FEARING THE BLACK BODY

The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia

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Introduction

The Original Epidemic

“Actually Starving! A Prominent New York Man Dies in Sight of Food. Why Could This Be So!” This dramatic if slightly awkward headline appeared in the February 16, 1894, edition of the *New York Times*, atop an article that began, “Thousands of men and women in New York are starving, although they have plenty of money to buy the best food!”

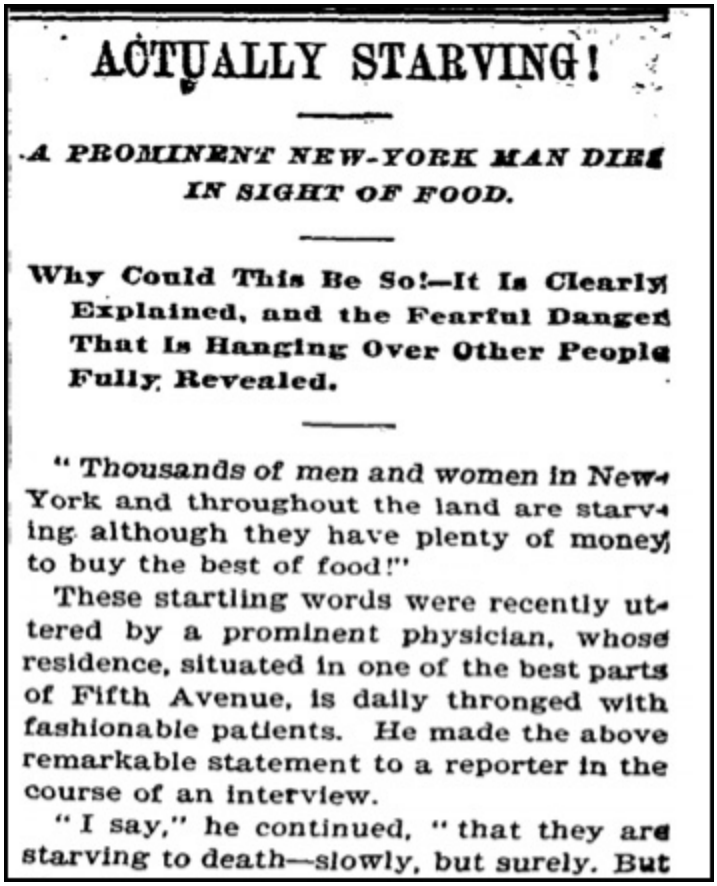
The unnamed author of the article went on to quote what was described as a “prominent physician” on the state of the American diet and physique. According to the doctor, the situation was dire. “I say … that they are starving to death—slowly, but surely,” he stated, adding that although many of those afflicted were members of the middle and upper classes, they nevertheless looked “emaciated [and] appear to be consumptives.”[1]

This article underscored the deep anxiety felt by many in the nineteenth-century regarding the state of the American physique. Doctors in particular agonized over what they described as the “pale, thin, and puny” forms that were apparently proliferating around the country. Several described with horror the “narrow chests, and lank limbs, and flabby muscles, and tottering steps [that] meet us at every corner.”[2] Thinness, it seems, was nothing short of an epidemic.

If in those years slenderness was considered a general American failing, the paleness, leanness, and malnutrition of women was particularly troubling. Prompted by the fragile state of their bodies,

esteemed doctors wrote disquieting manifestos on the question of their frailty.

The writings of the prolific and well-regarded New Englander Dr. William Alcott, a distant relative of the novelist Louisa May Alcott, were typical. In his 1855 treatise *The Young Woman's Book of Health*, Alcott lamented the reality that "our children, females among the rest, are trained by a community which is thus destitute of a true appetite."[3] He warned Americans to take heed of what he described as the "whole generation of women trained as a whole to tenderness, delicacy, nervousness, feebleness of muscle [and] want of appetite."[4] Being "tall, slender and delicate," he claimed, did not prepare a young woman for the vicissitudes of life.[5]



ACTUALLY STARVING!

A PROMINENT NEW-YORK MAN DIES IN SIGHT OF FOOD.

Why Could This Be So!—It Is Clearly Explained, and the Fearful Danger That Is Hanging Over Other People Fully Revealed.

"Thousands of men and women in New-York and throughout the land are starving although they have plenty of money to buy the best of food!"

These startling words were recently uttered by a prominent physician, whose residence, situated in one of the best parts of Fifth Avenue, is daily thronged with fashionable patients. He made the above remarkable statement to a reporter in the course of an interview.

"I say," he continued, "that they are starving to death—slowly, but surely. But

Figure I.1. "Actually Starving," *New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1894.

Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, the famed Seventh-day Adventist already known for his sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan, but not yet known as a purveyor of breakfast cereals, concluded in his *Ladies' Guide in Health and Disease*, "Particularly in this country, and especially in the cities and towns, girls as a rule are found to be decidedly lacking in physical development."[6] What the fair sex in America needed, Kellogg contended, was a nutritional revolution because their poor eating habits produced bodies that were "scrawny" and "waspish."[7]

It was more than a simple question of health or even aesthetics. The slenderness of American girls was regarded as nothing less than a threat to the nation. An 1888 article from the *Washington Post* that appeared under the headline "Are Girls Growing Smaller?" exclaimed, "The girl of the period ranges from 140 pounds down in some cases to 80 pounds or less.… In England and Germany the figures are higher.… Eighty pounds of femininity is of course, not much." And, the writer added, "our women will go on getting thinner and thinner until they disappear. It has happened in Boston already. The American stock … can't hold its own against the big-boned strong-built foreigner. The Irish have crowded the Yankee out of New England."[8]

The weight of American women represented, to many, a national black eye. But was it truly the case, as was often suggested, that these women were simply nutritionally uninformed? Given the right information, would they gain in flesh and, by proxy, in health, strength, and beauty?

The evidence suggests otherwise. Many well-to-do women it seems were trying to be slender at a moment when doctors routinely attacked slenderness as unhealthy.[9] The historian Adele Clarke noted that women of the fashionable classes were "wasting in style."[10] The svelte style, being contrary to conventional medical wisdom, had clearly been motivated by other factors.

Indeed, while many considered thinness an American shortcoming, for the adherents of the style, slenderness served as a marker of moral, racial, and national superiority. This attitude is on full dsiplay in an 1896 article from *Harper's Bazaar* titled "Are Our

Women Scrawny?" It begins with a reflection on the slenderness of American women: "American women in general are still thought to be sallow and scrawny." The article's anonymous author contests this assertion, claiming that while poorer women may be malnourished, few women of the privileged classes are so slim as to look peaked, as may have been the case with their foremothers. Today, the author asserts, American women have a "wholesome glow in their cheek" and a bit more flesh on their bones, both of which are a testament to the "wholly unmeasured success" of the American experiment.[11]

Yet, while praising a new and laudable "roundness" to the figure of the modern girl, the author nevertheless betrays a preference for traditional American slenderness. Of the shifting outlines of the nation's women, the author wrote, "One cannot help noticing in every metropolitan assembly that the feminine litheness and flexibility for which the republic has been famous is already on the wane, and that the opposite extreme is menacing."[12]

HARPER'S BAZAR

WINTER GOWNS AND HATS.

CADET-BLUE cloth is the material of the gown Fig. 1, which is trimmed with black velvet ribbon. The silk-faced bodice, somewhat longer than waists have been made, is sloped to a point at the front, and forms a short gobet basque at the back. The velvet ribbon is arranged in two horizontal groups of three rows on waist and skirt, crossed by two perpendicular groups that are made to appear continuous on the front of the waist and skirt. The sleeves are close, with short draped puffs. The standing collar is covered with passementerie, and two designs trim the front of the waist. Neck and wrists are edged with narrow Persian bands.

The costume Fig. 2 is made of brown whipcord canvas, part of which is velvet-striped and part plain. The striped material is used for the skirt, while the waist is a short bolero of the plain goods over a velvet vest and girdle. The jacket has a large angular revers collar of brown fox, and removable cuffs to match.

The round hat shown in Fig. 1 has a black chenille crown, and a shirred and upturned brim of soft black felt edged with chenille. Clusters of short black ostrich tips trim the sides of the hat, with a bird-of-paradise aigrette added on the left, and a large white peggy between them at the front. Chiffon rosettes are placed against the upturned sides of the brim. The less showy white hat is composed of a thick ruche of black chiffon, made fuller still by shirred frills at the edges.

A small draped toque of emerald-green velvet is finished with a twist and knots of black moiré ribbon. The ribbon forms small rustic bows at the right side and back, and some high-standing loops propped with wire on the left side.

Fig. 1.—Cheviot and Felt Hat, and Chiffon Tuck in Cut. Fig. 2.—Velvet Toque.

Figs. 3 and 4.—Back Views of Gowns Figs. 1 and 2.

ARE OUR WOMEN SCRAWNY?

A MERICAN women in general are still thought to be sallow and scrawny, and on this account by European though they have not been so for many, many years. Europeans should know better, for tens of thousands of American women go abroad annually (the number steadily and rapidly increases), and they are certainly

Figure I.2. “Are Our Women Scrawny?,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, Nov. 1896.

That fatness is described as “menacing” is telling. The author provides a sense of the foreboding associated with excess weight. Not only does stoutness supposedly sabotage the nation’s aesthetic identity, it also evokes the poor eating habits and immorality of the European elite. Worse still, extreme or “gross” corpulence slides into an association with primitive Africans. The author spells this out for the reader: “Stoutness, corpulence, and surplusage of flesh” are never desirable “except among African savages.”[13]

This raises several questions. First, what led some well-to-do Americans to believe that slenderness, especially among women,

was both aesthetically preferable and a sign of national identity? How did fatness become a sign of immorality? How did fatness become linked to "Africanity" or blackness? And finally, if the medical establishment just over a century ago feared the meagerness of the physiques of (elite white) women, when and how did they come to view fatness, especially among black women, as the greater threat to public health, as they would in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries with the "obesity epidemic"?

