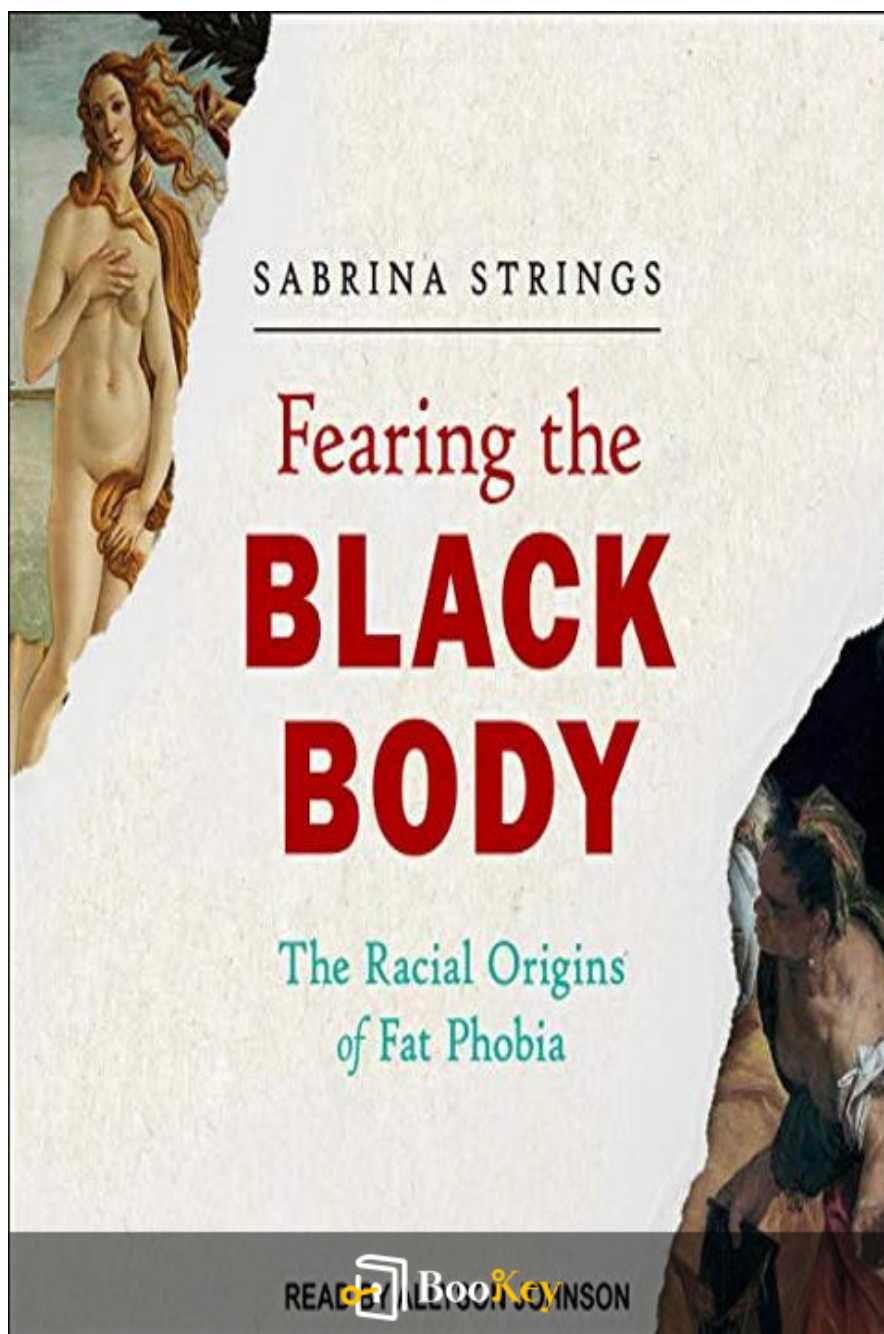


Fearing The Black Body PDF (Limited Copy)

Sabrina Strings



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Fearing The Black Body Summary

Unraveling Race, Beauty, and Fat in Western Ideology

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In "Fearing the Black Body," sociologist Sabrina Strings examines the historical roots of pro-thin and anti-fat ideologies within the context of Western patriarchy and white supremacy. The book spans from the Renaissance to the 1990s, offering a critical analysis of how beauty standards have evolved to promote slim, desirable images of white women while dehumanizing black women as corpulent and monstrous.

