

*“BRING IT, ALL YOU F—KING ANIMALS: representing the African
(American) as Savage from King Kong to Ferguson.”*

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“BRING IT, ALL YOU F- - KING ANIMALS”: REPRESENTING THE AFRICAN (AMERICAN) AS SAVAGE FROM KING KONG TO FERGUSON

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“BRING IT, ALL YOU F- - KING ANIMALS”

—Police Officer to Protestors, Ferguson, MO, May 11, 2014

With the surge in killings of unarmed Black men, America continues to confront its history of race perception, and its impact. During the height of Baltimore’s recent unrest, a New York police officer placed what was considered a racist post on Facebook. The photo juxtaposed a picture of Blacks on a minivan protesting the Michael Brown killing in Ferguson, with baboons jumping all over a white woman’s car. In the wake of the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, following the killing of Michael Brown by Darren Wilson that hot August day, police responded to protests by deploying military equipment and tactics, sending a message that they were essentially at war with their own people—tactics that even law enforcement partisans are now admitting only escalated the crisis, and contributed to occasionally violent counter-reactions by some protesters. Ferguson was seen as blatant evidence of anti-Black bias found throughout police departments in the United States. Police threaten to kill Black folks and hide the evidence, but are allowed to keep their jobs.

Others seem to have a penchant for posting blatantly racist and even homicidal rants on their social media pages, or in text messages, in town after town across America, in which White officers were found to have been sending around or posting blatantly racist e-mails, videos, or text messages, as in Florida, Ferguson, and San Francisco, where a group of officers exchanged messages calling African Americans “monkeys.” Textbooks have reinforced “culturally curated” stereotypical images in the collected consciousness of Africans, including enslaved Africans, as fear-inducing among Whites, physically strong, criminal, and lacking intellect. Black America knows that White males can pummel each other senseless in a hockey ring, and not worry that such violence might be viewed as a reflection of White people’s lack of impulse control or their thuggish natures, unlike the way brawls involving Black athletes are often viewed, especially on a basketball court. A White frat boy can fire a weapon at a rival fraternity and not have it seen as evidence of something inherent to preppy White kids and their penchant for gunplay. When White people riot, overturning cars, starting fires, and throwing rocks and beer cans at police--either because it’s “Pumpkin Fest” time in New Hampshire, or because of the results of a sporting event,--or a sporting event, or a sporting event or maybe yet another sporting event--there will not be long ruminations or explanations about the brokenness of White families, the pathology of our communities, or the need for Whites as a group to “take personal responsibility” for our “savage” young people. Social psychologists Phillip Atiba and Jennifer L. Eberhardt (2008,292-306) conducted a study of white male undergraduates that revealed that with just a second of “priming” the subjects with images of the words “ape” and

“gorilla” (shown too fast to consciously register) caused them, when watching videos of police brutality, to justify the level of violence used against the suspect when they were led to believe the suspect was Black. When they were led to believe the suspect was White, there was much less rationalizing of the amount of force used by police. The results strongly indicate that White Americans, who aren’t particularly prejudiced, subconsciously associate Blacks and monkeys.

The researchers believe this association is held in place through “implicit knowledge,” the result of a lifetime of conditioning via the long history of stereotyped anti-Black imagery that depicts Blacks as less than human (Atiba and Eberhardt 2008, 292-306). Their studies show that only about eight percent of White Americans claim to be aware of the history of the association between Blacks and apes.

Whether or not this is true, this disturbing research released in 2008 clearly shows a high level of subconscious engagement with this association.

In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, George M. Fredrickson (1971, 276) describes the White American construction of the Negro as a beast in the 1700s and 1800s. Fredrickson links that monstrous trope to the proslavery imagination, which had conceived of the Black man as having a dual nature--he was docile and amiable when enslaved, ferocious and murderous when free. Carl Hagenbeck, a seller of wild animals, exhibited Samoan and Sami people to great success in 1874. So popular was his 1876 exhibition of Egyptian Nubians that it toured Berlin, Paris, and London (Biachard, Bancel, et al., 2009). In 1885, King Leopold II of Belgium exhibited several hundred of his newly conquered Congolese people in Brussels to appreciative crowds. (Biachard, Bancel, et al., 2009). William Gallio Schell’s book (1901), *Is the Negro a Beast? A Reply to Charles Carroll’s Book Entitled, The Negro a Beast: Proving That the Negro is Human from Biblical, Scientific, and Historical Standpoints*, may have been seeking to counter the argument that Black people were akin to beasts and therefore only fit for slavery, it still maintained the idea of Black inferiority (Schell 2010).