In this book, I examine the history and legacy of the preference for slimness and aversion to fatness, with attention to their racial, gender, class, and medical contours. This book enters a decades-long conversation about the preference for slenderness and the phobia about fatness in the United States. Much of this research describes the emphasis on slenderness for "women."[14] But while most authors show that an aversion to fatness and a preference for slenderness has been most evident among middle- and upper-class white women, few have addressed the role of race and class status in the development of these dispositions.

Relatedly, scholars have shown that the fear of fatness commonly targets low-income women of color, and especially black women.[15] These and other scholars, including Sander Gilman, Jennifer Morgan, and Janell Hobson, have shown that black women's bodies have long been treated as being in "excess."[16] Still, few have attempted to explain how, historically, fatness became linked to blackness. Amy Farrell's 2011 book *Fat Shame* stands out in that it underscores the entwined racial past of fat stigma and the thin ideal. The book does not explore, however, how these racial connotations developed, nor does it explain the centrality of anti-blackness within them.

We also learn little about the role of morality in much of the existing literature. R. Marie Griffith's landmark 2004 text *Born Again Bodies: Flesh and Spirit in American Christianity* shines in this respect, offering a compellingly deep dive into the admonitions against gluttony and fatness in Christianity. Nevertheless, though it reveals that during the nineteenth century the fit body was used to buttress claims of racial and ethnic superiority, questions remain

about how these relationships developed and were popularized within the American mainstream.

This work departs from much of the existing scholarship in that it provides a historiography of the development of pro-thin, anti-fat biases. That is, while several studies have explored the historical antecedents of our contemporary size biases, none, to my knowledge, have endeavored a historical analysis that examines the key figures involved in their propagation, as well as the sociocultural and political factors contributing to their reinforcement. This book seeks to address this gap as possibly the first historical study of fat phobia and thin fetishism in the West, with an emphasis on the intertwined racial, gender, and moral issues involved in their advancement.

I argue that two critical historical developments contributed to a fetish for svelteness and a phobia about fatness: the rise of the transatlantic slave trade and the spread of Protestantism. Racial scientific rhetoric about slavery linked fatness to “greedy” Africans. And religious discourse suggested that overeating was ungodly.

These rationales for anti-fat bias had been circulating relatively independently in parts of western Europe for more than two centuries. Not until the early nineteenth century in the United States, in the context of slavery, religious revivals, and the massive immigration of persons deemed “part-Africanoid,” did these notions come together under a coherent ideology. In the United States, fatness became stigmatized as both black and sinful. And by the early twentieth century, slenderness was increasingly promoted in the popular media as the correct embodiment for white Anglo-Saxon Protestant women. Not until after these associations were already in place did the medical establishment begin its concerted effort to combat “excess” fat tissue as a major public health initiative. In this way, the phobia about fatness and the preference for thinness have not, principally or historically, been about health. Instead, they have been one way the body has been used to craft and legitimate race, sex, and class hierarchies.

These findings further reveal that the slender ideal and fat phobia are not distinct developments—as they are often treated in the

literature. The fear of the imagined “fat black woman” was created by racial and religious ideologies that have been used to both degrade black women *and* discipline white women. This is critical, since most analyses of race and aesthetics describe the experiences of either black people (and other people of color) or white people. This book reveals race to be a double agent. It entails the synchronized repression of “savage” blackness and the generation of disciplined whiteness. The discourse of fatness as “coarse,” “immoral,” and “black” worked to denigrate black women, and it concomitantly became the impetus for the promulgation of slender figures as the proper form of embodiment for elite white Christian women.

For my analysis, I draw on the work of two eminent social theorists, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. According to Bourdieu, elites are constantly working to differentiate themselves from the lower classes. In so doing, they often distinguish themselves by cultivating tastes, diets, and physical appearances that are in opposition to those of the subordinated groups. These “social distinctions” serve to naturalize and normalize social hierarchies.[17]

Building on this work, I show how racial discourse was deployed by elite Europeans and white Americans to create social distinctions between themselves and so-called greedy and fat racial Others. Black people, as well as so-called degraded or hybrid whites (e.g., Celtic Irish, southern Italians, Russians), were primary targets of these arguments. Elite white people also used Protestant discourse to claim a moral superiority over these same poor, immigrant, and racial Others. I rely on the work of gender scholars to show that since women have long been evaluated based largely on their physical appearance, racial-moral social distinctions primarily targeted the women in each racial/ethnic group.[18]

If Bourdieu can help us understand the racial-moral dimension of the spread of fat aversion and thin preoccupation, Michel Foucault gives us insight into the centrality of medicine in the propagation of these dispositions. According to Foucault, medicine intervenes as a key institution of the twentieth century, providing information on “how to live” for health and longevity. Its dictates inform what Foucault

calls the “biopolitics” of health management, which include disciplinary practices that one must perform to be considered a healthy and thereby good citizen. However, the medical disciplinary regime has not been objectively applied to all persons. Instead, it is treated as an imperative for dominant groups, to the exclusion of poor, racially Othered groups. This approach helps to maintain social and in many instances specifically racialized and gendered hierarchies.[19]

* * *

Researching the aesthetic, moral, and racial underpinnings of the American fear of fat required an eclectic approach. I began by reading the landmark texts by historians and feminist scholars on the history of fat phobia and the slender ideal.[20] In doing so, I discovered three points of agreement. First, there was a general consensus among historians and prominent feminist scholars that the fear of fat and glorification of thinness first gained widespread appeal in the United States. Second, these attitudes had more impact on elite and white women than on men, working-class persons, or people of color. Third, little is known about the factors contributing to the development of these attitudes.

In an effort to discover what led to the consolidation of these attitudes around the turn of the twentieth century, I used two comparative historical methods: process tracing and historical narrative. In process tracing, I used multiple sources of data to shed light on key individuals and events contributing to the growing anti-fat, pro-thin biases in the West. I used historical narrative to weave a tapestry illustrating the impact and interrelationship of these events.

I began with the Renaissance, a period in which, as sociologists and historians have shown, voluptuous physiques were in vogue throughout much of the Western world.[21] I traced developments in art and philosophy from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment in Europe, the period in which, scholars have shown, svelte aristocratic women and courtiers were commonly depicted by renowned artists and thinkers. I studied the writings of artists and philosophers in an

effort to describe the sociohistorical and intellectual context for the association of race, weight, and beauty between the early fifteenth and late eighteenth centuries.

Questions concerning the purported racial origin of fatness appeared in many philosophical treatises, as did questions about its (im)morality. Therefore, I returned to explorations of the body and the oral appetite in the ascendant branch of Christianity: Protestantism. I examined key texts by prominent Protestant proselytizers, especially those who made public pronouncements against overfeeding and fatness.

To weave a historical narrative of these many related developments in art, philosophy, and religion, I needed to understand how they were being transmitted to the public. The eighteenth century marked the rise of newspapers and magazines in Europe, and so I examined influential early publications, such as *The Spectator*, to understand how ideas in high art and philosophy about body size, race, attractiveness, and morality were represented.

Scholars have identified the United States as the country in which the pro-thin, anti-fat bias was gaining strength among elite, morally upright white Americans (especially women) by the nineteenth century and crystallized into a mainstream position by the early twentieth century. Therefore, I also examined American magazines and newspapers published between 1830 and 1920, among them *Cosmopolitan* (originally a magazine designed to appeal to families), the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, to look for evidence of these connections.

Finally, I discovered that many of the popular periodicals cited concerns about health and illness purportedly associated with corpulence. By the late nineteenth century, these publications relied increasingly on doctors' advice to make their claims. Therefore, I researched the depictions of overweight and obesity in the medical literature from 1880 to 1930. I chose materials that appeared in authoritative books or medical journals, such as the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*), or works written by recognized medical authorities.[22]

This book has three parts. Part 1, “The Beauty of the Robust,” offers a retrospective view of the exaltation of plump feminine physiques that existed throughout much of Western history. I also note signs of a shift in the seventeenth century as European men of learning began to degrade fatness as evidence of insipidity. In chapter 1, “Being Venus,” I describe Western aesthetic ideals of the sixteenth century and show that key artists and philosophers during the High Renaissance described “plump” and “proportionate” women as beautiful, following Christian and neoclassical conventions of beauty. I argue that contact with African women during the rise of the slave trade did not change these standards. Moreover, I show that black women were incorporated into the High Renaissance rhetoric and imagery of beauty as equally voluptuous, if socially inferior, counterparts to European women. In chapter 2, “Plump Women and Thin, Fine Men,” I describe the rise of the robust “snow-white” female body as desirable. I also show that the fat male body became a sign of poor moral character and mental incapacity. That is, alongside the exaltation of fat and curvy (white) women, fat men were lambasted among intellectuals as being of “poor constitution.” English philosophers claimed that a fat male body was indicative of a “dull mind.” Thus, a philosopher’s slim ideal was born.

Part 2, “Race, Weight, God, and Country,” describes how body size became a sign of race, morality, and national identity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In chapter 3, “The Rise of the Big Black Woman,” I detail how philosophers and race scientists made the case for intellectual and physical differences between whites and the “colored races.” In this period we see some of the earliest examples of learned men denigrating a so-called “black” fatness. In chapter 4, “Birth of the Ascetic Aesthetic,” I focus on the developing relationship between Protestant Christian identity and self-abnegation. I show that abstemiousness in England during the eighteenth century laid the groundwork for moralizing surrounding the oral appetites that would be seen in subsequent eras, particularly in the United States. I also show that some devout Protestants viewed fatness—the purported evidence of intemperate eating—as immoral. Slenderness, by contrast, was viewed as closer to

godliness. In chapter 5, “American Beauty: The Reign of the Slender Aesthetic,” I show that American Anglo-Saxon women adopted the ideals surrounding eating and embodiment that were popularized in eighteenth-century England. In the context of religious health reform movements and the massive immigration of Irish racial Others, Anglo-Saxon women used strict diets and slimness to convey religious enlightenment and racial uplift. In chapter 6, “Thinness as American Exceptionalism,” I reveal how the presence of the next wave of immigrants—southern and eastern Europeans—contributed to the mainstream consolidation of the aesthetic of slenderness. Following the trail of race science, I show that a new eugenic discourse of racial amalgamation among northern and western Europeans circulated widely in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This rhetoric promoted the desirability of women from these racial groups. It also intimated that the American melting pot created exceptional svelte beauties drawn from these superior races.

