

Delta of Venus: Saartjie Baartman

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Abstract (*Samantha R. and Deih Sian*)

Khoi women are enriched in dramatic and extravagant figures/attributes, such as their large, fleshy gluteal region, which created a strong sexualized interest from men. One crucial example/figure of medical exploitation of display among people of African descent was Saartjie Baartman. Throughout her life, she was taunted, flaunted, and characterized to behave like an animal in a cage or wild beast, such as in a circus, by her owners. Given this perspective, her publicized body was examined in which her dark beautiful complexion was medically analyzed and experimented on for further evaluation. In addition, her distinctive physical appearance suffered through several unethical violations, such as alternating between rape and intimate medical examinations. Moreover, she had to constantly and forcefully obey her owners' demands by executing tasks against her own will. Hottentot Venus, her new name, spent the last of her life drinking heavily in which she passed away at the age of twenty-seven from an infectious illness, but all was not concluded nor forgotten about Baartman. Even after her death, she was still mistreated as her body was dissected and displayed at a museum for a tremendously long time. However, in 2002, she was no longer displayed at the museum and was taken back to South Africa for a proper burial. In recent years, there have been similar cases with Chinese bodies being displayed in museums that were illegally obtained. Although racial discrimination is not as prevalent as it was in the past, it still continues in Western Medicine.

Keywords: Khoi, Dissected, Baartman, Exploitation, Display

Introduction (*Yeni H.*)

Medicine has been around for a very long time, which means bodies have been studied for a long time as well. However, American medicine was built on racism and slavery. This meant that the bodies that were often disrespected were the unprotected people of African descent who held a very low status in society. Racial inferiority was the basis for many medical journals and gave racist mindsets the ability to practice their prejudice and ignorance without interference. Throughout Western Medicine, this lack of human regard has been reflected through the treatment of Ota Benga, Saartjie Baartman, and other members of the Khoisan hunter-gatherers.

Synopsis (*Samantha R.*)

Born in the year of the French Revolution, 1789, and a member of the Khoisan hunter-gatherers, Saartjie (meaning Sara) Baartman was an enslaved servant for Peter Cesar who in turn, handed her over to Dr. William Dunlop, a British naval surgeon. Unaware of these men of science intentions, she was oblivious of becoming an object of medical curiosity and physical attraction due to her unique and “voluptuous” figure. Dunlop, as well as other male scientists, anatomically scrutinized her body by ceaseless sketching, measuring, and analyzing, which undertook several ethical violations. Because her body was constantly displayed nude or covered in animal skin, her name eventually stripped away and was replaced with “Hottentot Venus”. Baartman spent the rest of her life forcefully standing naked in a cage impersonating an animal or behaving like a wild beast (like animalistic displays in a circus) in which these men would ridicule and parade her around, then later become aroused by her. Heavily drinking in her last year of life, Baartman passed away at twenty-seven from an infectious illness; however, that was not the end of Hottentot Venus because in 1817, Baron Georges Cuvier, a French zoologist and

physiologist, dissected, preserved, and displayed Baartman's body in Paris's Musee del' Homme (Museum of Man).

System of A&P Focus *(Samanta C.)*

The medical and exploitative display of dark complexed individuals encompasses the integumentary system. The exhibition of black bodies in "medical displays" encouraged the alienation of an entire race due to the melanin in their cutaneous membrane. The depiction of their skin tone and facial features were used as inferiority evidence to enforce the ideology of people of African descent being of low status on an evolutionary scale as compared to white people (Washington, 2006). These displays lead to the over-sexualization of women of color for their skin tone, hair texture, and the deposits of adipose tissue in their breasts and buttocks causing their examinations to become demeaning and criminal. Women of color were assaulted and raped by men who held a twisted mindset of black inferiority. The unprincipled degradation of the bodies of darker complected individuals was not enough for medical professionals. Medical professionals wanted to pull back their skin and progress deeper by menacing anatomical dissections to further pronounce the social acceptance of the disrespect towards people of African descent (Washington, 2006).

Violation of Ethics *(Deih Sian)*

Ethics, also known as moral philosophy, is a set of moral conducts that govern an individual or a group's behavior (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Baartman's owners violated ethics because they forced Baartman to display her body without her consent and did not give her rights to her body. Baartman was taken to Paris to be in circuses where she was displayed like an animal, forced into a cage, and compelled to act like a beast. She was also used as a form of entertainment

during wealthy European parties and was mocked for her unique physical appearance that was seen as vulgar. Although Baartman stated that she consent to display herself, one should not believe her statement as it occurred during the 17th century when Africans did not have any rights. Even when Dr. William Dunlop performed medical examinations on her, he violated ethics as he took advantage of her and performed an intimate examination (Washington, 2006). Furthermore, her body was plastered, dismembered, and publicized at Paris's Musee de L'Homme without her consent in which her brain, vulva, and anus were conserved in decanters upon her death. After 150 years of nonconsensual exhibition, Baartman was finally removed from the museum and received a proper burial with the help of former South Africa president, Nelson Mandela (Daley, 2002).

Current examples (*Yeni H.*)

A current example of showcasing body parts would be the "Real Bodies exhibition in West Palm Beach" and "Bodies: The Exhibition in Vegas". These places are museums that contain real human bodies. The "Real Bodies" exhibit contains 20 Chinese men and women cadavers. Their models were given by the Dalian Medical University Biology Plantation in China. Many human-rights activists have questioned the origin of the bodies and raised many ethical questions. Doctors, lawyers, and scientists have claimed that the bodies were illegally obtained and actually belong to bodies of Chinese political prisoners and dissidents (people who oppose an official policy). Many people believe that the bodies were obtained from executions and not of natural causes as the organizers of the exhibition claim. However, the exhibit claims to have certified documents that prove that the bodies were legally donated and that the bodies showed no signs of trauma. The Bodies Exhibition in Vegas is similar to the exhibition in Florida because

it contains full sized human Chinese bodies as well. It contains 13 full sized bodies and 260 organs and partial body specimens. Although these body exhibits are allowed in certain places, they are banned in France, Israel, Hawaii, and the city of Seattle.

Conclusion (*Samanta C.*)

In 1817, Baartman, known as the “Hottentot Venus”, was anatomically dissected by a man who truly embodied a racist mindset and belief in white superiority. He made medical notes of her body by exemplifying her features and portraying them as animalistic characteristics (Washington, 2006). It is evident that racial discrimination persisted all throughout Western Medicine as described in *Medical Apartheid*. The immoral, objective examination of black bodies were exploited and abused until medical personnel further invaded their bodies by putting a scalpel to their skin. Compared to the past wrongdoings towards people of African descent, today, there exists no such disrespect in the name of entertainment. Fortunately, Western Medicine has surpassed such racially motivated propaganda. However, there is much to reflect from past mistakes to ensure that such a terrible time period, where certain groups of people are targeted, do not occur again in the future of Western Medicine.

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