The book is divided into three main parts:

1. **Contrasts in Femininity**: Strings begins by exploring how both white women and women of color were historically depicted as plump and feminine, regardless of their social class. This section highlights the complexities surrounding race, class, and gender, emphasizing that societal norms have often celebrated diverse female bodies, albeit in a limited and context-dependent manner.
2. **Emergence of Racial Ideologies**: The second part traces the rise of modern racial ideologies that link feminine beauty exclusively to Anglo-Saxon whiteness. Here, Strings illustrates how the societal narrative shifted, increasingly privileging slim white bodies and framing them as the ideal while simultaneously demonizing the bodies of black women. This shift laid the groundwork for systematic racial prejudices that persist today.

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3. ****Scientific Management and Marginalization****: In the final section, Strings addresses the concept of "scientific management," which refers to the ways in which white women's bodies have been subjected to strict standards of beauty and behavior. This regulation not only underscores the objectification of white women but also perpetuates the marginalization of black women, who are often seen as the "embodied Other." By placing fatness within a framework of cultural and racial domination rather than merely health discourse, Strings reveals how deeply entrenched these ideologies are in social structures.

Overall, Strings's work serves as a critical reflection on the intersections of race, gender, and the politics of body image, urging readers to reconsider the societal constructs surrounding beauty, desirability, and its implications for marginalized groups.

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About the author

In "Fearing the Black Body," Sabrina Strings explores the intricate relationship between race, body image, and societal norms, uncovering how these elements intertwine to shape perceptions and expectations around beauty, health, and identity. The book is particularly focused on how historical perspectives on race have influenced modern conceptions of the ideal body, specifically examining the stigmatization of Black bodies within a predominantly Eurocentric beauty framework.

Strings begins by tracing the historical roots of body image issues, linking them to the racial hierarchies that were constructed during the colonial era. She illustrates how the commodification of Black bodies has perpetuated stereotypes that associate Blackness with deviance and undesirable physical traits. This historical context sets the stage for understanding contemporary body image concerns, as ingrained prejudices continue to affect how individuals perceive their own bodies and the bodies of others.

As the chapters progress, the narrative delves into the implications of this racialization of body image within various spheres, including fashion, media representation, and healthcare. Strings emphasizes the damaging effects of these societal norms, especially on marginalized groups who grapple with the dual pressure of conforming to unrealistic beauty standards while navigating systemic racism.

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The book also highlights the resistance against these beauty ideals, showcasing the voices of activists and scholars who advocate for body positivity and representation. Through a sociological lens, Strings invites readers to critically evaluate how societal standards of beauty can be reshaped to be more inclusive, ultimately fostering a more equitable dialogue around race and body image.

Overall, Sabrina Strings' work serves as both a critique and a call to action, urging society to confront the oppressive structures that dictate value and worth based on body image linked to race. This journey through history and contemporary issues not only broadens the understanding of beauty standards but also seeks to dismantle the harmful narratives that continue to influence the way bodies, particularly Black bodies, are viewed and valued in society.

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Chapter 1 Summary: 1. Being Venus

Summary of Chapter 1 from "Fearing the Black Body" by Sabrina Strings

In the opening chapter, Sabrina Strings introduces Katharina, a young African slave depicted in a 1521 portrait by the renowned artist Albrecht Dürer in Antwerp, Belgium. Dürer's portrayal marks a significant moment in art history as it represents the first known depiction of a black person in that city. While Katharina's physical beauty is highlighted, her status as a slave complicates the viewer's understanding of her representation.

During the Renaissance, prevailing beauty standards idealized larger and well-proportioned bodies, and this notion of beauty began to intersect with the growing presence of black women in Europe, attributed largely to the transatlantic slave trade. Although black women were often perceived as physically appealing, societal prejudices against their racial and social status persisted, creating a paradox in the perception of their beauty.

Dürer's engagement with Katharina prompted a transformative view on beauty that moved beyond static ideals, embracing a richer appreciation for diversity. Nonetheless, while he recognized the beauty in Katharina's form, he still held onto certain negative stereotypes regarding African facial features, reflecting the conflicting attitudes of society at that time.



Strings explains that the artistic discourse of the Renaissance increasingly included black women, adding complexity to the representation of beauty. While these women were often depicted in subordinate roles, their voluptuous forms were celebrated within the art world. The chapter illustrates that varying regional interpretations of beauty existed across Europe; for instance, artists in Italy, such as Raphael, tended to focus on Neoclassical ideals—proportionality and harmony—while other regions integrated black figures in ways that maintained existing social hierarchies.