Part 3, “Doctors Weigh In,” examines how the American medical establishment viewed fatness and thinness from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries. In chapter 7, “Good Health to Uplift the Race,” I profile the life and works of the esteemed Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. I show that he, like many medical men of his day, regarded poor diet and excessive slimness, especially among elite American women, as a threat to the nation. Kellogg and others hoped to encourage women to gain weight to demonstrate the vigor of the nation. In chapter 8, “Fat, Revisited,” I explain the growth of anti-fat attitudes in the medical field. Due to the rise of actuarial tables that identified excess weight as a health risk, doctors became increasingly concerned about overweight. While the transition was slow at first, the standardization of “normal weight” and an intensified concern about “obesity,” especially among women, were firmly established within the mainstream of medical science by the turn of the twenty-first century. In the book’s epilogue, “The Obesity Epidemic,” I highlight the swing from one epidemic, that of the too-thin American woman, to the other, that of the too-fat American woman, in the span of a century. And I underscore the role that race,

aesthetics, morality, and medicine continue to play in the so-called obesity epidemic.

3

The Rise of the Big Black Woman

François Bernier was the salt of the earth. His parents were tillers of the soil in a small farming town in northwestern France. From these humble origins, he would go on to make a significant contribution to Western intellectual history. He would be the first person in the world to create a system of human classification based on “race.”

The field of what is today known as “race science” took off during the long eighteenth century, a period that encompasses the High Enlightenment and the peak of the transatlantic slave trade.[1] France and England were cultural and colonial powerhouses during the era. Learned men from these two nations generated a significant portion of the racial scientific theories.

Though Bernier was first to market, scholars have typically overlooked or diminished the significance of his racial theories. But Bernier’s intervention in the field of race science was consequential. His work reveals the centrality of concerns about feminine aesthetics to race-making projects since their inception. That is, integral to Bernier’s and many subsequent racial classification systems was the attempt to pin down fundamental physical differences between Europeans and non-Europeans, with an intense focus on the women in various categories. These differences were to serve as proof of European superiority. In this way, whereas women’s physicality had been largely outside the social distinctions that were made between Europeans and Africans in the Renaissance, by the eighteenth century it was treated as foundational to them. The racialized female

body became legible, a form of "text"[2] from which racial superiority and inferiority were read.

Bernier was born in 1625 in a small town in Anjou, France. Upon the death of his parents he came under the guardianship of his uncle, a priest.[3] At the age of fifteen, he moved to Paris to attend the Collège de Clermont, and it was there that this son of a farmer encountered the high gloss of the French elite, inhabiting the same adolescent social world as the celebrated French playwright Molière. At the Collège, Bernier became most closely acquainted with the notorious opponent of Descartes, the priest and philosopher Pierre Gassendi.[4] In the throbbing Parisian metropolis, Bernier trained under Gassendi in philosophy and physiology. Together, the two traveled to the south of France, where Bernier earned a medical degree from the University of Montpellier in just three months. The degree, however, carried the somewhat suspect stipulation that his fast-tracked medical knowledge was not to be exercised in the French commonwealth.

Bernier then set out for different pastures. In late 1658, by then in his early thirties, he landed in India, where he would remain for the next twelve years, serving as the private physician first for Prince Dara Shikoh and then for Dara's brother and rival for the throne, Aurangzeb. The intimate details of these events and his role as a foreign witness are described in Bernier's book *Travels in the Mogul Empire.*[5] His travelogue mirrors the narratives written by earlier Europeans on their treks beyond the continent. What distinguished Bernier's account, however, was that he chose not just to describe men and women from various locales in India but to sort them based on their skin color. According to Bernier, for example, "To be a Mogol it is enough that a foreigner have a white face and profess Mahometanism." This group was compared to the Franguis, or white Christians from Europe, and to the Indous, "whose complexion is brown."[6]

Bernier did not see himself as having invented these distinctions. In fact, he imagines himself an astute interpreter of existing social categories in India, in which he sees skin color as integral. In a letter to Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Louis XIV's finance minister, he marvels at

the supposed Indian and Mogul fixation on biological purity and color, using the term “race” to mark distinctions between the various subgroups.[7]

Bernier had not invented the term “race,” which had been in use since the Middle Ages.[8] But he was using it in a decidedly different fashion from those who came before. Bernier used the word to designate the clusters of people he encountered who varied by religion, region, and especially hue. The centrality of skin color in his early conception of race signaled a divergence from the ideas of theorists who preceded him. Still, in terms of Bernier’s racial theorizing, this was only the beginning.

In the 1670s Bernier left India and returned to Paris, finding himself in a city embroiled in debates and demonstrations about one of the most pressing issues of his day: slavery. France had entered the transatlantic slave trade nearly a century after England, due in large part to religious infighting between the Catholic establishment and the Protestant Huguenots. The French slave trade was formally authorized by the monarchy in 1648. In 1664 Louis XIV granted Jean-Baptiste Colbert, along with his French West India Company, the sole rights to the transport of slaves from Africa to the French colonies in the Americas.[9]

The French slave trade was only a few years old by the time Bernier returned to his homeland, and it was experiencing considerable growing pains. Since 1315, the country had maintained what was known as a Freedom Principle, which stipulated that no person could be held as a forced laborer on French soil. This decree, however, said nothing about the practice of slavery in the French colonies, which the monarchy willingly allowed. The king thus found himself in the dubious position of denouncing slavery in the kingdom while issuing royal decrees sanctioning its practice in his colonies. The Janus-faced nature of these polices proved untenable. By the late seventeenth century, a smattering of African slaves were already making their way to French shores, sometimes as servants to colonial administrators, other times as stowaways. Many petitioned for their freedom the instant they set foot in the country. The king’s position was to set free slaves seeking freedom within the country

throughout the seventeenth century. This practice collided with the 1685 royal decree known as the Code Noir (Black Code), a law that regulated slavery in the colonies and served as a resounding renewal of colonial policies that condemned Africans to a lifetime of servitude. This inevitably led to ever more Africans seeking a taste of the vaunted but elusive French freedom that was being denied them in the overseas territories.[10]

Bernier was well aware of the tenuous political situation that slavery posed. He had a personal relationship with Colbert. Moreover, since his return to Paris, Bernier had become a member of Madame de la Sablière's salon, which was peopled with Louis XIV's courtiers and other nobles. One of the topics commonly up for debate was whether some groups of mankind were a different species than Europeans and thus natural slaves.[11] This was not the first time Bernier would have encountered the question of whether "natural slaves" existed. These claims can be traced to the origin story crafted by Isaac la Peyrère, who in the 1650s conjectured that Gentiles were pre-Adamites, born before and somehow superior to the Jews, who descended from the biblical Adam. Peyrère's theory was deemed heretical by many in the 1650s, but in the context of the rising slave trade and the profits it generated, many Frenchmen were to soften on this position.

Scholars disagree as to whether Bernier himself was a polygenist, a believer that the human races are of different origins.[12] But what is evident is that his travels made him appear to others on the intellectual circuit as an expert on the topic of "alien" peoples. These attitudes, along with Bernier's studies in physiology, ignited an idea. He resolved to develop his own theory of humanity, one that could encompass and explain the tremendous biodiversity he had encountered on his travels. And in line with his medical training, his theory would be the first to achieve this goal by identifying fundamental *physiological* differences among swatches of humankind.

In 1684 Bernier sketched out his theory in a letter to Madame de la Sablière that bore the rather grand title "A New Division of the Earth." In this three-page manifesto, he explained his rationale for

developing this new model of humankind: “Hitherto, geographers have divided the Earth only into different countries or regions therein; but my own observations … have given me the idea of dividing it another way.”[13] The problem with the traditional, geographic dissection of the globe, he concluded, was that it failed to acknowledge the tremendous physical distinctions found between peoples living in diverse parts of the world. In Bernier’s estimation, “Men are almost all distinct from one another as far as the external form of their bodies is concerned, especially their faces, according to the different areas of the world they live in.”[14] And while globe-trotting men such as himself could “often distinguish unerringly one nation from another,” he nevertheless found that common unities of physical form across national boundaries warranted a new system for classifying mankind, a system he called “Types of Race.”[15]

As noted, Bernier had not coined the term “race.” But with his “New Division of the Earth,” he had fundamentally changed what it meant. In his reimagination of the term, race did not apply only to the lowly “Jewish” or “Moorish” subjects of the crown or to the high-borns within the kingdom. Rather, all of the world’s peoples had a race, one that could be identified both by where they lived and their external physical features.

Curiously, despite Bernier’s certainty that everyone had a physically identifiable race, he nonetheless wavered on how many races there were in all, stating that there were “four or five.”[16] The first race included people from three different continents, comprising “the whole of Europe in general except for part of Muscovy, … Africa, namely that between the kingdoms of Fez and Morocco, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, … and likewise a large part of Asia.”[17] Into the second race he placed nearly the entire continent of Africa, excluding the northern coastal areas already ascribed to the first race.