Throughout much of the twentieth century, depictions of Blacks as apes and monkeys found expression in mainstream popular culture. These images helped buttress an older European conception that Blacks and apes, kindred denizens of the “jungle” are evolutionarily closer than Blacks and Whites. Certainly, these images allowed the mainstream White audiences to continue to psychologically distance themselves from Black people, to perceive them as other. Often it was the Black male that was being caricatured as a zip or urban coon for the amusement of White consumers. Simian in appearance, these images were intended to be ironic, and to cater to the White notion that Black coons are too stupid to understand that their efforts to assimilate into White culture only emphasized their inherent inferiority, blurring the line between audience identification of them as humans and as monkeys.

In 1906 a young man from the Congo known as Ota Benga became the subject of headlines around the world when he was exhibited in a cage with an orangutan at the Bronx Zoo Monkey House in the preeminent American city of New York. Tens of thousands of New Yorkers flocked to the zoo to behold the so-called pygmy, who stood four feet eleven inches tall, and weighed a little over one hundred pounds (Newkirk, 2015: 12). That this occurred in a preeminent American city in the

twentieth century would seem enough to cause astonishment. While on the surface this appears to be the saga of one man's degradation, on closer inspection it is also the story of an era, of science, of elite men and institutions, and of racial ideologies that endure today. It also raises questions about the rise and fall of "scientific racism," and about the repression and simulated expression of "wildness" in popular entertainment. It shows how early twentieth-century Westerners perceived Africa and Africans. Lies and distortions had long been planted in the minds of millions of Americans. In the 1920s and 1930s, circus publicity put a South African man, dubbed "Clicko," on display for predominantly White audiences as one of the stars of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. As one ad declared: "He is as near like the ape as he is the human. We cannot help but wonder if his captor, Captain Du Barry, has not brought Darwin's missing link to civilization" (Bogdan 1988, 192). Clicko was exhibited to correspond to a link established for over two hundred years between Blacks and monsters in the White imagination. According to a range of racist discourses that endured well into the twentieth century, the Negro was the missing link between monkey and man, bridging the distance between species with little effort.

One of the most satisfying aspects of the moral progress mankind has made since the beginnings of the modern human rights movement is the recognition of the principle that it is wrong to laugh at or exhibit those who are different from ourselves. It seems astonishing to us that many people once delighted in freak shows, would find performing midgets amusing, or would in general be entertained by human oddity. Yet that happened, and there were people who lived and worked in precisely such a setting. Most of them are forgotten, their lives of no real consequence to those they amused.

In the April, 2008 edition of *Vogue* magazine, the cover picture garnered worldwide controversy because of *Vogue's* decision to personify a classic American stereotype. With his towering 6-foot-8-inch frame, anchored by size sixteen shoes, NBA star LeBron James struck a familiar pose on the magazine's cover—gorilla-like, baring his teeth, flexing his muscles, with one hand dribbling a ball, the other clutching the tiny, slinky waist of a blonde White supermodel. The criticism was swift. Sports columnists and cultural commentators accused the editors of the influential fashion magazine of "monkeying around" with James's image, evoking the stereotype of "The Black savage in search of the prized White woman." This is also evidenced in Hill's (2008) assertion of how the image by famed photographer Annie Leibovitz was similar to the 1933 poster of the film *King Kong* in which the giant, raging, dark ape carries off a fair-skinned damsel in distress. In framing LeBron James as *King Kong*, *Vogue*, which reaches 1.2 million readers a month, perpetuated one of the most enduring stereotypes of Black sexuality—the Brute. He is the oversexed, menacing Black man, inherently violent and destructive.

In February 2009, the *New York Post* published a provocative political cartoon. Two police officers, one with a smoking revolver in one hand, stood over the corpse of an ape they had just gunned down on the street. The ape, eyes open, tongue hanging out, several bullet holes in his torso, lay on his back in a large splattered pool of his own blood. One cop is shown saying to the other, "They'll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill." (*New York Post* 2009). We have seen racist jokes and e-mail chains from Ferguson, Missouri police and city officers that were exchanged over several years, comparing President Barack Obama to a chimpanzee.

