Flying While Black – A Degradation Ceremony

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Background

- Dr. Tisha Rowe, MD. 37 y/o Black woman
- Traveling from Jamaica to Miami
- 94 degrees outside
- Had to leave the plane with her son
- Was the only one asked to cover up by flight attendants

(Papenfuss, M. 2019) (Allen, K., & Gebremedhin 2019)
What is a Degradation Ceremony?

KEY COMPONENTS (Garfinkel 1956)

- A denouncer (flight attendants), a witness (the rest of the plane passengers, including her son), and the perpetrator (Tisha Rowe)
- Goal is to evoke feelings of SHAME and GUILT
- The perpetrator is made to feel SEPARATED from the group, an outsider
- The witnesses are aware of the norms that have been violated
Historical Stereotypes of the Black Woman* - Jezebel

- Promiscuous by nature
- Seductive
- Alluring
- Deviant
- Asking for it
- Curvaceous body types = inherently sexual

(Anderson, J. et. al. 2018) (Pilgrim, D)

*Other stereotypes of the Black woman include Mammy, Sapphire, Mulatto
The Double Standard

- Rowe was specifically targeted because of her figure
- Other women on the plane had been wearing short attire
- American airlines dress policy only states, “‘dress appropriately, bare feet or offensive clothing aren’t allowed’”

(Allen, K., & Ghebremedhin 2019)

(Conditions of carriage 2020)
Conclusion – Bodies out of Place
References

Allen, K., & Ghebremedhin, S. (2019, July 9). Doctor says American Airlines targeted her due to race, curvy figure. Retrieved from Doctor says American Airlines targeted her due to race, curvy figure


Slotnick, D. (2019, July 8). American Airlines made a doctor wrap a blanket around herself because a flight attendant found her summer outfit 'inappropriate'. Retrieved from American Airlines accused of humiliating doctor over her summer outfit.


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