The third race, covering the nations of China, Japan, and much of east Asia, also included “Usbekistan [*sic*], … a small part of Muscovy, the little Tartars, and the Turkomans.”[18] In the fourth race, standing conspicuously alone, were the Lapps, or the indigenous people of Scandinavia. The almost-fifth race would have been

reserved for the indigenous people of the Americas. But upon further consideration, he placed them too into the first type.[19]

Skin color was the major consideration used to sort people into racial groups. In Bernier's view, the first race had "white" or sun-tinged "olive skin." By contrast, black Africans, the so-called second race, had black skin that was the result of their "sperm and blood."[20] This simple one-liner, stated almost as if in passing, was of critical importance. Madame de la Sablière, hostess of his salon, had been an active participant in debates about the role of men's semen and women's eggs in the physical features of their offspring.[21] She therefore would likely have been invested in questions about the role of sperm in physical appearance. More to the point, this statement revealed Bernier's position on the biological basis of the physical distinctions among the so-called races. While it is unclear whether he was a proponent of the polygenetic argument, he nevertheless believed that white people were innately and physiologically distinct from black people. This fundamental biological divergence was, he suggested, the basis of the observed external physical differences.[22]

In his modest treatise, Bernier did not come out in favor of African chattel slavery. Yet, in the context of debates about the appropriateness of enslaving black persons, his assertion that white skin placed one in a biologically distinct "first race" while black skin placed a person in a "second race" carried the connotation of a social ladder of humanity with whites justifiably at the top. These ideas were to be read and expanded upon by subsequent scientists and philosophers, several of whom were deeply invested in maintaining or extending the slave trade.

If Bernier created racial categories for the express purpose of segregating groups of humanity based on their physical appearance, an important part of his project was to detail the particular aesthetic charms (or lack thereof) of the women of each race. Previous scholars have dismissed this aspect of Bernier's text as some form of bizarre fluff, evidence of his prurient fascination with women's looks.[23] But Bernier was building on a practice of learned men waxing intellectual about women's beauty that had existed since the Renaissance. Moreover, the section on female charms takes up

nearly half of Bernier's brief manifesto. Under the circumstances, Bernier's estimation of women was not off-color, nor was it novel.[24] It simply used a new language, that of "race," to make judgments about feminine loveliness.

Bernier entered the discussion about race-specific female attractiveness with a note about the so-called Hottentot.[25] "Hottentot" was a derogatory name created by Dutch settlers. In theory, it applied to the Khoikhoi living in the area encompassing the Cape of Good Hope and extending to Cape Town in South Africa. In practice, however, it was often applied to all Khoisan, meaning both the Khoikhoi and the Bushmen of South Africa.[26] "Blacks of the Cape of Good Hope," Bernier wrote, "seem to constitute a different type from those of the rest of Africa. They are usually smaller, thinner, with uglier faces."[27] His estimation of the Hottentot is noticeably similar to the common view of Africans in England and Holland during the period as "little, low, and foul." Bernier was, in fact, attuned to existing stereotypes of the Hottentot, which he exposes by stating, "Some Dutchmen say they speak Turkey-Cock."[28]

What distinguished Bernier from the Dutch and English, however, was his assessment that the small, thin, and unappealing Hottentot were an aberration among blacks, a "different type," albeit relegated to the same race. The Hottentot, in his view, may have been short, meager, and unattractive, but this said nothing of the appearance of blacks generally, and especially black women. On the contrary, Bernier wrote, he had encountered black women who were among the most beautiful in the world:

> What I have observed as regards the beauty of women is no less differentiated. Certainly, there are lovely ones, ugly ones to be found everywhere. I have seen some real beauties in Egypt, which put me in mind of the fair and famed Cleopatra. Among the Blacks of Africa I have also seen some very beautiful women who did not have thick lips and snub noses. I have encountered seven or eight in various places who were of such an astonishing beauty that they put in the shade the Venus of the Palazzo Farnese in Rome—with aquiline nose, small mouth, coral lips, ivory teeth, large bright eyes, gentle features and a bosom and everything else of utter perfection. At Moka, I saw several of them completely naked, waiting to be sold, and I can tell you, there could be nothing lovelier in the world to see.[29]

Bernier affirms racial differences in beauty by claiming that, like physical features in general, “the beauty of women is no less differentiated.”[30] Nevertheless, he certifies black women’s attractiveness by using the existing standard for white women: “aquiline nose, small mouth, coral lips, ivory teeth, large bright eyes, gentle features.”[31] In this way, the black women who were good-looking could lay claim to that title only because of their similarity to the neoclassical ideal of Venus. Indeed, these women appear to be beating the Venus at her own game. Although Bernier was influenced by the trail of black denigration left by the Dutch and the English, he did not let their perspective of black women contradict what he had seen with his own eyes.

His discussion of the attractiveness of (some) black women was only the starting point of his extended treatment of racially specific enticements. Bernier also included sections on the women he encountered in India, Turkey, and Persia. His work reveals the centrality of concerns about aesthetics, especially women’s appearance, in the articulation of racial theories. That is, to the extent that “sperm and blood” determined race and appearance, beautiful women could serve as proof of a certain type of inherent racial superiority, or inferiority.

The long-term impact of Bernier’s theories has been debated.[32] But as a progenitor of racial theories, Bernier was often cited by subsequent race theorists. Later race theorists would routinely use race as a justification for the colonial condition, and as a way to determine the attractiveness of women around the world. In the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the context of the Enlightenment and the peak of the slave trade, the science of race-making took flight. Then, as at its inception, philosophers underscored the purported racial distinctions in facial features, body type, and attractiveness between black women and white women.

Bernier’s notion of race had touched a nerve. His letter to Madame de la Sablière was eventually published in the esteemed *Journal des Scavans* for the broader scientific community to mull over. Still, the evidence of its impact was not to be witnessed for another sixty years. As it turned out, many French scientists and

philosophers at the time of his writing were preoccupied with either toeing the intellectual line or fleeing the country in the face of renewed religious persecution.

* * *

A variety of freedoms were restricted by Louis XIV in the 1680s. The king had long been begrudging at best when it came to the rights of Protestants. But in the watershed year of 1685, alongside the Code Noir, the king also issued the Edict of Fontainebleau. This order unraveled the Edict of Nantes, which had offered Protestant Huguenots a modicum of freedom in a Catholic nation, thereby effectively outlawing Protestantism in the territory. At the outset, rather than fight another bloody religious war, many Protestants chose to flee, repairing to various parts of England, the Dutch Republic, and Prussia.[33] But by the turn of the eighteenth century, many of the remaining Protestants, calling themselves the Camisards, took up arms in a new war. The reinvigorated religious battle competed with the war of Spanish succession for the king's attention and the crown's resources until Louis XIV's death in 1715.

The king's death had a ripple effect, triggering several important developments that would allow the national intelligentsia to return to honing their ideas of race. For one, Louis XIV's policies had prevented widespread slavery in the French territories. His passing gave functionaries an opportunity to push for new legislation enabling slave owners to safely travel to their homeland with their human assets in tow, without fear of these assets being liberated on arrival.

The Edict of October, issued in 1716, intended to quell these fears by introducing new regulations that would allow slave holders to keep their slaves as long as the slaves were registered at the courthouse; unregistered slaves could be set free. Louis XV himself issued the next key piece of legislation, the Declaration of 1738, stipulating that unregistered slaves, rather than being freed, would be seized and sent back to the colonies, where they would presumably find themselves slaves to a new master.[34] Importantly,

these codes were to be specifically applied to *nègres*, or African slaves. This meant that persons coming before the court demanding their freedom could be set free if they could successfully prove that they were not African. Such “proof” was generally found in their physical traits, those having been elaborated by Bernier and a host of non-French European authors since the fifteenth century. Beginning in the 1740s, the intensely controversial nature of these laws and their requisite practice prompted a variety of intellectuals to revisit the question of potential fundamental differences within humankind.

In addition, the late king’s death created the space for intellectual liberty that would allow the Enlightenment to flourish in France. The Enlightenment was a European intellectual movement that had actually begun in the mid-seventeenth century. Kindled by Descartes’s 1637 *Discourse on Method* and its infamous postulate, “I think, therefore I am,” a whole new era of inquiry developed in which reason was regarded as the primary source and arbiter of knowledge. These new adventures in what was called “rationalism” had been taking place largely outside the French commonwealth—in England, Scotland, and the Dutch Republic—since, in Descartes’s home country, his ideas been deemed heretical by the monarchy. The death of Louis XIV loosened the monarchy’s stranglehold on the dissemination of nontraditional ideas, officially launching the French Age of Reason. It was within this cultural and political environment that many of the most renowned thinkers of the French Enlightenment felt compelled to return their attention to the judiciously applied “fundamental differences” that exist within humanity. And quite promptly, Enlightenment luminaries like Georges-Louis Leclerc picked up where Bernier had left off.

* * *

Georges-Louis Leclerc was a prodigal son. His father was the lord of Buffon, a small township in eastern France. Born into a family of landed wealth, the teenage Georges-Louis bounced around colleges at his leisure before arriving in Angers in 1728. Shortly thereafter, his

middling academic achievements were brought to an abrupt halt when, having been challenged to and subsequently losing a duel, he was forced to flee the city. Leclerc landed first in Nantes. From there, he set off for Italy and England with his comrade, a comparably well-off young English duke. Three years later, when Leclerc's mother died, he returned to take control of the family estate in Buffon, claiming his title, Comte de Buffon.

