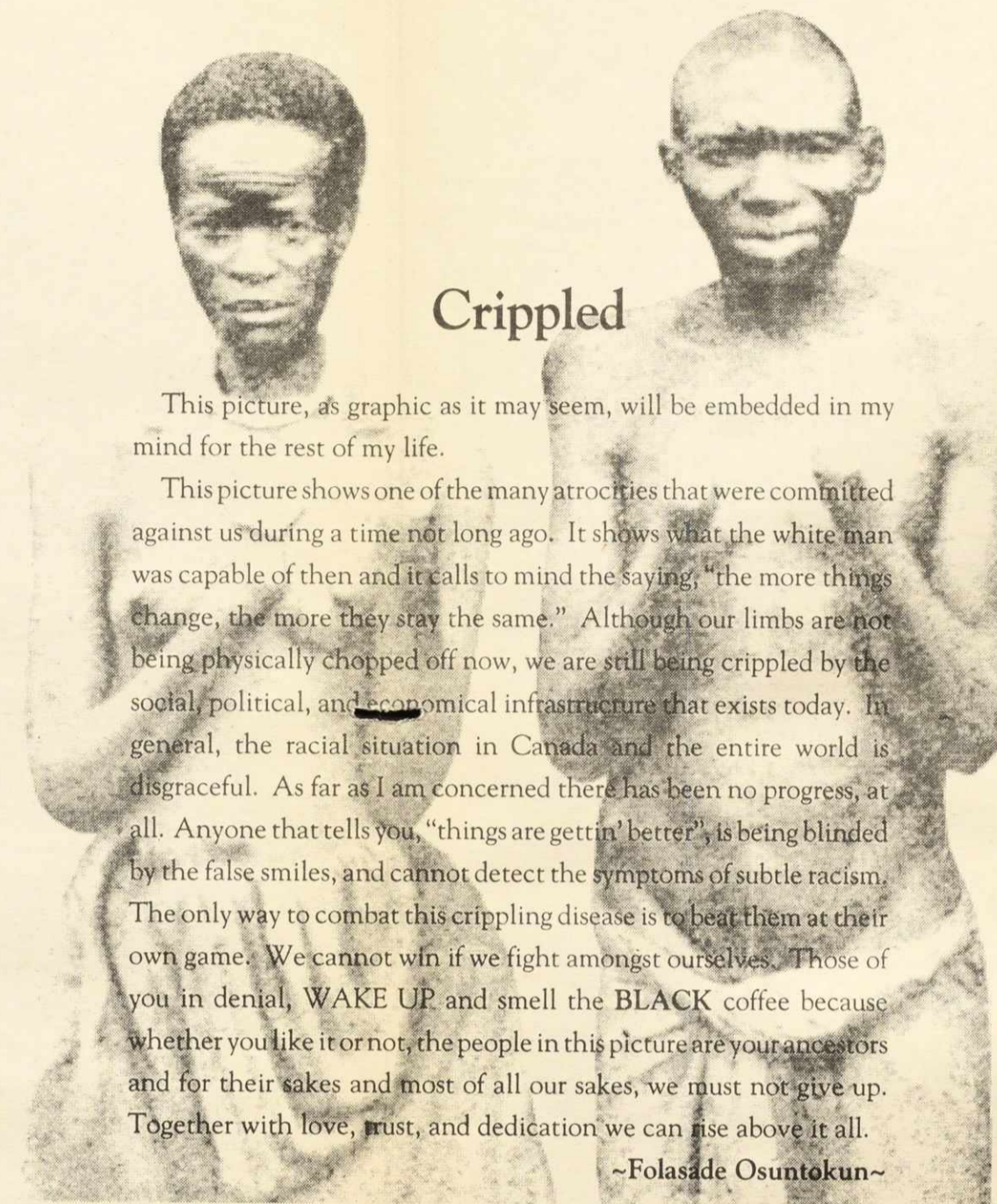
"Oh I love your hair."
"How long did that take to do?"
"Can you wash it?"
"Does it hurt?"

Can someone please explain to me why our hair is so fascinating? White people always want to ask questions and touch it all the time. Why is it that we as Black people constantly have to educate the majority? I was in New York, no one stared at me or asked me strange stupid questions about my hair. Then I came back to Halifax.

You see, White people need to start educating themselves. Can you imagine walking up to a White lady on the street and saying, "Oh I love your hair, can you wash it?" Think about it...

A White person will never know what it is like to be one of the few Black people in a university class of 150 students. They will never experience little children trying to eat them because they think that they're chocolate, going to teach dance classes in the South-End where both the children and the parents are scared to talk to you. Nor will they experience being stared at, followed throughout stores, not being served, not being able to hang in groups of five or six without being called a gang ... the list goes on!

So you see, all I want is for racist ideas to stop. I want White people to learn Black history, and not grow up ignorant in regards to Black culture. And please respect me as a young Black woman. Ask me questions, but don't invade my privacy.



Crippled

This picture, as graphic as it may seem, will be embedded in my mind for the rest of my life.

