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The Calvin Klein Stretch Jeans ad featuring Foxy Brown, the well known African American female rapper of the mid to late 90's, provides any who come across it with a number of blunt images. It's interesting to note, through the portrayal of Brown, the many social and economic issues that the ad brings to mind. From her positioning on all fours, to the shape of her dark black body, Calvin Klein uses all aspects of Foxy Brown's unique character and looks to the fullest in order to sell their jeans.

This being a jeans ad, it is no surprise where the makers of the ad, Calvin Klein, chose to place the primary focus. This focus lies on Brown's rear end, evidenced by not only the placement of the Calvin Klein logo, but also her overall positioning in the ad. On all fours (which possibly has other meanings in itself), with her back curved slightly, Brown's rear end is only subordinate to her head in the photo. Her butt is slightly off center due to the length of her body on all fours, but the creators make up for this lack of focus on her rear end by stamping the Calvin Klein logo directly onto it. The Calvin Klein logo, though large and placed halfway on top of Brown's behind, does not distract at all from the overall image of the jeans flowing over Brown's curvy rear end and legs. If anything it magnifies that image. The C in "CK" is positioned perfectly so that the upper curve in the C flows with the curve of Brown's rear end, while the "Calvin" in "Calvin Klein Jeans" runs directly through the same area. Calvin Klein

uses Foxy as the initial attention-grabber, but then quickly makes an effort to revert that attention to what is *really* important, their jeans.

Foxy Brown plays a number of roles in this jean ad, and one of the more important of these roles is her job as the aforementioned attention grabber. Calvin Klein makes interesting use of Brown's body and even her ethnicity in accomplishing this task. As mentioned, her position on all fours is not solely meant to accentuate her butt and the fit of the jeans on it, but more importantly to bring attention to the ad. "The protruding butt is seen as an indication of a heightened sexuality" (Hooks 289). What better way to attract an audience than to place a sexually excited female in the photo? The highly sexual pose Foxy Brown is placed in is not secretive; in fact, it's the center of the attention. Brown is on her hands and knees, a highly animalistic pose. She wears nothing other than a black bikini top and, of course, the Calvin Klein Jeans. Her hair is loose and untamed, and her left arm (the arm that can be seen by the person viewing the ad) sports a black tattoo wrapped around her bicep. This pose is the perfect fit for what Mireille Miller-Young, Assistance Professor of Women's Studies at the University of California, calls "the globalization of Black women's bodies as currencies of desire and disgust, economy and resistance" (par. 3). Calvin Klein uses this image and representation of black females to their advantage in the ad. Brown is placed as seductively, submissively, and desirably as Calvin Klein can while still maintaining that the jeans are what are being sold, not Foxy Brown. They position her on her hands and knees, with a blank seductive stare aimed at the viewer. This submissive yet seductive pose is what draws in the person's gaze and overall interest. This is not a natural scene, and therefore it becomes an object of amazement.

At first glance, one might question what advantages Calvin Klein gains in selling their jeans by making their model look like a submissive, tramp-like figure. Would a woman honestly

want to look like that? Klein fights off this notion in a number of ways. On each of her wrists, Brown wears a thick, diamond-laced bracelet. They make sure each bracelet is able to be seen. The background is also very important here. While Brown's initial get-up may seem trashy, her location definitely does not. She is knelt in front of a large sliding glass door leading to a balcony. The balcony oversees what looks to be a small city. The view is definitely easy on the eyes. The room she is in seems fairly high class itself, with dark red carpeting, glass balcony doors, and white hanging curtains. The contrast, though not so evident at first, should be obvious now. Calvin Klein combats the trashy connotation that may be associated with their jeans (from the positioning of Brown they used to attract viewers in the first place) with looks of glamour and riches. Foxy Brown herself is known for these things, so even her mere presence as the model helps. This relationship between sexual freedom and glamour is what Calvin Klein feeds off of in this case. They make being rich *and* sexy not only an idea, but a reality. In a way, they take the sexual deviance vibe that Brown emanates and make it okay and acceptable.

The contrast of glamour and sexual openness that Calvin Klein uses in their ad should not be viewed as a contradiction, but more so as the righting of a wrong. African American feminist Reverend Irene Monroe has talked extensively about the silence black women have taken toward their bodies and sexuality due to centuries of exploitation during slavery (5). "Consequently," she says, "African American woman's humanity is distorted and made invisible through a prism of racist and sexist stereotypes. So too is our suffering" (Monroe 5). Calvin Klein uses this same stereotypical representation of black women and their bodies to grab attention for the ad, but at the same time works to correct that stereotype. Although initial interest in the ad may be grabbed by the sexy submissive black woman, Klein realizes women will probably not desire to look whorish or tramp-like. So they insert the images of glamour into the picture, as if to say, wait a

minute, she's no whore – she's just a woman comfortable with her sexuality, and not afraid to submit to her sexual desire, or for that matter, be the one who is sexually desirable. Black or white, this image is successful in that it takes away the either/or belief (you're either a whore or a prude) and presents the consumer with a comfortable in-between. One can still be a good person, and remain sexy.