Anti-Black ape associations have persisted through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, coming back openly with the election of President Obama. For example, a photo of President Ronald Reagan holding and bottle-feeding a chimpanzee with the caption Rare Photo of Ronald Reagan Babysitting Barack, 1962 circulated online and was one of the images circulated via email by Ferguson police and court officials, resulting in the dismissal of three of them once the emails were made public. The present First Lady has not been immune either, being called “an orangutan,” with references to the film Planet of the Apes. In short, the conflation of “Black” with “ape” in representations of people of African descent has a long history that still continues to this day, and is used to remove the humanity of Black people in the eyes of white audiences.

Since the simultaneous invention of the motion picture in Europe and America coincided with the height of European imperialism, it is not surprising that for many years the dominant image of Africa seen on Western screens was that of condescension and paternalism. Western filmmakers began to film in Africa, taking advantage of the beauty of the landscape, the so-called exoticism of its customs, relegating the African to the background. The effect was to use the selectively photographed or fictionally created exotica of Africa to create sensation, titillate the imagination, to transport the consumer to the wild, weird, and either wonderful or terrifying Africa (Wiley 1982, ix-x.) This image the filmmakers projected of Africa was to have a lasting effect, haunting not only the Black people of Africa but also that of all Blacks in the diaspora. Colonialist representations, however, began long before the invention of motion pictures.

In various forms, vicious misrepresentations of African and authentic traditional African values existed in the works of European writers and scholars. The European colonizers were hell-bent on telling the world that colonialism was a valuable philanthropic “civilizing mission” inspired by the necessity to stamp out ignorance, disease, tyranny, and usher in the “best” cultural patterns (European cultural forms). British writers indefatigably reinforced this claim by publishing adventure literature and history books which became widely read in America. In Robinson Crusoe (1719) for instance, Daniel Defoe glorified colonialism when his protagonist (a wealthy slave merchant who has been shipwrecked) after many years alone on an uninhabited island, sees footprints in the sand. His first thoughts are not of finally having a companion, but of at last finding a slave to work for him. Stories of 19th century writers like Henry Rider Haggard, author of King Solomon’s Mines, Ethelreda Lewis, whose work Hollywood turned into the movie Trader Horn (1930), Elspeth Huxley, Robert Ruark, and Nicholas Monsarrat, to mention a few, according to Vaughan (1960, 85) have “clothed Africa with a mantle of mystery.” Accordingly, other writers undermined African traditional values and customs, including in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness. His books simply depict Africa as a continent just waiting to be colonized. Vaughan affirms how Africa was portrayed as peopled by savage tribes living “behind inaccessible forests” or a bizarre, miserable, vast land inhabited by unintelligent and barbaric people.

In America, European racist texts found a new haven. Influenced by such writings, Edgar Rice Burroughs exploited to new commercial heights the condescending romance-adventure stories. In his “dime novels,” he created fictional images of Africa, and although he never set foot on African soil, his legendary character, Tarzan, was to fascinate generations of Americans and audiences everywhere. Burroughs’s romance stories were so popular that they inspired a number of Hollywood films, more than two hundred as of this writing, which exploit the popular misconceptions already

embedded in the African romance-adventure stories. The tradition of Hollywood films exhibiting disproportionate interest in Tarzan/animal characters, as opposed to the depiction of the actual human life of Africa, was firmly established. In fact, in the Disney animated Tarzan, no People of Color appear in the film at all--only European and animal characters in a story that takes place in Africa.

Tarzan of the Apes (1918), directed by Scott Sidney, a film classic which glorified the animal and the jungle, and reduced Africa to a mere landscape, was the forerunner of numerous Tarzan escapades. E.R. Burroughs' fantasies made a mark in the history of cinema as one of the first films to gross one million dollars. Burroughs, who was a cattle driver, gold digger, and railroad policeman, was so poor during one period of his life that the only recreation he could afford was a habit of daydreaming wild adventures on other planets or in places of the earth (Kunitz and Haycraft 1966, 227). In Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer epics and similar extravaganzas, the African people play either scenery props (picturesque crowds with spears) or curiously unintelligent menials (Vaughan 1960, 86).