Back in his home country, he finally settled into a habit of serious intellectual inquiry. Within a few years, he had translated several key scientific works, including one by Sir Isaac Newton. In 1739 he was offered the privilege of serving as the keeper of the Jardin du Roi, or royal botanical garden in Paris, where he was assigned the task of cataloguing the royal holdings in natural history.[35] This activity culminated in Buffon's most significant work, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (*Natural History: General and Particular*), published in 1749.[36]

Buffon devoted a seminal chapter of the book, titled "Of the Varieties in the Human Species," to inquiries into the origin of presumed "natural" difference between the diverse peoples populating the earth. A staunch believer in the theory that all races descended from a common source, Buffon nevertheless believed in racial differences. He declared that individuals within a species who were capable of procreating, and whose offspring shared a set of traits that mirrored those of their progenitors, constituted members of a "race."[37] Echoing Bernier, Buffon avowed that the critical traits marking a race were physical, repeating the late doctor's point that "the first and most remarkable [difference] is the colour."[38]

After skin color, according to Buffon, the size and shape of the body were the next most important markers of physical distinction between the races. He had been aware of the stereotype of Africans as being "black, meager … and very small," which he attributed to the English seafarer Sir Francis Drake.[39] This stereotype, he claimed, was inaccurate. He countered by noting that there was considerable diversity among the peoples of Africa and that not all of them were diminutive in size. In Buffon's assessment, some Africans were meager and small, but they were not black Africans. Moors, he

claimed, were “short, meagre, of a disagreeable aspect, but ingenious and subtle.” Like Bernier, he claimed that they belong “to the race of whites.”[40] Black Africans, or *les nègres* (the Negroes), by contrast, were “tall, plump … but simple and stupid.”[41]

This distinction between Moors and blacks in size and stature, with blacks being labeled “plump,” represented an important innovation in the elaboration of racial differences, or what Barbara and Karen Fields have called “racecraft.”[42] This differentiation had been largely absent in England and Holland during the previous century, as evident in Buffon’s criticism of Francis Drake’s account of Africans. In this way, Buffon was able to speak authoritatively without having to wholly abandon the stereotype of “Africans” as short and slight, a stereotype already lodged in the European imagination. Rather, Buffon articulated a new physical identity for *black* Africans, who he claimed could be defined by both their dark skin and their enormity.[43]

According to Buffon, the “plumpness” of black Africans was evidence of their ease of circumstance and their idleness. The land “inhabited by the Negroes,” he claimed, was “rich, abounding in pasturage, in millet, and in trees always green.”[44] For this reason, black Africans were able to stay well nourished with little or no effort, which made them “well fed” but also “simple and stupid.”[45] Buffon’s linking of corpulence to laziness and slow-wittedness was in harmony with the ideas of the thin, fine, serious intellectuals of England of a century earlier, as well it should have been. Upon departing for England, Buffon found himself well received by the English intelligentsia. While there, he was elected a member of the Royal Society, one of Europe’s first national scientific societies, whose founders included none other than the waifish Cambridge Platonist, Robert Boyle.

Buffon never met Boyle, who died before he was born. But Buffon would have been privy to the writings of Boyle and the Royal Society’s other founders, as well as those of subsequent members represented in the Society’s official journal, *Philosophical Transactions*. The journal was crammed with essays by scientists and physicians, several of whom shared Boyle’s perspective that

overindulgence and corpulence were signs of mental torpor. One entry, written in 1733 by a Dr. Alexander Stuart, is typical. Stuart was responding to a question about the cause of sleepiness after a meal. In his reply, Stuart conflated sleepiness with laziness, and claimed that this predicament was caused by overeating and a general lack of reasoned self-management, since it was usually "gross feeders, drunkards, corpulent, short neck'd by constitution" who felt sluggish after a meal. This lazy sleepiness, he argued, which routinely besets the robust and overindulgent, "never attends" those with the force of mind to be "temperate persons."[46] Stuart further added that the problem of post-meal lethargy was endemic in hot climates, which "makes the inhabitants generally lazy and inactive."[47]

Clearly, ideas linking insipidness, greediness, and corpulence had long been in circulation in the Royal Society. Beginning in the eighteenth century, these three traits were also being linked to hot climates. In this way, Buffon's theories connecting stupidity, plumpness or "bulk," and blackness were by no means fringe. His *Natural History* was intended to be the synthesis of decades' worth of great tomes and minor works that were part of the royal collection in France, as he still had an appointment in the Jardin du Roi. His connection with the Royal Society meant that his interpretation of the texts would likely reflect the Society's influence as well. Moreover, given the constant intellectual exchange between the English and the French during the Enlightenment, it is likely that many of the ideas, if not the critical texts themselves, would have been similar.

Buffon never traveled to the more remote regions of Africa that he expounded upon. More of an armchair cartographer, he used his significant talents for classification to make claims about the nature of the races.[48] And, as with Bernier, within his treatment of race he focused a great deal of his energy on the appearance of women. Buffon was the first celebrated scientist to assert that black Africans were plump, idle, and insipid. Yet, significantly, he did not find their figures unattractive. On the contrary. Buffon enthused about the "tall, plump" physique of *le nègre,* describing it as "well-made."[49] The term *le nègre* is itself gender-neutral, but when the topic turned to beauty, the language quickly became feminized.

Buffon appeared to find inspiration from a generation of race theorists as he slid seamlessly from the assertion that blacks were robust and well-made into a several-page dissertation on the beauty of shapely black women of select nations. In describing the women of Senegal, for example, whom he believed to be the most attractive of all black women, he stated,

> They are tall, very black, well proportioned, and their features are less harsh than those of the other Negroes.… [The Senegalese] have the same ideas of beauty as the Europeans, considering fine eyes, a well-formed nose, small mouth, and thin lips, as essential ingredients.… Their skin is soft and delicate, and, colour alone excepted, we find among them, women as handsome as in any other country of the world.[50]

In terms that echo the ideals of the High Renaissance, Buffon lauds the fine, “well-proportioned” figures of an entire nation of black women. In the midst of the Enlightenment’s dismissal of corpulence as a sign of indolence and ignorance, particularly among men, he nevertheless continued to praise plumpness as an element of beauty in women. As with Bernier, it is significant that the presumed beauty of black African women is found not in their departure from European standards of face and physique, but in their adherence to those standards.

This may seem peculiar, given that the racial project was one of demarcation, of making and refining distinctions based on physical appearance. Instead, it reveals that the goal for many early theorists was to comprehend and make sense of the world’s diversity. According to these theorists, women the world over may in some critical respects have been racially distinct, but this did not place all of them beyond the pale of sexual desirability. Evidently, some non-European women were measuring up, quite literally. In this way, early classification schemas may have been hierarchical, as we see with Bernier’s “first race” theory and Buffon’s estimation of the beauty of black women, “colour alone excepted.” But the overarching project at the time was not necessarily to condemn black people to inferiority in every category.

Still, while such condemnation was not the original intent, the project of race making evolved. In the context of mushrooming French and British slave trade enterprises, presumed innate racial

differences in mental capacity, industry, and sensual appetite came to be used as sound evidence of inherent inferiority. The body too became “legible” through racial discourse, as body size was increasingly linked to racial category.[51] This transformation built on the work of Buffon.

Discussions of race in *Natural History* represented little more than a review of the existing literature on the subject, and yet the work’s influence was undeniable. *Natural History* was widely disseminated and often quoted among French intellectuals during the Enlightenment.[52] It found particular favor among radical rationalists such as Denis Diderot, whose own philosophical treatises on the use of reason (and not religion) for the attainment of moral excellence were winning him praise from the cognoscenti and heat from the Catholic clergy.

In 1749, as *Natural History* was being published, so was Diderot’s *Letters on the Blind,* the most recent of his dissident discourses on Christianity. This work earned him a short stint in prison. When he was released, he lowered the volume of his atheistic rhetoric. He turned his attention instead to the development of a compendium that would rock the authority of the church in a more covert fashion, revealing the vast universe of knowledge being generated by rational scientific inquiry.[53] Diderot set to work on what would be his most celebrated and influential publication, the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*Encyclopaedia, or A Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*). In the first draft, he set himself the painstaking task of merging the most significant scientific and philosophical interventions of the time, which included skimpy characterizations of “Africa,” “Africans,” and “race.” Explorations of the latter term were handpicked from his close friend Buffon’s *Natural History,* from which he reportedly reproduced ideas as he saw fit.[54]

The first iteration of the *Encyclopaedia* offered only a terse summation of “Africans” suitable for use by those invested in commercial trade. But French investment in the slave trade was burgeoning, as was the number of black Africans making their way back to the French metropolis. The growing presence of blacks in

the territories, along with the political dialogues swirling around them, may have encouraged Diderot to expand on the topic of blacks in subsequent editions of the *Encyclopaedia*. To do this, he tapped his friend and fellow philosopher Jean-Baptiste-Pierre Le Romain. Le Romain, who had lived in the Caribbean, was a self-styled expert on French colonies and sugar plantations.[55] He included in the *Encyclopaedia* the following description of *nègres* in the colonies:

> The [slaves] of Cap Verd … or Senegalese, are regarded as the most attractive in all of Africa.… The coast of Angola, the kingdoms of Loango and the Congo produce an abundance of attractive nègres.… Their penchant for pleasure makes them fairly unfit for hard labor, since they are generally lazy, cowardly, and very fond of gluttony. The least esteemed of all the nègres are the Bambaras; their uncleanliness, as well as the large scars that they give themselves across their cheeks from the nose to the ears, make them hideous. They are lazy, drunken, gluttonous, and apt to steal.[56]

Le Romain's judgment of the Senegalese as "the most attractive" of the black Africans seems to have been lifted directly from Buffon's text. Given not only the eminence of *Natural History* but also Diderot's personal ties to Buffon, this was probably no coincidence. But Le Romain dramatically shifted the tenor of his assessment from that of Buffon. In a neat few paragraphs he pulled together several defamatory generalizations about the blacks of Africa: that they were lazy and thieving, with a "penchant for pleasure" and a fondness of gluttony. Le Romain's use of the word "gluttony" had not been lifted from Buffon. In Buffon's opinion, the bulky frames of blacks were due to the ready availability of food, combined with their lack of the mental capacity needed to devote themselves to activities other than eating. Le Romain's use of the term "gluttony" implied something else, a willful greediness that ironically, given Diderot's atheism, evoked the seven deadly sins.