The narrative drives home the influence of the slave trade on artistic representation, particularly in cities like Venice where black women were both commodities and subjects of fascination for European artists. As the slave trade entrenched itself further, the beauty of black women became a contentious topic within the realm of high art.

By the late 17th century, the chapter notes a troubling shift in perceptions, as black women's bodies, once viewed as aesthetic equals to those of white women, began to be regarded as inferior. This transition foreshadows the rise of "proto-racist" ideologies that would shape societal views on beauty, penalizing blackness and promoting an ideal of thinness in white bodies.

In conclusion, Chapter 1 of "Fearing the Black Body" critically explores the intricate interplay between art, race, and the evolving standards of beauty



during the Renaissance. It highlights how these concepts were influenced by the socio-political climate of the time, revealing the deep-rooted complexities surrounding race and representation.

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Chapter 2 Summary: 2. Plump Women and Thin, Fine Men

Summary of "Plump Women and Thin, Fine Men"

The Aesthetic of Rubens

The celebrated late Renaissance artist Peter Paul Rubens is renowned for his depiction of voluptuous women, whose bodies are often dubbed "Rubenesque." His artwork encapsulates a celebration of curvaceous figures, predominantly featuring white women, reflecting prevailing standards of beauty tied to skin tone.

Historical Context

In the seventeenth century, the expansion of the slave trade fostered a societal discomfort around black individuals, leading to the emergence of a "proto-racist" discourse. This narrative framed blackness negatively, associating it with unattractiveness and hypersexuality, directly opposing the idealization of white women as embodiments of purity and chastity.

Changing Perceptions of Masculinity

As the appreciation for voluptuous women grew, so too did the societal preference for thinness in men. There emerged an association between slimness and intelligence, presenting a stark contrast to the voluptuous ideal



celebrated in women. This shift emphasized the evolving standards for male beauty, where fatness was increasingly linked to irrationality.

Rubens' Life and Artistic Influences

Rubens, born in Germany in 1577, navigated a challenging childhood marked by his family's flight from religious persecution. His exposure to Mannerism, combined with his esteemed role as a court painter, influenced his artistic direction, allowing him to express a deep fascination for feminine beauty and the celebration of women's bodies in his artwork.

The Impact of Slave Trade on Artistic Representations

The flourishing of the slave trade further entrenched cultural shifts in art, leading to the negative portrayal of black women in comparison to their white counterparts. Works by Rubens, such as "The Four Rivers of Paradise" and "Venus in Front of the Mirror," reveal a contrasting depiction of black women, often reflecting their assumed social inferiority.

Cultural Significance of Whiteness

Whiteness began to signify beauty and social superiority, particularly in England, its allure intensifying after the Elizabethan era. This cultural fascination contributed to the institutionalization of beliefs associating blackness with unattractiveness, demonstrating the broader societal prejudices of the time.



Medical Discourse and Views on Fatness

With the increasing availability of sugar due to the slave trade, a rise in obesity occurred, leading the medical community to associate it unfavorably with moral decay and poor character. Notable thinkers like Descartes posited that physical appearance correlated with intellectual ability, reinforcing societal biases about body image.

Shift in Artistic Representation of Women

The late Renaissance's representations of black women shifted toward a more derogatory view in the seventeenth century, where they were portrayed as "little, low, and foul." While Rubens initially celebrated fuller figures, the prevailing societal sentiments gradually distorted the representation of women across racial lines.

Conclusion: Evolving Racial Ideologies

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, evolving ideas about race significantly influenced perceptions of beauty, leading to a pronounced disparity in how black and white women were depicted and regarded. This shift carried implications for societal norms and cultural values, embedding racial ideologies into the fabric of artistic and social discourse.



Chapter 3 Summary: 3. The Rise of the Big Black Woman

The Rise of the Big Black Woman

François Bernier's Contributions to Race Science

François Bernier, a 17th-century French intellectual, played a pivotal role in the development of race science by categorizing humans based on physical characteristics, particularly skin color. His work emerged during the High Enlightenment, a period marked by significant intellectual and cultural shifts in Europe, coinciding with the height of the transatlantic slave trade, dominated by France and England. Bernier's observations highlighted the importance of physical aesthetics—especially among women—in early racial classifications, focusing on contrasts between Europeans and diverse non-European groups, particularly those from Asia and Africa.

