
Analysis Of “Diagnosis: Freedom: The Civil War, Emancipation, And Fin de Siècle Medical Research” By Harriet A. Washington

In Chapter Six, “Diagnosis: Freedom: The Civil War, Emancipation, and Fin de Siècle Medical Research” from her book *Medical Apartheid*, Harriet A. Washington analyzes how medical research and statistical data were manipulated back in the mid-1800s to the early 1900s to prove African American inferiority. Washington covers an instance where a Psychiatric doctor for the Alabama Insane Hospital back in the 1860s named Dr. Peter Bryce, believed that there was a common diagnosis for many of the black patients he had encountered, and he believed all or most of them suffered from the same psychological condition which impaired their intelligence and judgment that was needed to properly care for themselves. Dr. Bryce came to the conclusion that freedom was the diagnosis for these patients.

Washington not only uses historical data, but she also uses testimonies from others such as doctors to further prove her evidence. She also used historical documents such as the U.S. Census of 1840 to add additional information to support her thesis. Given the evidence that Washington has provided, it's clear that whites in the U.S. believed that blacks were insane and physically and mentally incapable of being free. It was also believed by whites that “Slavery was also thought necessary to protect whites, because freely roaming sick blacks were perceived as vectors of infectious disease.” Whites would've done everything possible to make blacks look worse off and to prevent the African American race from flourishing. This was proven in the making of the U.S. census of 1840, “The 1840 census indicated that the town of Worcester, Massachusetts, was the home of “133 colored lunatics and idiots,” but this was actually the number of white patients in Worcester’s State Hospital for the Insane.” This proved that whites would even go to the extent of lying in legal documents to degrade the African American race. In my opinion, Washington did a great job in detailing each event within the chapter. Washington touched on a great deal of major soft points that would make any reader think hard about the cruel mistreatment of African Americans during that time period and the physical and mental mistreatment African Americans still go through to this day. At this day in age, African Americans are still made out as “angry” or “dangerous” and although slavery is no longer legal, many African Americans are legally enslaved to the prison systems all across the nation. Whites believed during the slavery era that African Americans are not and will never be mentally or physically capable of being free because they feared that African Americans would become criminals or lash out on whites to seek revenge. Today, many African Americans are imprisoned for minor non-violent offenses and are locked away for most of their lives and labeled “angry” and “dangerous”.

Recently, Serena Williams, an African American professional tennis player who played in the U.S. Open Final had a dispute with the umpire during the match because he accused her of receiving coaching and other code violations. Soon after, Mark Knight an Australian cartoonist published a very controversial cartoon of Williams and many felt that it labeled her as an irate, hulking, bigmouthed black woman. The drawing shows Williams angry, pouting and stomping on her racket with a pacifier not too far from her, while the umpire is having a conversation with her opponent asking, “Can you just let her win?” Interestingly enough, her opponent who was a

Japanese and Haitian woman was depicted in the cartoon as a petite blond-haired white woman. Many aspects of this cartoon made people feel that the cartoonists' intentions were very racist and uncalled for. There has always been a stereotype that anytime an African American woman or man gets upset they are viewed as angry, irate, and dangerous. This stereotype relates back to how whites believed African Americans would behave if they were ever freed and how they view them now.

The point that Washington made is that freedom was not the diagnosis for the African Americans that were suffering from mental illnesses. Although, slavery and the harsh mental and physical mistreatment could cause permanent damage to one's brain and body that was not the diagnosis for those with mental disabilities. The correct diagnosis would have been proper treatment and healthcare for African Americans everywhere instead of being used as laboratory rats.

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