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Important to Daughters

On one hand, I am immensely happy that through my wife I have learned to not only empathize with the plight of women, but internalize that plight as well. On the other hand, I find myself disappointed with my learning curve, and some of my past actions with women, some whom I claimed to love, sicken and disgust me. I always understood the reasoning behind the desire for a strong masculinist figure in the life of a young lady, but since I never really had one and for some reason could not internalize the experience(s) associated with being in the presence of one completely at ease with a functioning, healthy masculinity, I guess I never truly appreciated the importance of masculinist figures in the lives in young men, let alone young women. I mean, I didn't have a strong masculine presence in my life; I had a multiplicity of strong feminine presence. And I turned out alright, right? Hell no! I'm crazy as batshit; I digress. What I, along with those of my ilk, struggle with is reconciling the concepts of American masculinity – into which I am so thoroughly inured and the concepts of which are so ingrained - with the concepts of a healthy feminism that I would be determined to teach and have portrayed to my daughter. Of course, it is the reconciliation of such concepts that many allude to as maturing, as growing up: they say, “He really grew up when he began to have children.” I am not talking about that. How can we, as men, live according to the criteria of a middle-class patriarchal masculinity, yet desire and teach our daughters of feminisms that advocate resistance to many of the criteria of masculinity of which we men are proponents and adherents? How can we expose our daughters to feminisms whose greatest impediments at times are engendered by middle-class patriarchal masculinity? The two seem incompatible.

Nobility. I want to discuss the American masculinist criterion nobility and its *rhizomatic* connection with the plight of women like Foxy Brown (aka Inga Marchand). I find it hilarious that any American man, let alone any African American man, considers the concept of nobility an important aspect of masculinity. There are not many in the United States distinguished by high birth or rank: not many who are members of *any* aristocracy. But, let us move on. While there are no American aristocrats, the desire to express some aspect of nobility manifests itself, sometimes, in our marriage traditions. Take asking the father for the daughter's hand.

I am not so uncouth that I do not recognize that asking permission to marry someone's daughter reflects a sign of respect; but what it also reflects is the asking of and granting of permission to take possession of another's property. We all are aware of the development of home economics throughout our human history and, we are aware of the value of healthy, child-bearing females to the economy of any household. When that household is dominated by the patriarch, by the *paterfamilias*, then it is the patriarch's permission one needs to remove any person (or body) integral to the economics of the household. While the economic value of lower-class members of lower-class households is pragmatic and easy to understand – if I have seven

children I can probably harvest more crops compared to three children – the economic value of upper-class members of upper-class households sometimes seems more abstract and idealistic: things like reputation and character begin to count a great deal (theoretically). Upper-class women had to be pure – at least this is what the middle-class thought as they began to carve out a living space for themselves in the world and, in emulating the upper-class with whom they sought to associate, developed criteria of masculinity (and femininity) which placed a high premium on concepts like nobility.

In the United States of America, where everyone is created equal, yet middle-class patriarchal masculinity is practiced, the nobility of recognized title and aristocratic birth was replaced by the nobility of being from a “good family.” And, daughters born to good families are to be reared in a *cult of domesticity* – reflecting protection and security - ensured by the strength, loyalty, virtue, and courage as supplied by a spouse, brother, uncle or father inured in middle-class patriarchal masculinity. Those daughters not born to good families are not afforded such protection. Those daughters, whose fathers are absent or, whose fathers are incapable of supplying the protective cult of domesticity that American masculinity calls for or, those daughters who may find that American masculinity and its attendant cult of domesticity are just too stifling to allow one to experience their fullest humanity, are subject to any and all abuses to which they cannot resist. Take Inga for example.

Foxy Brown recently admitted that she and Jay-Z were involved in a sexual relationship when she was fifteen years of age; he was reportedly twenty-seven. At what time and place is such a relationship acceptable? What aspects of Jay-Z’s American masculinity permitted him to believe that having such a relationship with a child would be of benefit to both the humanity of the child and the rapper himself? Well, let’s see. Foxy, Inga, did belong to a household: the House of Marchand. Evidently there was no healthy masculinist figure present when Jay-Z came calling, for we have no evidence of the twenty-seven year old man asking Inga’s father for permission to bang his daughter. So, Jay-Z’s intelligence began to function in a manner that it always seems to function, publicly anyhow: he began to ponder how he could capitalize on the misfortunes of another; what a business man! The machine, the machine.

No matter how much I detest some of Jay-Z’s lyrics and his delivery, I must admit he is a very articulate man. Perhaps he used such articulateness to express his strength and virtue and loyalty – in a seemingly honest and rational manner – to Inga while displaying his physical attractiveness (after all she liked his “horse dick,” right?) while he maintained the self-control necessary to court the fifteen year-old adolescent in the furtherance of engendering his own noble court of little Jay-Zs in American. No wait, that’s what he did with Beyoncé. Foxy Brown was just a throwaway jump-off broad from the ghetto about whom no one cared. Still today, more people are arguing over whether Jay-Z was twenty-four or twenty-seven when he took Foxy’s “virginity.” I say who gives a fuck? Do we ever make such qualifications when we

discuss the age of the lord who rapes the peasant girl? Or, do we ever make exceptions for the slave master and his underage mulatta whose very existence was the result of the master having a similar relationship with the mulatta's mother when the mother was a young girl? Do we make excuses for the teacher who has an inappropriate sexual relationship with a seventeen year-old girl who seems to be mature beyond her years? Or, do we just say those are the prerogatives of powerful men? I would argue that it is some twisted internalization of middle-class patriarchal masculinity that even allowed Jay-Z to entertain such a sexual relationship. Men are dominant. Men are strong. *Real* men take what they want. In this case, he wanted a fifteen year-old child. How healthy is such a masculinity? Do we want to pass such inhumane treatment of others, if only from a lower economic class, on to our children?

Men, our mothers have been (and in some instances continue to be) abused for too long. Mentally, physically, emotionally. I grew up in households dominated my women. Women who gave me as much as they could and provided whatever happiness for me that they could; yet these women never seemed happy. I always wondered what kind of man it would take to make my grandmother happy, my aunts happy, my cousins happy...my mother happy. They loved me and I loved them and we were all seemingly happy; how come they couldn't find men that loved them and made them *really* happy? It took me a minute to figure out that, while my female relatives definitely have some issues, men in American are spiritually and emotionally and mentally disabled and disturbed...and African American men...There is no way we can continue with middle-class patriarchal masculinity as an ideal form of masculinity to teach and pass on to our children. In the pursuit of developing some sort of a class of nobles, do you all realize that Oprah Winfrey has placed the African American, a to a degree American, stamp of approval on Jay-Z. Jay-Z! The woman who portrayed that iconic figure who muttered, "You told Harpo to beat me" and whose female co-star said, "Until you do right by me..." now promotes, idolizes and shares political and cultural capital with a pedophile in the guise of Jay-Z. Wow! Do African American feminisms have anything to say about this?

Men *are* important to daughters. If we take that role with integrity and with serious concentration, forethought and execution, then perhaps we will begin to understand how important we are to women. Women like Inga. Not that *all* women *need* us. But in the furtherance of making this world a little easier, a little brighter – a place where we compete to discover our greater humanity, not to establish bigger bank accounts – we men may want to consider what a masculinity that considers our mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, spouses and lovers as the conduits through which we develop our masculinities could accomplish and facilitate.