Bernier's Journey and Theoretical Developments

Educated in Paris and later earning a medical degree from the University of Montpellier, Bernier's career included serving as a physician to Indian princes. His travelogue, "Travels in the Mogul Empire," was groundbreaking

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for incorporating racial distinctions based on skin color—an approach relatively new among Enlightenment thinkers. In his writings, he identified various ethnic groups, including Arabs, Indians, and different African peoples, laying the groundwork for future racial theories.

The Impact of Slavery Debates

Upon Bernier's return to France, discussions surrounding slavery intensified, influenced by the Code Noir, which governed colonial practices while maintaining purported freedoms in France. This contradiction between condemning slavery domestically and supporting it abroad fueled debates on inherent racial differences. Although Bernier personally opposed slavery, his theories inadvertently contributed to a hierarchy that positioned whites as superior to blacks, intertwining ethical discussions with racial classifications.

Bernier's Racial Theories and the Aesthetic of Women

Bernier proposed that physical features were foundational to understanding humanity, asserting that biological distinctions were evident across races. He used skin color as a criterion for assessing beauty and desirability, reinforcing prevailing European beauty ideals. His observations on the



physical traits of women from various backgrounds often conformed to Eurocentric standards, perpetuating stereotypes about black women while acknowledging the beauty of certain African women through a biased lens.

Subsequent Developments in Race Science

Bernier's concepts influenced later scholars, including Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, who expanded upon the idea of race. Buffon argued that despite a common ancestry, significant physical differences existed among races, with skin color being particularly crucial. His writings perpetuated the notion that physical appearance correlated with mental qualities, laying a foundation for justifications of slavery based on perceived racial inferiority.

The Case of Sara Baartman and Racial Embodiment

Sara Baartman, known as the "Hottentot Venus," became a symbolic figure at the intersection of race, gender, and body politics. Her exhibition in Europe brought attention to the fetishization of black female bodies and the stereotypes surrounding black femininity. This commodification highlighted how bodily characteristics were racialized, casting black women as exotic and excessive, while concurrently reinforcing harmful ideas of inferiority.



Conclusion: The Legacy of Racial Discourse

The evolution of racial theories and narratives surrounding black bodies illustrates the complex interplay between aesthetics, race, and gender in shaping societal perceptions. The enduring preoccupation with physical traits—especially those deviating from European norms—contributed to established racial hierarchies, fostering notions of superiority and inferiority with profound ramifications for cultural and social dynamics surrounding race. The legacies of these ideas continue to inform contemporary discussions on race and identity.

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Chapter 4: 4. Birth of the Ascetic Aesthetic

Birth of the Ascetic Aesthetic

Changing Social Landscape in England

In early eighteenth-century England, societal values began to shift as concerns over moral decay intensified. This period, referred to as the long eighteenth century (approximately 1680 to 1815), highlighted growing anxieties regarding the excesses associated with the consumption of sugar and caffeine. As these indulgences became synonymous with vice, influential philosophers and religious leaders sought to redefine acceptable behavior and aesthetic ideals, giving rise to new "standards of taste."

New Standards of Behavior and Beauty

The evolving etiquette of the time emphasized moderation, particularly regarding women's appetites. This cultural change framed slender figures as symbols of refinement and virtue, thus positioning English women as ideals of delicacy. In contrast, gluttony and obesity began to be associated with negative racial stereotypes, particularly concerning African women. Such developments indicated a profound societal fear of being perceived as uncultivated or connected to those deemed "Other."



The Role of George Cheyne

In this milieu, the medical practitioner George Cheyne gained prominence by addressing the health concerns of the affluent related to overindulgence. After suffering health issues tied to obesity, Cheyne adopted a strict vegetarian diet and encouraged similar lifestyle adjustments among his upper-class patients, particularly women. His teachings linked physical health with moral integrity, reflecting the era's newly emerging values.

Cultural Origins and Ideological Foundations

Cheyne's advocacy for temperance and restraint drew heavily from sixteenth-century Puritan ideals that condemned excess. During this period, the dissemination of these principles coincided with a cultural transformation, where shifts in aesthetic values and perceptions of health intersected with emerging racial hierarchies influencing standards of beauty.