The overarching narrative of Tarzan stories reflects the belief that it takes a European aristocrat to save Africa from itself. The indigenous people of Africa are no better than the animals of the continent. As with the discussion, above, concerning racial imagery, Tarzan is, after all, "Lord of the Apes" and "King of the Jungle," and Burroughs and those who create films based on his work make it apparent who the real "apes" are. One film that has been at the forefront of Hollywood's jungle adventure films is Merian Cooper's 1933 King Kong, released during the greatest U.S. economic recession of the twentieth century: the Great Depression. Before and during these years African Americans, exhausted by years of extreme persecution and exploitation in the more radically racist South, had begun migrating to the North, where they effectively set themselves up as fierce competitors to working class White men. American society was engaged in a full-fledged racial battle. 1931 marked the year of the Scottsboro case, in which nine Black youths were accused and convicted of raping two White girls.

The importance of the trial within American culture cannot be over-estimated. It was widely publicized and debated in newspapers across the country, highlighting the nation's racial fissures. The world was living easily with racial segregation, and the violence which enforced it.

In the American South Black men were regularly tortured and murdered while entire towns looked on. For American Whites, the Scottsboro trial confirmed the fear that Black men coveted white women. Kong's final destruction and the rescue of the damsel in distress, Ann, by White Air Force pilots, becomes a symbol of White (civilized) men's rule over Black (uncivilized) men, and their savagery had to be kept firmly in check. Only a few years before, it can be noted, D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation glorified the Ku Klux Klan as it went about its self-appointed task of putting "uppity Blacks" in their place.

Scholars differ in their opinions of what Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's 1933 King Kong's narrative and individual symbols demonstrated about American society in 1933. Audiences would most certainly have been aware that the US Congress had passed the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Bill in a failed attempt to grant Filipino independence. The film audience watched transfixed, in the final

moments, as a colossal gorilla scaled the face of New York City's Empire State Building—a modern, state-of-the-art-skyscraper erected just two years prior, the technological modernity of the American building in direct contrast to the primitive ape scaling it (Goldman 1980, 9). Kong ascends the Empire State Building with one muscular arm, holding on for his life. As he perches atop the building, he fends off hordes of military aircraft with one hand. With the other arm, he clenches a woman—a beautiful young blonde—who wants nothing more desperately than to be freed from the beast's grip. The 1933 *King Kong* is a fantasy that tells exactly how the White world of the time saw reality.

In *King Kong*, the “darker” races served as tropes for an inter-species brand of racial Otherness. The only Black people seen in the movie are on Skull Island, and they are firmly linked to Kong, from the sound of the drums to the ritual dance in monkey suits.

Indeed, during the first encounter between film crew and Black people of Skull Island, the Black shaman offers to buy Ann Darrow (Fay Wray), the white woman, from the men and offers a dozen Black women in exchange.

He is Kong written small—the Black man who would own the white woman, seen as much more valuable than the Black women.

Throughout the history of colonial and racial texts, the Black man has consistently been represented in popular culture and science as a primitive and often sexualized creature, drawn primarily to White women. This representation has often taken the symbolic form of a primate, a symbol chosen presumably for its implications of evolutionary “inferiority” to White Europeans. Moreover, Kong's rapport with the White Heroine, Ann Darrow, lays bare the tenuous relationship between race and gender in jungle films. For not only does Ann serve as Kong's unwilling victim, the blonde actress who cowers before her simian suitor, but she is also aligned with the monstrosity and darkness he represents. As the relationship between Black men and White women in American historical and mythological discourses has shown the role of White heroines in jungle films is coded in racial terms – they represent the civilizing “superiority” of their race, and their interactions with male natives and gorillas invoke the White fantasy of an uncontrollable Black man ravishing a helpless White woman.

The White woman occupies a pivotal role in the racial crossing that characterizes a number of jungle films. Kong's bond with Ann is the terrain in which racial crossing occurs. She is the mid-point between Kong and civilization, between Black and White men, and between the jungle and New York. In addition to her function as an icon of civilization and victim of Black aggression, she bridges the Black and White races. The White heroine is a mediator between the worlds of the White and Black man, with the latter assumed to include gorillas of all shapes and sizes. This scenario takes a slightly different form in the Tarzan films of the era, in which the White male vies for a meditative position with the White heroine, Jane.

