



WHY NEGRO SUICIDES ARE INCREASING!

As Negroes wade into American mainstream,
an increasing number is swept away by suicide

... IN THE QUIET SWANKY SUBURB OF SPRINGWOOD, ...

The Inner Conflict of the Negro Male

The article and advertisement used to construct this image were taken from the 1965 July issue of *Ebony* Magazine. The original image is from a Smirnoff vodka advertisement, in which there is a white man and a black woman sitting at a bar together smiling. This advertisement stood out to me because of the two feature articles in this particular issue. The first article is titled: "Does Amalgamation Work in Brazil? Absorbing Negro Through Interracial Marriage is Their Answer to the Race Problem". The second article is titled "Why Negro Suicides are Increasing". I extracted the headline from this article and inserted it as a caption for the Smirnoff advertisement.

This image is a representation of the challenges and racial politics facing black people during this time, especially middle class blacks. As middle class blacks gained social mobility through the civil rights movement, assimilation and the adoption of white middle class values pervaded the lives of the socio-economically privileged blacks. The fact that this magazine describes amalgamation in Brazil as a possible "solution" to the "race problem", is indicative of a particular ideology that idolized the white familial structure and lifestyle. The article on Brazil was reminiscent of Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* and his discussion of the black man's desire for the white woman, the ultimate property of the white man. However assimilation comes at a price, the middle class black man's desire to be a part of a community that has degraded and exploited him, coupled with his exclusion from his own black community as a result of his disloyalty, drives the middle class black man insane. This is why the suicide article is relevant. "For as the Negro wins his way into the material plenty of American middle and upper middle class life, he inherits economic, social and psychological tensions possessed by his white counter parts. And suicide is a part of this legacy"¹. The article implies that ultimately, the black man can not handle this new lifestyle and many of them turn to suicide as an escape, which is itself seen as a "white" thing to do. I found that the article was also pretty sexist in it's depiction of Negro suicides. Black men were cited as being the victims more often than black women and while black men's reasons for committing suicide seemed to be more legitimate, black women who committed or attempted to commit suicide were depicted as irrational, emotional and over dramatic. This victimization of black men and the lack of sympathy for black women reminded me of Calvin Hernton's article on black women writers. In the article Hernton describes the backlash experienced by many black female writers as they wrote about the sexism within the black community. Black men were enraged by the writings of women such as Alice Walker, Michelle Wallace and Ntozake Shange. Black men attempted to flip the script and make themselves out to be the victims and accused black women of conspiring with white men to further denigrate the black man. The image of the white man and the black woman sitting at the bar smiling is supposed to represent this belief among black men.

¹ Woodard, John N. "Why Negro Suicides are Increasing", *Jet* Magazine, Johnson Publication. July, 1965. pp. 89

Thus, I would say that my image is about the perceived threat of the white man and black woman. It is about the internal conflict between the desire to assimilate and the desire to have power and control.