Influence of Literature and Periodicals

Influential periodicals like *The Spectator* provided moral instruction on diet and manners, addressing men's concerns over their own excesses while critiquing women's growing corpulence. These publications reinforced the cultural narrative that pressured women to maintain a slim physique,

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illustrating the societal imperative to conform to these new ideals.

Emergence of New Ascetic Aesthetic

By the mid-eighteenth century, these shifts culminated in women internalizing preferences for slenderness—a trend that found expression in the art of the time. Prominent artist Thomas Gainsborough, for instance, depicted women with delicate, slender forms, thereby cementing the ascetic aesthetic as the prevailing standard of beauty.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Observations

The reflections of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, a notable figure of this era, highlighted the disparities between English and foreign beauty standards. She praised the voluptuousness of Turkish women, while simultaneously critiquing the corpulence of English aristocratic women, further underscoring the evolving beauty ideals that increasingly aligned slenderness with refinement and virtue.

Culmination of Aesthetic Ideals

By Gainsborough's time, the slender ideal was firmly established as the standard of feminine beauty in England. This aesthetic would only evolve further into the nineteenth century, promoting a celebration of slenderness



among women who identified with "Anglo-Saxon" heritage. The emergence of the ascetic aesthetic not only shaped notions of beauty but also reinforced dietary discipline, moral virtue, and racialized concepts of propriety, laying the groundwork for future beauty standards.

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Chapter 5 Summary: 5. American Beauty: The Reign of the Slender Aesthetic

American Beauty: The Reign of the Slender Aesthetic

Introduction to Sarah Josepha Buell Hale

Born in 1788 in Newport, New Hampshire, Sarah Josepha Buell Hale was shaped by the educational limitations imposed on women in her era. Despite these constraints, she emerged as a pivotal advocate for girls' education, intertwining her beliefs with the ideals of Christian temperance and a slender physique, which were often associated with racial superiority among white Anglo-Saxon Protestant women in 19th-century America.

Historical Context of the Slender Ideal

The slender aesthetic developed in the United States as a composite of Protestant values, racial theories, and societal reactions against waves of immigration. Although some voices critiqued the obsession with extreme thinness, many Americans came to view slender figures as the pinnacle of beauty, particularly among white women, solidifying the notion that a svelte form was synonymous with virtue and desirability.

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Hale's Literary Contributions

After marrying lawyer David Hale, Sarah rose to prominence as an author and educator. She became well-known for her children's poetry, notably "Mary Had a Little Lamb." As the editor of *Ladies' Magazine*, Hale aimed to elevate women's education and literary engagement, even while feeling compelled to include fashion-related content, reflecting the societal expectations of her time.

Cultural Reflections on Women's Conduct

Under Hale's guidance, *Ladies' Magazine* championed temperate living as a moral imperative for women. The era was marked by campaigns promoting dietary moderation as a means to protect women's health and uphold their virtue, reinforcing the notion that women were the moral compass of society.

Protestant Reforms and Women's Roles

The early 19th century witnessed the Second Great Awakening and the temperance movement, during which women emerged as crucial moral advocates. Hale leveraged her editorial influence to promote dietary reform and temperance, closely linking these concepts with perceived racial superiority, thus positioning women as guardians of both morality and

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ethnicity.

Emergence of the "American Beauty" Ideal

As Hale's *Godey's Lady's Book* gained traction, it heralded a new beauty standard, primarily defined by slender, Anglo-Saxon women. The magazine published articles that extolled delicate features and derided heavier physiques, intertwining aesthetics with moral and racial superiority, thereby shaping a narrow definition of beauty.

Influence of Fashion Magazines

The culture of fashion magazines evolved, and with *Godey's* as well as newer outlets like *Harper's Bazar*, the emphasis on slenderness in beauty standards intensified for white women. These publications not only showcased beauty ideals but also reflected the prevailing cultural aspirations, identity politics, and emerging racial ideologies of the time.

Racial Dynamics in Beauty Standards

Conversations about beauty became increasingly entangled with race, promoting thinness as the ideal while enforcing a homogeneous racial standard. The contrasting perceptions of Irish bodies—often viewed disparagingly—versus the revered Anglo-Saxon aesthetic highlighted the

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prevailing socio-political dynamics rooted in racial hierarchies.

Conclusion: The Transformation of Beauty Ideals

By the late 19th century, beauty standards had transformed, amalgamating concepts of race and class. The integration of Celtic immigrants into the broader framework of accepted whiteness marked a significant shift, resulting in a singular beauty ideal that embodied both societal aspirations and racial dominance within American culture. This transformation illustrates the complexities behind beauty norms and their deep connections to social identity and power structures in American society.