This picture shows one of the many atrocities that were committed against us during a time not long ago. It shows what the white man was capable of then and it calls to mind the saying, "the more things change, the more they stay the same." Although our limbs are not being physically chopped off now, we are still being crippled by the social, political, and economical infrastructure that exists today. In general, the racial situation in Canada and the entire world is disgraceful. As far as I am concerned there has been no progress, at all. Anyone that tells you, "things are gettin' better", is being blinded by the false smiles, and cannot detect the symptoms of subtle racism. The only way to combat this crippling disease is to beat them at their own game. We cannot win if we fight amongst ourselves. Those of you in denial, WAKE UP and smell the BLACK coffee because whether you like it or not, the people in this picture are your ancestors and for their sakes and most of all our sakes, we must not give up. Together with love, trust, and dedication we can rise above it all.

~Folasade Osuntokun~

Africa

Africa my Africa,
Africa of proud warriors in the ancestral savannahs,
Africa my grandmother sings of
Beside her distant river
I have never seen you
But my gaze is full of your blood
Your black blood split over the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your toil
The toil of slavery
The slavery of your children.
Africa, tell me Africa,
Are you the back that bends
Lies down under the weight of humbleness?
The trembling back striped red
That says yes to the sjambok on the roads of noon?
Solmnly a voice answers me
Impetuous child, that young and sturdy tree
That tree that grows
There splendidly alone among white and faded flowers
Is Africa, your Africa. It puts forth new shoots
With patience and stubbornness puts forth new shoots
Slowly its fruits grow to have
The bitter taste of liberty.

David Diop

Submitted by the African Students Association,
Dalhousie University



In Africa, I live in the Biggest Tree in the Compound

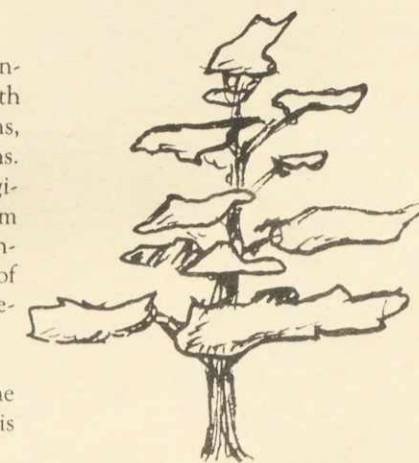
by Nadia Ronke Meley Maathey

The following are extracts of conversations I've had in Halifax with many people: White Canadians, Black Canadians, and Caribbeans. They are not a figment of my imagination though I wish some of them were. These are conversations I encounter on a daily basis, some of which illustrate the problem of stereotyping.

Q: How did you get to Canada? (some friends who have been asked this question said things like.)
A: I swam across.
Q: Really?

Q: What do you wear to school in Ghana?
A: I wear jeans, pretty much the same things worn here, as well as traditional clothing. (Do you think I walk around naked, I wonder?)

Q: What! (she shrieks) You have BMWs in Ghana (I think she's about to faint)
A: Yes (I reply confidently) we have many BMWs in Ghana, amongst other luxury cars. ("Ignorance is such a vile thing," I think to myself.)



Examples of other questions I get asked:

Q: (Flicking through my photo albums) I didn't know Africans would be light-skinned, I thought they were all very-very black, like I see on T.V.
A: Not at all. We are of varying shades even within a nation. As you move further north of the equator in Africa the people get progressively lighter in skin tone like the Ethiopians and then still further north is Egypt and Libya where the people are Mediterranean in appearance but still are a part of Africa.

Q: Ooh, you're from Africa...
A: No, I'm from Ghana in Africa. Actually they're some fifty countries in Africa and Ghana is but one of them.

Q: Ooh you're from Africa, I know someone who lives in Kenya, he's called Alfred...eh well I can't remember his last name. Do you know him?

A: No I'm sorry. (Yep I'm very sorry if you don't realize that Ghana is on the opposite side of Africa, quite far from Kenya. I certainly don't presume that you would know my friend John whatz his name in British Columbia.)

Q: Do you have lions on the streets?
A: No, the only time I saw one was at the zoo.

Q: Do you have houses in Africa?
A: (Some of my friends reply as follows) No, we live in the biggest tree in the compound.

Yes, we have houses, and they are made from iron rods, concrete, and cement plaster, and in terms of their beauty, structure, and size many of them are a lot like Spanish villas.

On Being Black..

Black is discovering that mothers of the little white girls who bring you home after school for a snack, wash your dishes a second time.

Black is a fifth grade teacher explaining the history of Africa, and telling you that your ancestors were immoral, primitive, barbaric and inferior.

Black is having a white man approach you to tell you how much he likes black girls.

Black is having a white woman tell you over and over that you are equal.

Black is wearing a frozen smile when you hear jokes about black people made by white people.

Black is driving home from UCETA with your boy friend and being stopped by the police and told to get out of that area

Black is moving through years of discovery, fear, bigotry, militancy, brotherhood, pride and unity.

Black is an attitude. An attitude of pride and a wondering at the tolerance of well-meaning white people.

What do I mean by that...

I mean, for example, you and me. You were very nice in giving me this assignment to talk on being black. But I wonder what you would have done if I had asked you to talk on being white.

You see, we are not yet human to human, are we?

Not yet.

Anonymous