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**JET Magazine Part I: The Elegant Lady**

**Assignment:** *Observe how the archetypes of the Black Macho and the Superwoman figure in the black media landscape of the day.*

During our “lab day” a couple of weeks ago, I stumbled across several images that could be perceived as reinforcements of the “superwoman” figure that we discussed in class. The one I remember most was an image of a woman carrying groceries and with their children. The only male in the picture was in the background and he was looking away and seemed completely unaware of the seemingly single mother. More surprising about the JET images, however, was the introduction of the “Elegant Lady”.

I think it fair to say that the figure of the “Elegant Lady” has historically been associated with the white woman and has been inaccessible to the black woman. JET’s inclusion of features such as *Beauty of the Week* and stories about *attractive* accomplished black female politicians, actresses, etc., attempt to bridge a gap between the mind and body of the black female. Granted, this elegance seems to be associated with or marketed by makeup so one could ask what it means that this elegance is only achievable after self modification; but I still think that there is something to be said for the fact that elegance is a possibility for black women when it did not used to be.

One particular issue (April 17th 1980: page 26-27) features a full page image of an “elegant woman” who is described as “charming, fascinating, [and] alluringly beautiful”—adjectives that were foreign if not forbidden in the “past”. Despite the progress of the Black Power Movement and Civil Rights initiatives in the 60’s and 70’s, I still think it rather progressive for JET to assist in the creation/portrayal of the black woman as elegant given both the historicity of her body during slavery and her struggle to claim her womanhood both during and after slavery. I also think it’s interesting that JET’s *Beauty of the Week* could be read an attempt to introduce the elegant lady to society as it generally features women who are beautiful but also have interests/accomplishments that go beyond the features of their bodies. At the same time, these women and their interest are listed presented right alongside their body measurements so I wonder how destructive those measurements are to the creation of the elegant black woman who is more than her body.

**JET Magazine Part II: Art or Politics?**

A question that this JET exploration has sparked is: Was/is JET magazine art or political? The 1954 February 11th publication of JET features the tagline “The Weekly Negro News Magazine”, a tagline that I did not see on many other covers, though when I search the Jet Archives on Google Books the tagline that that comes up is: “The weekly source of African American political and entertainment news”. When I talked to my mom about her experience with Jet she said that “it served a purpose in the Black community,” she said. “It was entertainment that enlightened blacks with stories of us. It wasn’t as serious as Ebony more lighthearted and small town oriented with public interest stories about everyday people.” All of this, along with the many articles I have read/images I have seen in the past couple of weeks makes me more inclined to think that JET was/is a political publication; (Political in that it is related to/addresses issues of constraint, social value, relationship to resources, etc.)

That being said, I was quite interested in an event that I learned about over the weekend called “Jet Exposé MMXII: African American Art Show”. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend but apparently, “Jet Exposé is an object-centered culturally informed evening of African-American art during Black History month held annually at Northampton Center for Arts”.

(Here is the link for the event page: <http://jetexpose.tumblr.com/>) Last year’s Expose: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3i4Bfly5_nw&feature=player_embedded>

<http://www.gazettenet.com/2011/02/21/jet-expose-2011-gala-look-african-american-arts-and-fashion> Unite (sponsor)-Black History Month: <http://vimeo.com/37379658>

JET magazine seems to be a good example of literature as a means of expression for groups that have been written out of or marginalized in history. So, I was surprised when I started to look for information about the exposé and found nothing related to JET magazine other than the advertisement for the event. The way this particular cover (Feb. 11th 1954) is used appeals to me more as art than it does as a political statement. The event itself was certainly art focused but I was surprised at the (supposed) lack of a political element. I have yet to figure out why the event is called Jet Exposé when JET did not seem to be a focus or a sponsor of the event. But the connection has sparked the following questions:

1. What does it mean to take JET out of a political context?
2. Is art inherently political? That is, does it/must it make a political statement?
3. One of the sponsors, “Unite Footwear”, hosted a fashion show featuring shoes and backpacks from their line. Firstly, I did not understand how relevant the show was to an art exposé seeing that it did not appear to have any deep cultural significance. I suppose it could qualify as art… Secondly, if you go the sponsor’s website (<http://www.unitefootwear.com/#blank>) you and look at the advertisements on the homepage you will notice an ad that says: Come and join UNITE for our 2nd Annual Get Fresh Like Frederick Douglass Sale! Celebrate black history month with 40% off everything. While I do not think that this advertisement is any “worse” than other advertisements that assist the general exploitation of historical figures to market merchandise, I do think it interesting that this group be associated with this art show/Jet Exposé.

I am still trying to find out more about their information about the event but these are my initial thoughts.