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Chapter 6 Summary: 6. Thinness as American Exceptionalism

Thinness as American Exceptionalism

Introduction to Elizabeth Bisland

Elizabeth Bisland was born in 1861 into an affluent family in Louisiana. Despite the upheaval brought by the Civil War, she developed a passion for writing. Bisland emerged as a prominent literary figure, contributing to influential publications of her time. Her work often highlighted the ideals of beauty among white American women and engaged with the racial theories prevalent in her society.

Cultural Notions of Female Beauty

In the late 19th century, the standards of female beauty heavily favored thinness, linking it to broader racial and cultural narratives. Bisland and her contemporaries argued that the beauty of American women was a reflection of their Anglo-Saxon and Celtic heritages, fostering notions of racial superiority based on Nordic and Aryan characteristics.

Impact of Immigration on Beauty Ideals

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As immigration patterns shifted, particularly with the influx of Celtic Irish and other European groups, perceptions of beauty began to evolve. The increasing presence of southern and eastern Europeans began to challenge existing ideals, but the standard of thinness emerged as a powerful emblem of American identity, signaling confidence and modernity.

Elizabeth Bisland's Early Life

The Civil War disrupted Bisland's childhood, prompting her to pursue writing to support her family. Her journalistic endeavors flourished in New Orleans and later in New York, where she became influential in shaping the media narratives surrounding female beauty and societal expectations.

Publication Influence

During a period of significant racial ideologies, Bisland's articles in **Cosmopolitan** framed beauty as intrinsically linked to Northern European ancestry. She frequently emphasized traits such as height and slimness, which became markers of desirability in American culture.

Racial Theories and Supremacy

The belief in the superiority of northern and western Europeans was rooted

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in earlier racial theories, including those proposed by Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, which established a hierarchy that diminished the value of non-Aryan races. These ideas played a critical role in formulating a new social order in America that privileged certain racial characteristics.

Eugenics and Slimness

The rise of eugenics provided a 'scientific' framework to support ideas of racial superiority. This movement reinforced societal norms that equated thinness with health and marital desirability, claiming that only those deemed 'fit' should reproduce, thereby intertwining physical appearance with genetic fitness.

Growing Anxiety Over Southern and Eastern European Immigration

As immigration centered on southern and eastern Europeans, societal anxieties about perceived inferiority intensified. These groups were frequently associated with obesity and deemed less desirable, thus reinforcing their lower status within the established racial hierarchy.

The Idealized American Beauty: The Gibson Girl

By the early 20th century, the Gibson Girl emerged as the quintessential image of American beauty: tall, slender, and of diverse Northern European

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descent. This archetype was widely celebrated in media and served as a symbol of American exceptionalism, encapsulating societal aspirations and standards of beauty.

Conclusion

Thinness became a defining ideal of American exceptionalism, intricately linked to race, class, and media representations. This cultural narrative was shaped and reshaped in response to changing demographics and immigration trends, marking a pivotal moment in the history of American beauty standards. Bisland's contributions reflect the broader societal constructs that promoted thinness as not just a personal preference, but a marker of national identity.

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Chapter 7 Summary: 7. Good Health to Uplift the Race

Chapter 7: Good Health to Uplift the Race

In this chapter, we explore the influential figure of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, who played a crucial role in American health reform and the promotion of vegetarianism within his Seventh-day Adventist community. Kellogg's beliefs centered on the idea that improving diet could enhance the health of particularly vulnerable demographics, notably young women, and ultimately contribute to the preservation of the Anglo-Saxon race. This notion reflected broader societal concerns about health and racial integrity prevalent in the era.

Kellogg's journey into health reform was deeply influenced by his family's struggles and his exposure to ineffective medical treatments during his youth. Growing up in a devout religious setting, he became immersed in the Second Great Awakening, a significant cultural movement that encouraged the transformation of dietary habits as part of a moral and racial uplift. He was inspired by health reformers like Dr. George Cheyne and Sylvester Graham, who advocated for dietary moderation and vegetarianism, further guiding Kellogg's ambitions in health and wellness.