The glamour allows Klein to pull this off because we do not normally associate such things with tramps. Although Calvin Klein is using the representation of black female sexuality to gain attention, they try to avoid having that same representation associated with people who wear their jeans. It's clearly a dangerous idea. By publishing the ad, they take the risk that women will associate their jeans with trashiness, but that's not their point here. As mentioned, the true idea is to help a woman feel glamorous yet at the same time look and feel sexually available and attractive. The ad uses the trashy image to attract interest, but then corrects that wrong connotation by pointing out that in reality, this woman is far from trash. Once the attention is seized, the ad itself goes to work. Selling the jeans becomes the primary focus once again.

Calvin Klein further pushes the idea that Brown is not being represented as some sort of hooker by almost making the scene into an obvious photo shoot. Again, they want the jeans to be associated with sexiness, not trashiness or with the stereotypical representations of black female sexuality we mentioned earlier. So Foxy Brown is shown with her head turned toward the camera, eyes staring blankly yet proudly into it. She is aware she is being photographed. Perhaps going along with this is the strangely lit green sky in the balcony view described earlier. The entire outside background is tinted by this greenish lighting. The coloring is clearly not natural, which is important in this case. This is not a natural setting. The viewer is made aware that this

isn't a real scene. Strange, but it's the route Klein has to take to avoid associations of their jeans with the image they used to attract us to the ad in the first place. Knowing this is a photo shoot, and knowing Foxy was purposefully placed in this pose is important to the realization once again that the jeans are the most important item in the ad. *They* are what are on display. The model is there to show them off.

What is more interesting than the way Foxy Brown is used to attract viewers is the way in which she is used to sell the Calvin Klein Jeans themselves. It may seem racy at first, but Calvin Klein uses Foxy to her full potential in this ad. Everything from the positioning of her hands to the curvature of her back and butt point to the makers' awareness of Brown's best attributes. There are certain obvious points that they so blatantly put the focus on. The most important of which is Brown's rear end and thighs, which the stretch jeans tightly yet comfortably are pulled over and are covering. When Adrienne Maree Brown talks about her experiences as a young African American girl, she mentions the "love that many in the black community have for 'Thick Sistas'" (16). It is not uncommon for stereotypes to develop that refer to black women as "stacked" and "thick" due to features such as their breasts or butts that are known to be naturally larger than their white counterparts (Brown 16). Calvin Klein is clearly aware of this, and uses Foxy's most prominent feature, her behind, to show off those jeans. As noted, her behind is the center of attention, and it is the perfect tool for showing not only the fit of the jeans, but their stretch abilities. Using a black model to show off the jeans can be seen as a type of reassurance for consumers. The most important qualities of these jeans are their stretch quality (Hence the name Calvin Klein Stretch Jeans). What better way to show them off than on a black body? Knowing the stereotypes we often see in popular culture referring to African American women's

bodies, it's reassuring in that the ad practically says, "If they fit a black woman, they'll fit anything."

There are other advantages in using Brown to model these jeans. Earlier we mentioned that it was important for Calvin Klein to revert the initial focus from the model to the jeans, or at the very least the region in which the jeans occupy. However, some may argue that Klein had to do virtually no work in order for this to happen. As Bell Hooks noted, "In contemporary post-modern fashion sense, the black female is the best medium for the showing of clothes because her image does not detract from the outfit; it is subordinated" (295). Perhaps there is some truth to this statement that black women make great models because of how objectified they are. Whether consciously or subconsciously, if the appearance of the black female is less important than the outfit (in this case the jeans), the attention becomes focused on the jeans themselves, not the model. In this context, the makers of the ad didn't have to do anything other than hire a black model to take the initial attention off of the model and onto the product. The rest of the work is done by the representation of black female bodies in society built up over hundreds of years of history. So although hiring Foxy Brown as the jeans model had its obvious initial advantages, it could also be seen as beneficial in that according to theory and stereotyping, the main gaze of a viewer will not remain on Brown, but on the product. We become focused on the jeans, not the "object" that is showing them off.

The way Calvin Klein chooses to represent Foxy Brown, though it touches on some controversial social ideology, is seemingly flawless. The casual viewer is bombarded by all these images of Brown (part animal, part whore, part slave, part lover, part glamorous feminist), yet there is almost no confusion on the overall message. Yes, the ad does bring up some touchy social and ethnic messages, and yes, the ad even uses some of them to its advantage, but the

message remains clear and to the point: BUY THESE JEANS. This is a reoccurring theme throughout the ad. Chop it up however you like, every single image and use of Foxy Brown eventually directs the attention to one thing, the Calvin Klein Stretch Jeans. Foxy Brown is an extremely efficient model in accomplishing this task.

Works Cited

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