

Speaking Through ‘Lard-Slicked Lips’ – Fatness, Racism, and Narratives of Self-Control Encircling the Paula Deen Scandal

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Abstract:

This article represents the efforts of a disciplinarily diverse group of scholars (a pop culture critic, a feminist scholar who works on body image, and a historian who works on issues of race and ethnicity) to decode the multiple nasty turns we saw taken in conversations around Paula Deen scandal. The authors are invested in creating dialogues between our various disciplines in order to determine how and why Deen’s own body came to be used to rebuke her for her remarks, how sizeism came to stand in for a condemnation of racism.

1 Paula Deen is an American celebrity chef, best known for her collection of extensive collection of cookbooks and popular cooking television programs, most notably on the Food Network. Deen’s unique brand of Southern-style cooking began as a small home business in the early 1990s that developed into the popular Savannah, Georgia restaurant, The Lady & Sons. Deen’s high calorie culinary creations were popular with tourists and local residents alike, and her particular type of Southern-style “comfort foods” earned her a significant following. By 2002, she had joined the Food Network with her show *Paula’s Home Cooking*. By 2013, Paula Deen was a well-recognized fixture on American cooking programs, food magazines, and on bookstore shelves. Yet legal troubles involving former staff members put Deen’s eatery empire in jeopardy and brought discourses of race, fatness, and bodies directly in the public eye.

2 In March of 2012 Lisa Jackson filed a lawsuit against Food Network star Paula Deen and her brother, Earl ‘Bubba’ Hiers, accusing them of racial and sexual workplace discrimination. Among the allegations, Deen is said to have made racially offensive comments, including one regarding the desired dress code for servers at her brother’s wedding.

“Well what I would really like is a bunch of little n***ers to wear long-sleeve white shirts, black shorts and black bow ties, you know in the Shirley Temple days, they used to tap dance around,” Jackson claims Deen told her. “Now, that would be a true Southern wedding wouldn’t it? But we can’t do that because the media would be on me about that.” (THR Staff)

Other accusations made in the lawsuit included:

Black staff had to use the back entrance to enter and leave restaurant; Black staff could only use one bathroom; and Black staff couldn't work the front of the restaurants. (Washington, 2013)

Despite the gravity of the allegations, however, it was not until May of this year when Deen admitted to having used the N-word and to being fascinated with the image of a plantation-themed wedding complete with waiters playing the role of slaves in a deposition for the lawsuit that the mainstream media started paying attention to the case (Duke).

3 The consequences for Deen were swift: the Food Network opted not to renew her contract, and companies like Wal-Mart, Target, Home Depot, Sears, Kmart, Walgreens, J. C. Penny, Caesars Entertainment, Novo Nordisk, and Smithfield Hams announced that they would cut ties with her (cf. Gennis and Bhasin). Random House dropped her forthcoming cookbook and canceled her five-year contract (Moskin), and QVC announced that they had “decided to take a pause” from their business relationship with Deen in the wake of the scandal (ABC News).

4 By August, the scandal died down, just in time for the courts to dismiss the racial discrimination case on the grounds that the plaintiff, a white woman, had no standing to sue (Bynum). The sexual harassment portion of the case, likewise, was dismissed with prejudice, and the remains of the lawsuit were finally resolved in a settlement agreement on August 23rd (Severson, "Settlement in Lawsuit Against Paula Deen"). But the damage to the Deen brand was already done.

5 This article represents the efforts of a disciplinarily diverse group of scholars (a pop culture critic, a historian who works on issues of race and ethnicity, and a feminist scholar who works on body image) to decode the multiple nasty turns we saw taken in conversations around Paula Deen scandal. We are invested in combining the perspectives of our various areas of focus to determine how and why Deen's own body came to be used to rebuke her for her remarks, how sizeism came to stand in for a condemnation of racism.

Headline News - With a Side of Fat Jokes

6 One of the things that fascinated us about the unfolding Paula Deen scandal in the media was how the occasion seemingly came to be used as a justification to launch a raft of mean-spirited body-based attacks against the former Food Network chef. Much of this discourse was circulated through social media like Facebook and Twitter. For example, Deen's food became the vehicle through which people lampooned her racial comments via the trending hashtag #PaulasBestDishes (some of the most clever entries included: Ashley

Carter @ashcar: “We Shall Over-Crumb Cake” and Parallel @ParallelRhymes: “Paula Deen’s Whole Grain Whites Only Rice: The South Will Rice Again”).

