

Literature and Sociology Lesson Plan:  
Racism, Masculinity and Inter-Racial Love in Public Enemy's 'Fear of a Black Planet'

This lesson will be delivered to sixth form students and will incorporate literature, history and sociology, through a close reading of Public Enemy's 'Fear of a Black Planet' (Def Jam Recordings, 1990), a track which interrogates societal fears of racial mixing. Chuck D repeatedly assures the rhetorical white man that he is *not* pursuing his daughter, 'sistah' or wife, evoking ideas about the 'super-predator' stereotype.<sup>1</sup> The over-arching theme for the class is inter-racial love, with sub-topics of racism and masculinity.

To begin, I will hand out a crunched version of the lyrics, with every word listed in alphabetical order. The students will know that we are studying a hip hop track but not its title. Using the crunched lyrics, the students will brainstorm ideas of what the track could be about, encouraging them to consider meanings and associations of word choice. We will then listen to the track and read the un-crunched lyrics. I will provide some contextualising material regarding the historical and cultural use of the 'super-predator' label, discussing the characterization of Gus in D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*<sup>2</sup> and the more recent use in discourse of crime and punishment. To prompt discussion of the text itself, I will ask if they think that this constructed stereotype has affected society's view on inter-racial relationships and if so, how. The class will be split into groups and asked to identify and interpret textual evidence relating to an assigned theme: Racism, masculinity, the 'super-predator' and inter-racial love.

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<sup>1</sup> Salim Muwakkil, 'Fooled by Stereotypes of Superpredators', The Chicago Tribune, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2002, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-10-21/news/0210210202\\_1\\_central-park-jogger-case-matias-reyes-crime](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2002-10-21/news/0210210202_1_central-park-jogger-case-matias-reyes-crime)

<sup>2</sup> *The Birth of a Nation*, dir. by D.W. Griffith, (Epoch Producing Co., 1915)

Learning Objectives:

- To understand the significance of ‘super-predator’ as a historically, culturally and socially constructed label.
- To identify evidence from ‘Fear of a Black Planet’ that discusses this stereotype in relation to inter-racial love.
- To assess the utility of the track as a form of social critique – is ‘Fear of a Black Planet’ an effective way to talk about race relations?

Questions:

1. Natalie P. Byfield writes that ‘central to sustaining racial borders were regulations against interracial sexual interaction that would prevent the development of a group of “mixed race” people who could challenge the traditional racial/labor/class order.’<sup>3</sup> How does Public Enemy use humour and irony to critique these ‘racial borders’?
2. How does Flavor Flav’s refrain ‘But supposin’ she said she loved me’ position the white woman within this conversation?
3. How does the chorus mock racism and its impact on people’s relationship choices?
4. Find evidence that critiques the stereotyping of black males as criminals.
5. How does the track’s title speak to each of our four themes?

We will end by watching the trailer for the upcoming film *Get Out*, directed by Jordan Peele, to demonstrate the continued relevance of Public Enemy’s critique.

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<sup>3</sup> Natalie P. Byfield, ‘The Position of the Black Male in the Cult of White Womanhood’, *Savage Portrayals: Race, Media and the Central Park Jogger Story*, (Temple University Press: 2014), p. 62

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‘Fear of a Black Planet’ Lyrics:

Man you ain’t gotta  
Worry ‘bout a thing  
‘Bout your daughter  
No she’s not my type  
(But supposin’ she said she loved me)  
Are you afraid of the mix of Black and White  
We’re livin’ in a land where  
The law say the mixing of race  
Makes the blood impure  
She’s a woman I’m a man  
But by the look on your face  
See ya can’t stand it

Man you need to calm down, don’t get mad  
I don’t need your sistah  
(But supposin’ she said she loved me)  
Would you still love her  
Or would you dismiss her  
What is pure? Who is pure?  
Is it European I ain’t sure  
If the whole world was to come  
Thru peace and love  
Then what would we be made of?

Excuse us for the news  
You might not be amused  
But did you know white comes from Black  
No need to be confused  
Excuse us for the news  
I question those accused  
Why is this fear of Black from White  
Influence who you choose?

Man c’mon now, I don’t want your wife  
Stop screamin’ it’s not the end of your life  
(But supposin’ she said she loved me)  
What’s wrong with some color in your family tree  
I don’t know

I’m just a rhyme sayer  
Skins protected ‘gainst the ozone layers  
Breakdown 2001  
Might be best to be Black  
Or just Brown countdown

I’ve been wonderin’ why  
People livin’ in fear  
Of my shade  
(Or my hi top fade)  
I’m not the one that’s runnin’  
But they got me on the run  
Treat me like I have a gun  
All I got is genes and chromosomes  
Consider me Black to the bone  
All I want is peace and love  
On this planet  
(Ain’t that how God planned it?)

Excuse us for the news  
You might not be amused  
But did you know white comes from Black  
No need to be confused  
Excuse us for the news  
I question those accused  
Why is this fear of Black from White  
Influence who you choose?