



The photo above is the cover of Jet magazine, published on March 4, 1971. I looked at this same photo the other day in class, and had a pretty conventional discussion about it. It felt like there wasn't anything novel to say about this "Most Beautiful Face on Television." She's light-skinned, and her hair is relaxed... She's conforming to the White standard of beauty- we *know*! I feel like if you haven't noticed that trend in Black America, you obviously haven't been looking that closely. Maybe this is a presumptuous stance, but I don't think so.

But I know I've only scratched the surface of this photo. I think the media often reflects how society views the world, or wishes to view the world—not necessarily what the world actually looks like. I especially like this distinction between society's reality and *actual* reality in photography because photos are meant to capture literally what's in front of them, i.e. what's real.

This warping of reality reminds me of biomythography. At first, I had a hard time accepting Lorde's view on biomythography. How could it be good for someone to build his/her identity on a false history? It seems dangerous--and shallow--to create who you are out of something fictional. But after our discussion, I sort of understood how biomythography could be empowering and beneficial for the person using it. The key part of coming to terms with biomythography, however, is to understand that *all* history falls into that category. Nothing retold has ever been purely factual; first, it all swims through the human brain and get contaminated by whatever biases that brain holds.

This concept is, of course, very frustrating. Not only does it force me to question everything I've ever learned *ever*—it also forces me to wonder if the human experience and *truth* are mutually exclusive. Baldwin wrote, "it is not possible for the human being to be as simple as a stallion or a mare, because the human imagination is perpetually required to examine, control, and redefine reality... this relentless tension is one of the keys to human history." This quotation relates to biomythography because it admits that everyone understands themselves (and others) in terms of other people; reality is, then, a human creation.

I used to think that if something wasn't true, it wasn't important, or legitimate. That's why I rejected Lorde's support for biomythography. It all seemed so cheap. But obviously there are plenty of things in society that aren't "true" necessarily, but still are influential. Race and sexual orientation are perfect examples of this. Race has almost no scientific significance, and determining who belongs to what race is both impossible and pointless. But race still matters; I don't know how I could justify being in this class if I didn't think so. Sexual orientation is similar to race in that it's also impossible to adequately label people either straight, gay, bisexual, or whatever. But regardless of whether or not these labels are true, they still matter on a personal, societal and historical scale.

I suppose then, that Jet magazine used this cover picture to create its own myth-history. Maybe Jet thought that by making the perfect Black woman an imitation of the White woman, it would create a legacy of Black beauty comparable in esteem to White beauty. Or by putting this Black woman in a Puritan collar, Jet thought it could somehow infuse African-Americanism into the American colonial period, making African-Americans more legitimate members of the country. I don't know if I'm taking this biomythography idea too far, but this is where my exploration has taken me.