7 Many mainstream media pieces (even ones coming from sources often labeled as having a liberal bent) deployed such jokes in an apparent attempt to recruit viewers into feeling outraged at Deen. Rather than cultivating empathy with those who were accusing Deen of racial and sexual discrimination, these commentators used cheap othering tactics to paint her as a big, fat villain, literally. That is to say, her villainy and racism, it was implied, arose from her fatness. For example, on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (a late-night comedy program that many young Americans use as their source for news, see Feldman), substitute-host John Oliver’s segment on the scandal opens with a pair of fat jokes:

The N-word? Uh, which one did she use? Because I know it wasn’t ‘non-fat.’ BOOM! Paula Deen is the only chef to receive an A-rating from the American Lard Council. BOOM BOOM! I can do this all night! (“Fried & Prejudice”)

Following a few minutes discussing the allegations against Deen, the fat jokes resume. An image appears of Deen pouring a ladle full of melted butter into a large stock pot. Oliver quips:

Now, now. I know that looks disgusting. But don’t worry. It’s not butter. That’s just Paula Deen’s urine which, to be fair, at this point is about 85% butter. BOOM! I guess what I’m saying is I’m not surprised she was diagnosed with diabetes. I’m surprised they didn’t rename diabetes the Paula Deen Syndrome. (“Fried & Prejudice”)

The segment concludes with Oliver bringing in fellow comedian Jessica Williams, who frames Deen’s racism as a diabetes-esque disease; type I racism, Williams contends, is genetically inherited while type II is a “lifestyle disease” that afflicts those who wallow in racist sentiment. She concludes by stating that Paula Deen might be able to someday recover and live a normal life... that is, “until she chokes on a sausage fritter or drowns in a vat of butter” (“Fried & Prejudice – Paula Deen’s Diagnosis”). All told, John Oliver’s portion of the program spends three minutes and one second discussing the allegations against Deen and two minutes and eleven seconds indulging in fat jokes. Williams’s appearance lasts two minutes and fifty seconds and could be said to be working both angles simultaneously using her diabetes-themed framework to discuss racial relations.

8 Fans of *The Daily Show* will point out that the program is primarily comedic in nature, so jokes at Deen’s expense are to be expected. After all, Deen has long been the target of sizeist jokes. However, by choosing to make so many fat jokes in the wake of this particular story, *TDS* signals to viewers that the primary reason one should dislike Deen is her fat body and not her business practices or her allegedly antiquated and offensive racial

beliefs. To be fair, Oliver does seem to acknowledge that his jokes are nothing more than cheap-shots. The cheesy delivery style, with each joke emphasized with a pantomimed punch and a shouted “BOOM!” suggests that Oliver is aware that he is “punching down” by going after Deen’s weight.

9 Other commentators deployed the same rhetorical stance, lacing discussions of the Deen scandal with numerous asides about her food, her diabetes diagnosis, and her weight. For example, “The Rude Pundit,” a liberal blogger and regular guest on *The Stephanie Miller Show* left-wing radio program, wrote an especially vicious post on the topic. Here are a few choice quotes:

The first time you look at or hear Deen, you know that a racial epithet or two, at least, passed through those lard-slicked lips. [...] The Rude Pundit's basic attitude is ‘Fuck Paula Deen.’ She made a ton of money getting people fat and getting them to believe that eating piles of fattening shit was somehow just fine. This is not to even get into the cultural colonialism of her appropriation of African-American cooking without an acknowledgement of it. Then, after it turned out she had diabetes because of the butter-rich slops she threw in a trough to gorge on, she hid her disease for a couple of years until she signed a deal with a pharmaceutical company. And her TV show was just awful. So, yeah, fuck her. (Rude One)

He even threw in a gratuitous bout of fat-shaming aimed at the (uninvolved) recently deceased: “That revelation [that Deen had used the n-word] is about as surprising as James Gandolfini dying of a heart attack” (Rude One). Richard Lawson at “The Atlantic Wire” (a sister blog to the print magazine *The Atlantic*), on the other hand, kept it short and (none too) sweet, referring to Deen as a “grease being.”