The *Encyclopaedia* seems to have been one of the earliest prominent publications to make the claim that blacks were "fond of gluttony." But it was not the first ever to do so, nor would it be the last. Reports had been making their way to Europe from the colonies describing the ritual practice of overfeeding in Africa for over a century. In the 1580s, for instance, the Italian botanist Prospero Alpini pronounced himself awestruck by what he called the "art of

fattening" in Egypt. The women there, he claimed, ingested drugs and a cornucopia of food laden with animal fat in order to make themselves as rotund as possible. Alpini found this gluttonous indulgence a deeply disturbing "vice of the flesh," a sterling example of the immorality of the Egyptians:

> Can one desire anything more shameful than an obesity acquired through the infamous vice of the flesh and of unchecked sensuality? … This vice is so widespread down there that one sees most women flopped down on the ground like fat sows.[57]

Alpini was not alone in this assessment. In 1625 the Englishman Samuel Purchas published a four-volume set of stories pertaining to the inhabitants of distant lands, based partially on travel narratives left behind by his late countryman, Richard Hakluyt. In Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, he too expressed his disdain for the unbridled sensuality of blacks in Guinea, denouncing them as orally and sexually insatiable heathens:

> They have no knowledge of God.… They are very greedie eaters, and no lesse drinkers, and very lecherous, and theevish, and much addicted to uncleanenesse: one man hath as many wives as hee is able to keepe and maintaine.[58]

Accounts of black Africans eating to excess were clearly not unknown before the eighteenth century. But whereas earlier accounts fell into the category of outlandish tales of sensational cultural practices, by midcentury such narratives were becoming a type of gospel. Diderot's *Encyclopaedia* played no small part in this shift. The text was widely read and disseminated among intellectuals and those with commercial ties in Africa right up until the French Revolution.

The *Encyclopaedia* served as an important text in the new science of race. It lent credibility to the idea that it was not idle eating (as per Buffon) but the vice of gluttony that was inherent to the black African's sumptuous way of life. Given that such indulgence was intrinsic to the black way, it was not discouraged among the dark-skinned people but, according to scientists and philosophers in the new field of race science, positively encouraged.

If French intellectuals such as Buffon and Diderot detailed in their massive and influential oeuvres the so-called nature of the races,

and within this the black African proclivity for overfeeding and fleshiness, British writers too were growing ever more scornful of the purported African gourmand.[59] The agreement among French and British authors on the question of excessive appetites among blacks is evident in the writings of the colonial transplant Edward Long. In 1774 Long wrote the influential *History of Jamaica*, in which he cast a wide net around the "Negroe race [*sic*]," suggesting that blacks in the Americas were no different from their brethren in Africa.[60] In a text rife with contradictions,[61] Long suggests that those persons from "Negro-land" in general "have no moral sensations, no taste but for women, gourmandizing and drinking to excess, but wish to be idle."[62]

If the statements labeling blacks as idle gourmands appear Buffonian, this is not a coincidence. Edward Long idolized Buffon, peppering his book with citations from the French thinker. It is not surprising, therefore, that Long, like Buffon, claims that many blacks were "large, fat, and well-proportioned," and not a few of the women were particularly "well-shaped" and worthy of praise.[63] This was owing not just to the "gourmandizing" predilection of blacks, but also the hot climates that contributed to their "corpulent and muscular" bodies.[64]

The major difference between Long and Buffon was that Long was a polygenist. He was convinced that the idle avarice of blacks, as well as their size and stature, proved that they were of a wholly different origin. In a mishmash of evidence used to reveal the absurdity of claims of human unity, Long cites not only Buffon but also a Shakespearean sonnet:

> "IN THE CATALOGUE THEY GO FOR *MEN*,
> As hounds, and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels …
> *All* by the *name of dogs* …
> That writes them all alike;—*And so of men*—"
>
> says that faithful observer of nature our immortal Shakespear [*sic*]; and with him so far agrees the truly learned and sagacious naturalist Mons. Buffon, who investigates the marks of variation among mankind in the following manner: "Men differ from white to black, from compound to simple, by the height of stature, size … and other bodily characteristics; and from the genius to the dolt."[65]

Buffon and Shakespeare may seem like strange bedfellows. But Long's text shows how French and British literati could be randomly

cited in service of claims about fundamental black-white distinctions.

It is not surprising that the French and British were at the helm of eighteenth-century racial scientific discourse marking black people as “gluttonous.” The growing codification of black people as greedy eaters developed against the backdrop of the accelerating slave trade among these two colonial powers of the eighteenth century. This, together with the exigencies of reasoned self-management in the context of the High Enlightenment, transformed the act of eating from personal to political. Indulging in food, once deemed by philosophers to be a lowbrow predilection of slow-witted persons, became evidence of actual low breeding. It bespoke an inborn, race-specific propensity for laziness and ease, an unbridled desire to meet the demands of the flesh at the expense of cultivating higher pursuits. Such behavior was deemed wholly uncharacteristic of the rational thinkers sitting atop the new racial hierarchy.

And yet, up to this point, the large and robust feminine forms that such eating presumably engendered were still prized. The tail end of the eighteenth century would mark the dawn of a new era. In an attempt to rationalize even aesthetic values, the beauty of the plump feminine form was reconsidered.

* * *

Julien-Joseph Virey, the French anthropologist and naturalist, made no attempts to hide his admiration of Buffon. Virey had entered the military in the 1790s, his stint in the service being spent largely as a pharmacist at Val-de-Grâce hospital in Paris. It was likely in the armed service that Virey encountered Charles-Nicolas-Sigisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt. Sonnini de Manoncourt was a recognized naturalist and traveler who had himself been a member of the navy. He had also been a former secretary of Buffon, spending six months with the famed naturalist in the 1770s translating his texts. A shared fascination with natural history, and in particular the works of Buffon, led Virey and Sonnini de Manoncourt to collaborate on a reissue of Buffon’s *Natural History* in 1799.[66] For Virey, this was only the beginning. Two years later, he published his massive tome *Histoire*

naturelle du genre humain (*Natural History of Mankind*), in which he provided his own anthropological insights into the nature and variety of humankind.

Virey, like his intellectual forebears, was captivated by the question of race, with a special interest in the character and physical traits of Africans.[67] In *Natural History of the Negro Race,* an excerpt from his *Natural History of Mankind* published as its own book in 1837, Virey asserts that Negroes were "of a mild disposition, robust, but slow and very lazy."[68] The Foulahs, a people inhabiting the region from Senegal to Northern Cameroon, he described as a "very handsome" people.[69]

With these observations, Virey appears to be simply retreading ground that had already been covered by Buffon and Diderot. Yet despite his admiration of Buffon, who had been a proponent of the environmental theory of racial difference, Virey had also been inspired by the creeping re-biologization of race that was taking place in his homeland. In the mid-eighteenth century in France, novel biological theories of racial difference—which were distinct from the early "sperm and blood" theories of Bernier—were gaining traction alongside the environmental theory of Buffon. Although Buffon had rejected claims of biological difference, during the eighteenth century they were revitalized.[70] By the nineteenth century they would be used to fill out and buttress Buffonian theories. Part of their appeal was that they provided a convenient explanation for both black skin and corpulence. According to the revitalized humoral theory, black skin was caused by a superabundance of black bile beneath the skin.[71] Moreover, an overflow of black bile could cause gastrointestinal disorders and weight gain.[72]

Virey was a voracious reader of bile theories, and he would make his own claims about black skin, gluttony, and weight. Black people, he claimed, were mindless, self-gratifying automatons who were "given up to the pleasures of the table, those great eaters, intemperate epicures who seem to live only to eat, have a stupid look … always digesting, they become incapable of thinking."[73] In this way, they were distinct from whites. He elaborated,

> In our white species, the forehead is projecting and the mouth retreating, as if we were rather designed to think than to eat; in the negro species, the forehead is retreating and the mouth projecting, as if he were made to eat rather than to think.[74]

Virey further used the language of bile theory to claim that fatness was directly correlated with skin color: “[Those] who are darker than others of the same race are also more robust, active, and stout.”[75] The reason for this, he asserted, was that “the hot sun causes the body to hold onto this excess liquid fat, allowing it to accumulate in the breast and belly.”[76] In this way, those who live with greater exposure to the sun, are thus more likely to be darker-skinned, and are also going to experience an unsightly “excess” of liquid fat accruing on the body.

This was Virey’s general view of the relationship between skin color and superfluous fat when he (inexplicably) chose the tawny-hued so-called Hottentot peoples as his example of dark-skinned greed and corpulence. His reason for doing so remains elusive. But, since Virey was yet another desk-bound French scholar, it is likely that he chose the Hottentot based largely on the proliferation of texts that had been written about them since the sixteenth century. It is also likely that his potential role in the dissection of one famous Hottentot played a part.[77]

Virey treated the Hottentot as exemplary, and yet also representative of “negresses.”[78] In *Natural History of Mankind*, Virey notes that while Hottentot men have a robust but “firm” constitution, the women, particularly as they age, develop big bottoms and bellies that push out. In addition to living in a climate that causes the body to retain excess liquid fat, the women, he claims, are often sedentary or pregnant. This leads the superabundant fatty liquid to collect in their abdomen and long, pendulous breasts, and to wrap around their hips and buttocks.[79] The derrieres of Hottentot women, he added, resembled those of four-legged creatures, at times growing so large that they could be supported with a small cart, like a domesticated animal.[80]

It is questionable whether Virey ever encountered any of the living, breathing, “negresses” of which he speaks so authoritatively. Like Buffon, Virey seems to have gleaned his intimate knowledge of

African people by reading the secondhand accounts of diverse European travelers. And many Europeans had written about the so-called Hottentot.

"Hottentot" was a name given the Khoikhoi by Dutch colonists, after the Dutch East India Company (VOC) settled the Cape of Good Hope in the seventeenth century. Since that time, reports had made their way back to various European city centers depicting the unique physiology of their women. One of the earliest such reports came from Wilhelm ten Rhyne, a medical doctor with the VOC. In 1686 the doctor wrote of the elongated labia of the women, which was thought to resemble fingers that were protruding from their private parts, which he believed to be unique to the Hottentot.[81]

Figure 3.1. Cover art, J. J. Virey, *Natural History of Mankind*, 1824.