After earning his medical degree, Kellogg took charge of the Battle Creek

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Sanitarium, a facility dedicated to holistic health practices. Here, he pioneered a health regimen that revolved around vegetarianism and hydrotherapy (the treatment of illness through water), creating products like granola and cornflakes. Kellogg posited that a clean diet and adequate hydration were essential to preventing disease, although his revolutionary ideas met skepticism from the established medical community.

Despite his popularity and success, Kellogg encountered significant challenges. His unconventional practices drew criticism not only from medical peers but also from church leadership, leading to a lengthy defense against accusations of ethical breaches within his medical practice. His advocacy of eugenics further complicated his legacy, as it revealed a troubling racial hierarchy that prioritized Anglo-Saxon health and well-being over that of other groups.

Kellogg's philosophies culminated in his book "Ladies' Guide in Health and Disease." This publication specifically targeted Anglo-Saxon women, as he believed their often excessive thinness posed a danger to the perceived health integrity of their race. In this work, he advocated for a diet abundant in fruits and grains, reflecting contemporary eugenics that linked body size with the overall well-being of the race.

As time progressed, while certain aspects of Kellogg's methods gained traction within mainstream medicine, his popularity began to wane, largely

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due to changing economic conditions and the effects of the Great Depression, which ultimately led to the closure of the sanitarium in 1938. Kellogg's vision for a health-centric, racially uplifted community was not sustainable, underscoring the complex interplay of health, race, and gender dynamics in American society during his lifetime.

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Chapter 8: 8. Fat, Revisited

Fat Revisited

Introduction to Morris Fishbein's Book

Morris Fishbein's **Your Weight and How to Control It**, co-edited in 1927, reflects a complex understanding of weight management. The book critiques the unrealistic ideals of ultra-thin femininity while simultaneously expressing concern over obesity, cementing weight control as a significant public health concern. The introduction by Wendell C. Phillips captures the dual dangers of both underweight and overweight, foreshadowing a societal struggle with body image that ensues in later decades.

The Concept of Normal Weight and Insurance Influence

The idea of "normal weight" began to take shape in the early 20th century as health insurance companies analyzed data, primarily derived from middle-class white men, to establish weight-to-height ratios. With the contributions of statistician Louis Israel Dublin, these analyses created medico-actuarial standards that associated obesity with various health risks, thereby influencing medical perspectives on body weight.

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Emergence of Height and Weight Tables

In collaboration with his colleagues at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, Dublin developed a standard table outlining ideal height and weight ratios. This table asserted that being overweight might be acceptable until the age of 35, after which it posed health risks. The tables gained prominence within the medical field, leading to a neglect of concerns related to underweight individuals and shifting the focus significantly toward managing excess weight.

Dynamic Shift in Medical Literature

Throughout the 1920s, there was a notable shift in medical literature regarding body weight, moving from concerns about thinness to heightened scrutiny of obesity. This change ushered in a growing awareness of obesity as a serious health issue, especially among women, creating an environment where weight control became an urgent concern.

Historical Tension Between Slimness and Fatness

Initially, medical narratives linked thinness with illness. However, by the late 1910s, a critique of fatness emerged, with health authorities warning that obesity could lead to chronic diseases. Lulu Hunt Peters' best-selling weight-loss book characterized fatness as a "disease," which fueled

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increasing medical and societal anxiety about body size and further stigmatized excess weight.

Societal Pressures and Fashion Influence

The conversation around ideal body weight began to incorporate the influence of fashion, with Dr. Elliott Joslin noting that societal norms heavily dictated perceptions of acceptable weight. This era witnessed the portrayal of slenderness as synonymous with health, a sentiment that conflicted with the views of some physicians who advocated for a more nuanced understanding of body types.

Racial and Ethnic Considerations in Medical Discourse

Health discussions concerning obesity often ignored racial and ethnic minorities, with the medical literature frequently targeting immigrant communities. This oversight linked excess weight to notions of racial inferiority, revealing a disturbing intersection of race, health, and societal values.

Changing Focus on Minority Health

In the late 20th century, there was a gradual shift towards addressing the health disparities faced by racial and ethnic minorities. However, these

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efforts often emphasized individual responsibility for health, inadvertently supporting biases related to body size among different racial groups rather than tackling the systemic factors at play.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates the intricate relationship between societal perceptions of obesity, femininity, and race, as well as the influence of medical standards throughout history. The evolving discourse surrounding fatness highlights a complex web of cultural anxieties, medical mystique, and socio-political dynamics that continue to shape contemporary understanding of women's health and body image.

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