In this instance, the hero is a more successful negotiator in the sense that his affinity with Blacks is better developed than hers. Despite Tarzan's more distinct association with the darker races, however, he serves a conventional hero role, even saving Jane from the bad savages. Thus, like the heroines of other jungle films, Jane also occupies an important position between the White and

Black worlds. Ann's relationship to Kong is that of a victim to a monster, and also a potential romantic partner to the monster. The construction of non-western Blacks and African Americans as monstrous was not confined to written discourse. On circus and sideshow stages from the 1800s through the 1930s, Blacks were displayed as exotic attractions, visual spectacles and freaks (Bogdan 1988, 176-177). They were considered appropriate for public display solely on the basis of race. The early careers of Kong's filmmakers Cooper and Schoedsack were as ethnographic filmmakers (MacDougall 1975). In his book *White Screens/Black Images: Hollywood from the Dark Side*, James Snead (1994) offers an interpretation of Kong as "an autobiographical, self-referential film citing the early careers of Cooper and Schoedsack as ethnographic filmmakers. He describes their two previous cinematic ventures, *Grass* (1925) and *Chang* (1927), as milestones in the ethnographic film tradition (1994:16). With this background in mind and the oft cited comparison between the ship's captain, Denham, and Cooper himself, one can explore King Kong as Cooper and Schoedsack's personal vicarious fantasy. Unsatisfied with simple ethnographies, perhaps the filmmakers had a desire to bring back something more valuable--more "real." Perhaps Kong represents the ideal OTHER that Cooper and Schoedsack sought in their early career together. Kong, for the filmmakers, may be a fictionalized representation of their ideal ethnographic specimen as the "Big White Hunters." Conquests and exploitation seem justified in Cooper's film by the exoticism and wildness of Kong's realm and his association with Africa. Skull Island provided proof of the underdeveloped world's barbarity. The island consists of a jungle populated by prehistoric monsters. Lack of order in the Western sense suggests that whatever the White explorers find is theirs for the taking, all the more so since the dark-skinned islanders in their fantastic costumes engage in primitive acts that affirm Western superiority.

In the film's narrative, the ship (the *Venture*), as we learn in the first few minutes, is leaving with dangerous "cargo" (dynamite, guns, and bombs), and will likely return with tamed "Black cargo." The ambitions of the ship's crew and leader (Captain Denham) evoke ideals at the heart of the West's economic success. This transaction is the very definition of "trade," and no less, of the slave trade. Denham's adventure resembles any one of a number of forays by Europeans to non-European nations in search of animals, minerals, artifacts, and even human beings.

Denham and the crew make a clear separation between "lower cultures" and "higher cultures," and jump to the racist conclusion that the island's great wall could not possibly have been built by the Black people who live there. Despite their sense of separateness from the "native" population, the *Venture's* crew enlists its aid when it is expedient.

Historically (in slavery and colonialism) as in this film, such attitudes culminate in the successful attempt to humble, humiliate, or even annihilate the victim. One may recall Denham's words just after Kong has succumbed to the gas grenades: "He's always been the king of his world, but we'll teach him fear." Reading Kong as a captive, Denham's pleasure in showing Kong on a stage platform (in every sense, an "auction block") takes on a certain historical bitterness. The natural habitat of Kong, according to the film's narrative, is on the fictional Skull Island, located in the South Pacific.

Perhaps by choosing to locate the beast's origins within a fictional locale, the filmmakers wished to avoid any direct implication towards Africa or the Caribbean. Skull Island represents a popular

colonial interpretation of the “dark continent.” Not only is the island home to King Kong and group of Black natives, dinosaurs are seen to coexist with the indigenous peoples. The natives themselves are presented as antiquated savages, their facial paint, shields, spears, headdresses, and lack of clothing, are physical markings that restrict their potential for “narrative action.” They are portrayed as worshipping Kong as a god, sacrificing virgins to him on a regular basis.

Blackness in such a context could not but mean “the primitive,” “the elemental,” as well as “the marginal.” The blackness of the South Pacific Islanders serves a symbolic function, introducing us, as it were, to the most primitive human beings, before we later encounter the most primitive flora and fauna (foremost of these fauna, Kong himself!). The islanders seemed to even have absorbed the conglomerate Blackness of Kong. Some of the Blacks in the sacrificing ritual have made themselves up in Konglike skins, complete with facial paint, shields, spears, headdresses, and lack of clothing.