Reports of the peculiarity of the Hottentots were reproduced by travelers and self-styled anthropologists for the next century. A notable text by Dr. Anders Sparrman, a Swedish physician and naturalist and a student of Buffon's rival Carolus Linnaeus, saw several reprints in both British and American magazines.[82] In it, Sparrman expressed his consternation about the representation of Hottentot women, proclaiming that the world had been misled into believing that they were "monsters by nature." According to Sparrman, since the only difference between the Hottentot women and other women the world over, regardless of color, was their

elongated clitoris and nymphae, they were not monstrous. To him, this physiological anomaly was simply proof of their “slothfulness and the warmth of the climate.”[83]

Sparrman made no mention of the size or shape of the buttocks, breasts, or bellies of the Hottentot women. But had he done so, he likely would not have been as repulsed by their purported fatty nature as Virey had been. To the contrary, Sparrman introduced his discussion of the Hottentots with the following assertion:

> With regard to their persons, they are as tall as most Europeans; and as for their being in general *more slender*, this proceeds from their being more stinted and curtailed in their food.[84]

In describing the Hottentot as naturally slender, Sparrman offered a starkly different perspective from that of Virey. In fact, it mirrored the general description offered by Bernier some hundred years earlier. One reason for their different perspectives could be the fact that Sparrman, unlike Virey, actually traveled to the Cape and encountered real women there.[85]

There is another reason why their views may have been so disparate. With the arrival of the British came the proliferation of a new discourse about the Hottentot being overindulgent.[86] In 1777, for instance, a British woman named Jemima Kindersley published letters from her travels around the Cape of Good Hope, one of which included this observation about the Hottentot:

> Drunkenness and gluttony are the vices to which they are most addicted; having no moderation in either eating or drinking, but whenever it is in their power, indulge themselves in either to the greatest excess.[87]

Tales of the gluttonous Hottentot were uncommon among the Dutch or even in the British narratives of the sixteenth century. But in the context of the Enlightenment, the British preoccupation with the ills of excess feeding were folded into the racial discourse. This helped to make overindulgence evidence of not only slow wit but also barbarism.

Yet the increasingly widespread depiction of the Hottentot as gluttonous among British authors during the Enlightenment, like the depiction of black Africans generally, did not instantly change their

representation from that of a slender to a fat people. In 1773 the London-born writer John Hawkesworth was credited with writing the first British portrayal of the Hottentot. Based on the travelogue of Captain James Cook, he said of them, “These are in general of a slim make, and rather lean than plump.”[88]

In the 1790s two events collided to slowly shift the view of the Hottentot from thin to fat. First was the growing conflation of “Hottentot” with “Negro.” This was shown in the work of the Swiss founder of physiognomy and Protestant pastor Johann Caspar Lavater. Lavater’s work, in which he uses the terms as if interchangeably, was widely read and praised in Britain. After the 1795 British conquest of Cape Town, British reports of the Hottentot size and shape described them as remarkably similar to the “Negroes” that had been written about by English and French authors in the mid-eighteenth century. *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa,* an 1804 book by an Englishman named John Barrow, details the Dutch Boers’ mistreatment of the Hottentot, and explores how the inhumane conditions of the old colonizers had made them greedy and fat:

> Unwilling to work and unable to think; with a mind disengaged from every sort of care and reflection, indulging to excess in the gratification of every sensual appetite, the African peasant grows to an unwieldy size.[89]

But perhaps the most important factor in the reinvention of the Hottentot from slender to stout was the encounter with and subsequent exhibition by the English of a presumed archetype of Hottentot female beauty. Her presence as a symbol of black femininity helped transform the image of the Hottentot from thin to fat. It also helped make fatness an intrinsically black, and implicitly off-putting, form of feminine embodiment in the European scientific and popular imagination.

The woman went by the name of Saartjie “Sara” Baartman. The year of her birth is a point of contention, with most accounts citing 1789 but at least one suggesting she was born in the 1770s.[90] Sara was raised on the farm of a colonist named David Fourie, a descendant of French Huguenots whose family had fled persecution

under Louis XIV and settled in Cape Town in the 1680s. Fourie himself was a ruthless murderer who settled the area where Baartman's family had lived, and took possession of land, cattle, and people by fiat. After his death, the Baartman clan was broken up and sold to various slavers. Sara and her parents were sold to a man named Cornelius Muller. Around 1803, a year after a bloody Khoikhoi rebellion, many British left parts of the Cape, fleeing with the remainder of their wealth and resources.

The economy at the Cape collapsed. Hendrik, a so-named Free Black man who purchased Sara after her parents died, found himself deeply in debt. He liquidated his once 400-strong holding of slaves, keeping for himself only two, one of whom was Sara. To pay down his mountain of debt, Hendrik decided to display Sara to British soldiers. These soldiers came with the latest infantry in 1806. Their heads were aswirl with tales of the insatiable and carnal nature of black women at the Cape, stories that had been making their way to England for decades.[91]

So it was that Sara began her career as an exhibition for European titillation around 1806 while still in Cape Town. Her first shows took place at the local Naval Hospital, where a large contingent of military men found themselves immediately upon their arrival. An infirmary delight, Sara would reveal her naked body to the soldiers for their last gasp of sexual entertainment before welcoming sweet death. She was, according to scholars Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, "an early nineteenth century exotic dancer," and for a fee, the dying men may have been able to touch her or even have sex with her.[92]

The idea that Sara should be more than a sideshow for the sick and dying at the Cape came from a Scottish surgeon by the name of Alexander Dunlop. Dunlop had lived in London as a youth, and after seeing Sara's charms, he decided he could make considerable money off of her if he could only get her to the Continent. Dunlop coerced the illiterate Hendrik into signing a contract stipulating that he would accompany Sara on a trip to London, serving as something of a handler, or showman. Sara, being the property of Hendrik, was not consulted on the matter. In 1810 the trio set sail for England.

London was the epicenter of Europe. The city was teeming with opportunities for the business-minded, salons for the philosophically minded, and spectacles for those seeking lurid entertainment. With the display of Sara, Dunlop intended to exploit the intersection of all three. He promoted Sara as an erotic and scientific curiosity, a veritable “ethnographic freak show.”[93] In his earliest posters for her show, she was billed as the “most correct and perfect Specimen of that race of people”—meaning the so-called Hottentot.[94] Moreover, as if to explain why the word “Venus” was part of her name, the bills touted the fact that she possessed the “kind of shape which is most admired among her countrymen.”[95]

Figure 3.2. *Saartjee, The Hottentot Venus, Now Exhibiting in London, Drawn from Life*, 1810. Image courtesy of Bridgeman Images.

Contributing to the image of Sara as the “perfect specimen” of Hottentot woman, and by association all black women, was the voluptuousness of her physique. Together, Dunlop and Sara had worked to fashion a suitably believable and yet exotic costume that was more fantasy than fact as it pertained to the garb of the Khoikhoi. Nevertheless, some iterations of her vestments were found to be disappointingly tame, and thus inauthentic, to London viewers anticipating something out of the African wild. Curious Londoners, however, were drawn to the exhibit by tales of her largesse, and especially the size and shape of her buttocks.

Figure 3.3. *Saartjee, The Hottentot Venus, Exhibiting in No. 225, Piccadilly*. Image courtesy of Mary Evans.

There had been a precedent in London for viewing persons deemed grotesquely oversized. In 1803 Daniel Lambert, said to have weighed over seven hundred pounds, had exhibited himself as the "fattest man alive," drawing enormous crowds.[96] But the fascination with Sara's size was different. She was simultaneously grotesque and exotic: a sexual specimen with a peculiar racial identity. For these reasons exhibitgoers came both to gawk at her proportions, especially her posterior, and to experience the sensory pleasure of touching her, which they could do for an additional fee. Although

bustles exaggerating the derriere were fashionable in England at the time, there was something about the amplitude of flesh that, it was claimed, was amassed in her bottom and over her whole body, which made her a spectacle. Her figure was deemed “very different from the feminine standards of London” and its ladies’ “long, slender lines.”[97]

The exhibit was a smash hit in London for nearly a year, until controversy surrounding Sara’s slave status derailed Dunlop’s dream of riches that were quite literally built on Sara’s backside. In 1811 the group took its act on the road, entering exhibits and fairs in other parts of England. They punctuated their travels with return engagements in Piccadilly. But the novelty of her act having worn off, Sara was often received with disdain or indifference when she was received at all.

Two years after her arrival in England, reviewers of her by then well-known show continued to marvel at the proportions of Sara, the conspicuously plump “Hottentot Venus.” At the Bartholomew fair in London in 1812 a new rendition of an old ballad was issued in her honor: “Here, here the only booth in the fair … the greatest curiousity in all the known world—the Wonderful and Surprising Hottentot Wenus [*sic*] is here, *who measures three yards and three quarters round*.”[98]

Sara was the first Khoikhoi to complete a successful run through England. The infamy of her physique would only increase in the coming years, when she made her way to Paris. It was there that she would encounter Georges Cuvier, the man responsible for turning Sara into an internationally recognized totem of racial and sexual savagery. Her “excess” fat was used as one sign of her primitivity.

Before Sara ever made it to Paris, she lost Hendrik. He had vanished a year into their stay in Europe. The following year, in 1812, Dunlop died, leaving Sara with not a single soul she knew from the Cape. Perhaps this was why she was willing to travel to France with Henry Taylor in the summer of 1814. It was only a few months after the defeat of Napoleon and the signing of the Treaty of

Paris, and the British were excited about the possibility of resuming travels and touristry in the famed city.

