



Black America, Body Beautiful: How the African American Image is Changing Fashion, Fitness, and Other Industries

Eric J. Bailey

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Despite all the medical and media attention focused on the rate of overweight and obesity in the African American population, African American images and body types are greatly influencing changes in the fashion, fitness, advertising, television and movie industries. This is because overweight, like beauty, can be in the eye of the beholder. Most research studies investigating attitudes about body image and body type among African Americans have shown they are more satisfied with their bodies than are their white counterparts and that there appears to be a wider range of acceptable body shapes and weights, and a more flexible standard of attractiveness, among black Americans as compared to whites. That fact is not being lost on leaders of industries that might profit from understanding this wider range of beauty, as well as playing to it. In this book, medical anthropologist Eric Bailey introduces and explains the self-acceptance and body image satisfaction of African Americans, and traces how that has spurred changes in industry. His book fills the void of scientific evidence to enhance the understanding of African Americans' perceptions related to body image and beauty and is the first to document these issues from the perspective of an African American male.


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Voluptuous supermodel Tyra Banks is just one African American who's broken the mold in that industry. The effects have been seen right down to department and local clothes stores, where lines of larger and plus-size fashions are expanding, becoming more colorful and more ornate. In the fitness industry, health gurus Madonna Grimes and Billy Blanks have been revolutionizing how people get fit and how fitness needs to be redeveloped for the African American population. Advertising has taken a similar turn, not the least manifestation of which were the major campaigns Dove and Nike ran in 2005 with plus-sized actresses (who continue to appear in promotions for both companies). In movies and on television shows, the African American beautiful body image has followed suit.

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