There is a disconnect in the metaphorical connection between Denham’s (the ship’s) journey and the European American trade in African slaves by setting the story in the Pacific “west of Sumatra,” and yet portraying the islanders not as Malays, but as “Oceanic Negroids” (Goldner and Rutner 1975, 78). As an allegory of the slave trade, then, and of various forms of exploitation, Denham’s journey might be expected to resemble what we already know about Europe’s encounters with traditional (and, in this case, African) peoples. As the film progresses, Kong is eventually taken captive and brought to America to be exhibited as the “eighth wonder of the world.” This sequence is a direct allegorical reference to the exhibition in Europe of Saartjie Baartman—“The Hottentot Venus” who was portrayed, like Kong, appealing to the White desire for “proof” of the Otherness of the Other. As discussed earlier, long after Baartman’s death, human zoos and side show stages from the 1800s through the 1930s remained popular, celebrating Europeans’ conquest of “primitive” people. Strategically deployed Black-and-White contrasts confirm on the visual level the danger emanating especially from Black males. Ann’s fair hair and skin and her daintiness are sharply in contrast to Kong’s blackness and his furry body. Kong falls for Ann, but he remains as frightening to her as the dinosaurs and other creatures lurking in every corner. Such scenes fed on the belief that African men lusted after White women. Ann appears to belong to a superior race embodied by the White male, and represents a highly valued good. In order to keep her inaccessible to creatures of a lower order, like Kong, White males will risk their lives. In turn, the inferior dark male will risk his life to obtain her. Cooper’s Ann represents cinematic eruptions of socially repressed forces of sexuality that carry the threat of a dreaded primordial “Blackness.” Eighty-two years after the release of King Kong (including two remakes!), race continues to be one of the most emotionally and politically charged subjects in the American social psyche and media imagination. The social and political meanings of “race,” of course, are not fixed, but are matters of ongoing construction and tension; whether in volatile debate or subtle transactions, the negotiation of racial images, boundaries, and hierarchies has been part of our national life from the beginning. The turbulent power of race is evinced by the variety of ways in which the images and historical experiences of African Americans and other people of color are symbolically figured in commercial cinema. Contemporary approaches to racial prejudice suggest that these more egregious forms of racial bias have been relegated to the past. It is commonly thought that the old-fashioned prejudice has given way to a modern bias that is implicit, subtle, and often unintended.

This new understanding of racial bias may have led researchers and lay people alike to believe that

the dehumanization and subjugation of Blacks was primarily a historical phenomenon. There is a persistent pattern of ambivalence in the attitude of some White Americans toward Blacks that always contrasts both positive and negative features, but usually tilts toward the latter where acceptance of Blacks in fields other than sports or music reflect deeply embedded stereotypes that continue to overshadow the real role of Blacks in American history.

The “monster” always constitutes the return of the socially or politically repressed fears of a society, those energies, memories, and issues that society refuses to deal with openly (Guerrero 1993, 43). At the mouth of New York Harbor not far from the site of Kong’s demise at the foot of the Empire State Building is the Statue of Liberty—that awe-inspiring symbol of promises kept and broken and promises broken. This monument too could easily figure in as a harbinger of the division between police and the people they serve that plague twenty-first century America. In the early 1990s, California state police euphemistically referred to cases involving young Black men as N.H.I.—No Humans Involved (Wynter 1994, 42). One of the officers who participated in the Rodney King beating of 1991 had just come from another incident in which he referred to a domestic dispute involving a Black couple as “something out of Gorillas in the Mist” (Kennedy 1998, 120). Assuming that these incidents are not confined to police officers, is it possible that, at the same time that contemporary racial bias has become subtler, these extreme forms of dehumanization nonetheless remain?

The danger is that law enforcement perceives people of African descent as Kong--dangerous apes to be conquered and killed. These cinematic myths still shape the perception of Africans and African-Americans across the United States. While the Black Lives Matter movement developed in response to police violence against People of Color, and attention is being called to bias and racism within White America in general and law enforcement in particular, showing that there is cultural resistance to these models of African as “jungle beast,” I note that in July 2016, ninety-eight years after the first Tarzan film, a new Tarzan film has been released - *The Legend of Tarzan*, in which once again, by battling the Congolese slave trade, White Tarzan helps Black Africans who seemingly cannot help themselves. He is noble; they are the savages. How far have we actually come in the depiction of Africans and people of African descent in American culture?