Sara's status as slave or free was not questioned in France, largely because conditions had changed significantly since the Edict of 1716 and the Declaration of 1738. In 1777 Louis XVI supplied his last significant piece of legislation in an effort to resolve the matter. The declaration, known formally as the Police des Noirs, banned the entry of all "blacks, mulattoes, and other people of color."[99]

The prohibition on people with *any* black ancestry in the metropolis circumvented the question of slavery on French soil by granting only white persons rights as legal residents. This, of course, had disastrous implications for free black persons already living in France. And while the law was met with immediate resistance, it was nevertheless registered by the Parlement of Paris, something neither of the earlier edicts could claim. In any case, the law resolved very little. Slave owners continued to petition for the right to keep their slaves, which on occasion they were granted. Slaves themselves continued to petition the Admiralty Court of France for their freedom, which they were granted on occasion. This haphazard system remained in place until 1790, one year after the Revolution, when a November decree abolished this court.

Evidently, the French Revolution had not abolished slavery. France provisionally ended slavery in 1794, five years after its fabled revolution had declared liberty and equality for all.[100] The five-year waiting period for black freedom was in large part bought with the profits from overseas sugar and coffee plantations. By 1780, 40 percent of the Western world's sugar and coffee were being produced in French colonies. France's economic dependence on slavery meant that the question of liberty for blacks had been temporarily postponed, and it was further delayed by Napoleon in 1802 when he reinstated slavery.[101]

So when Sara arrived in France, after the passage of the Police des Noirs and during a revived moment of slavery, few questioned whether she was or should have been the human property of Henry Taylor. Not only were few questions asked about their relationship, their arrival was chronicled in the *Journal General de France.* The

Hottentot Venus was by then a known quantity in Europe's bustling city centers. It was perhaps owing to Sara's fame as an ideal specimen of her race that Taylor was emboldened to send a letter to Georges Cuvier, the head of the Museum of Natural History, as well as something of a national treasure, inviting him to come to a show.

Cuvier was not a native Frenchman. Born in the German duchy of Württemberg to a strict Lutheran father, Cuvier had attended the illustrious Carolinian Academy in Stuttgart. Upon graduation in 1788, he secured a position as a tutor for a noble family in Normandy. In his free time, he performed independent zoological studies, the notes from which he sent to the professor and zoologist Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire at the Museum of Natural History in Paris. It was Saint-Hilaire who invited him into the fold at the museum in 1795. There he would begin a storied career in comparative anatomy that culminated in Cuvier being the first person to establish species extinction as a fact.[102]

Cuvier had a known passion for comparative anatomical studies. Sara was being promoted as both an erotic and a scientific curiosity. Nevertheless, he initially rebuffed Taylor's invitation. But some time later, he laid eyes on Sara for the first time. She was on display at a ball organized by Countess Du Barrier. For the occasion, she was wearing only feathers, giving her the appearance of an exotic bird. If Cuvier had previously been uninterested in Sara, the sight of her outfitted like an enticing fowl must have stimulated a deep and abiding interest in her that was to follow her long after she had been laid to rest.

Cuvier invited Sara to the Museum of Natural History, where he had planned to study her form and features in close quarters. She accepted the invitation, spending three days with Cuvier, who had had a few artists on hand to chronicle her behavior and sketch her most intimate parts. But Cuvier most wanted to see and measure her elongated labia. This she denied him.

Only after her death would Cuvier get his wish. Sara died in 1815. The exact date of her death is a matter of dispute, but according to Cuvier, it was December 29. He procured her body for an autopsy and claimed that the cause of death was excessive tippling.[103]

Having her corpse at his disposal, he determined to dig into her body cavity to excavate the true nature of Sara, and by extension, her people.

Sara, in Cuvier's estimation, was not a Hottentot but a Bushman. He had decided this in the manner of his forebears, based on what he had read in diverse and contradictory accounts by European travelers about Bushman and Hottentot peoples. These accounts had set forth that only Bushmen had a *tablier* and "large and prominent buttocks."[104]

Unlike her handlers Dunlop and Taylor, Cuvier thought that Sara was an abnormal specimen of "her race," meaning in this case the Bushmen. Bushmen, he had read, were short, pockmarked, and "horribly thin."[105] What had impressed him about Sara, by contrast, was the vastness of her figure. In his assessment, she was both taller and stouter than the average Bushman. In a manner that recalled Buffon from nearly a century earlier, Cuvier assumed that Sara's height and "bulk" could be attributed to the easy accessibility of food in the region where she lived, as he speculated that there must have been an "abundance of food" at the Cape.[106]

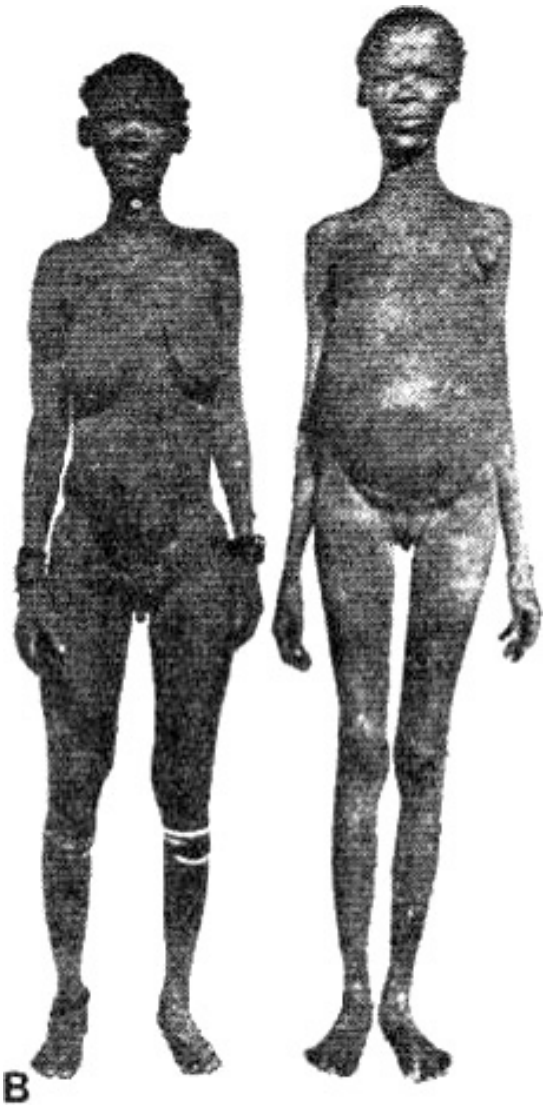


Figure 3.4. A photo of “Bushwomen” from 1912. Cuvier and many others believed Sara to be a member of this tribe.

But unlike Buffon, Cuvier found rotundity to be defective as opposed to alluring. “Her shape,” he wrote of Sara, “is all the more shocking because of the enormity of her hips,” each measuring larger than eighteen inches, “and by the projection of her buttocks, which was larger than a half a foot.”[107] Her hips and bottom were, he adjudged, her principal “deformities,” because while her knees were also fat and a little knocked in, her shoulders and back he found “graceful,” her arms were “thin,” and her stomach “didn’t protrude

excessively," a statement that reveals his unease at the very prospect that it might.

Cuvier was, indeed, generally disgusted by Sara's amplitude. This might have reflected some self-loathing on his part. As Elizabeth Kolbert explains in *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, "During the [French] Revolution, Cuvier was thin. In the years he lived on the museum grounds, he grew stouter and stouter, until, toward the end of his life, he became enormously fat."[108] Arguably, Cuvier saw in Sara what he despised in himself. Or perhaps he was reflecting the heightened feeling in France and England that fatness was uncharacteristic of whites, and thus unbecoming in general. While these are things we can't know for certain, it does seem that he was in some small way comforted by the knowledge that the pockets of "excess fat" on Bushwomen's bodies were "already known" among other scholars, and therefore he had not been alone in bearing witness to them. The lesser-known explorers and writers Levaillant, Peron, and Jansens had been among those who had previously described the "fat mass resting underneath the skin" of Hauzannana people, into which Cuvier lumped the Bushmen and—more dubiously still—Sara.

The argument about fat lurking under the skin sounded stunningly similar to that of Virey's environmental-cum-biological armchair theorizing that made the Hottentots examples of black grotesquerie. This similarity could be due to the fact that Virey would have access to the same written sources as Cuvier. It could also have been that Virey had been present at the autopsy, which some scholars have suggested.[109] Alternatively, he may have received these ideas from Cuvier himself, since the two were contemporaries, and Virey cited the eminent zoologist in editions of his written works since 1824.

In any case, it was becoming part of the general zeitgeist that fatness was related to blackness. Thus, it was treated as evidence of barbarism, of a nonwhite affectation. Sara Baartman, as the Hottentot Venus, was considered a prime example of these relationships. If the Black Venus of the sixteenth century had been the low-status counterpart to the Venus de Medici, the Hottentot Venus was its antithesis. When Sara arrived in Paris, the *Journal de*

Paris had warned potential showgoers that since “ideas of beauty vary according to the climate, amateurs should not expect to discover in the Hottentot Venus the Venus de Medicis.”[110] Similarly, the *Journal de France* quipped that “if we were to be taxed … we would prefer the French Venus to the Hottentot one.”[111]

When it comes to the Hottentot Venus, it is hard to separate fact from fiction. Showgoers flocked to see her because her supposed curious shape made her the apotheosis of Hottentot (and by proxy, black African) femininity. By this same measure, she was deemed the antipode of European femininity. But some exhibitgoers were disappointed to discover that she looked, well, just like any other woman. At least one Frenchman wrote that he had been hoping to see a monster, but complained that he had been bamboozled: “Instead of the imposing and majestic Venus of the Cape of Storms, I found only a svelte Venus.”[112]

Whether fact or fiction, the purported size of her bottom, in tandem with her presumed general rotundity, placed Sara beyond the pale of fair-skinned, European norms of beauty. Racial theories had linked fatness to blackness in the European imagination. And they had also linked thinness to whiteness.