10 Melissa Harris-Perry of MSNBC’s *The Melissa Harris-Perry Show*, normally a serious and thoughtful news personality, began her segment on Deen with a re-cap of Deen’s nutritional sins.

We thought we’d had our fill of delicious drama from television’s number one pusher of all things artery-clogging back when we found out that first ugly truth. You remember that while she was stuffing us full of fatty food, she was stuffing her pockets with money as a spokesperson for a diabetes drug maker. Oh, and keeping quiet for three years about her own diabetes. But what was a little questionable integrity amongst friends when Paula was still showing us Southern-style love with those delicious, no-calorie-spared home-cooked meals, mmm-hmmm? (NewsPoliticsInfo)

Meanwhile Alexandra Le Tellier described Deen’s racist speech as “toxic baloney” in a piece called “Paula Deen is Still Trying to Poison Us” written for the *Los Angeles Times*:

For years, Southern chef Paula Deen shamelessly built an audience around high-fat, high-calorie recipes. Never mind the burgeoning obesity epidemic responsible for an

increase in such killers as heart disease and diabetes. She was encouraging sticks of butter and celebrating all the way to the bank. It was unconscionable. (Le Tellier)

Even some of Deen's defenders jumped on the chance to shame her for being a peddler of fatty delights. In a piece titled 'Forgive Deen for Epithet, But Not Butter' featured in *USA Today*, DeWayne Wickham argued that, between using racial slurs and 'pushing fatty foods,' Deen culinary choices were "her real crime":

Paula Deen's foul mouth should have gotten her sacked long before now. If bad talk really matters to the folks who run the Food Network, it shouldn't have taken the leaking of a deposition, in which Deen admits having uttered the n-word in private conversations, to kick the celebrity cook off of TV. Her repeated use of the word "butter" should have gotten her fired long ago.... I'm willing to give Deen a pass on something she confessed to saying years ago. What I have a problem with is not the racist talk for which she has apologized. It's her years of hawking of unhealthy eating—such as her recipe for two glazed doughnuts wrapped around a cheeseburger patty. That should have pushed Food Network executives to give her the boot before her n-word scandal broke. (Wickham)

11 These commentators ironically use one type of hateful rhetoric to recruit viewers and readers into condemning another. Were they so afraid that an apathetic population would remain unmoved by accusations of racism and sexism that they felt the need to recruit their audience by playing into fat hatred? Or did they simply detect that their audiences would be glad to hear that Deen had made such politically incorrect comments so that they could have an excuse to pillory her for the sin of being an unapologetic fat woman in public? As a chef and a celebrity notoriously known for her size, perhaps some references to her food and her body are to be expected. But the stark opposition between the messages delivered in these commentaries and the form those messages take strike us as bizarre. Deen is said to be worthy of scorn because she judged other people based on what they look like, yet that scorn *itself* takes the form of attacks on her looks.

Body Discipline: Thinnes as Control

12 The above accounts of the Deen debacle require audience complicity in an recognizing and acknowledging Deen as fat in order to get the joke's punch line. As the butt of a joke, *fat* identifies a specific bodily feature as not simply flawed but further as discursively policeable. Like *queer*, *dyke*, *slut*, and a host of other words, *fat* can be used as a description of the body or bodily activities that operates to shame, silence, and negate the ethos of whomever it describes by marking that person as somehow Other than the imagined social ideal.

13 Many of the storylines described above further imply that the cause of Deen's problems is her fatness and dietary choices rather than her management of the workplaces she owns. This shift in focus from workplace management to dietary management illuminates the many social values connoted in the binary fatness/thinness. Thinness is commonly associated not only with beauty but with control, discipline, and the hard work of achieving and maintaining a thin body, one that has been "marked by the self's repeated discipline" (Kent 131). Fatness, then, is the visible stigma not only of the failure to meet a beauty ideal or standard but of the failure to master or even meet several otherwise unseen social values we see as made visible and legible on the thin body.

14 Control, in this case, is not only of one's body size or shape but of one's appetite, which consistently appears as a stand-in for temptation in the metaphors we live by. Consider Susan Bordo's descriptions of chocolate commercials that describe their products as "sinful" or yogurt commercials that use a rhetoric of "being good" to describe making food choices that will supposedly lead to thinness (128-129). Blaming Deen's fatness for her follies links her fatness to a number of choices for which she is currently being condemned, from her language use to her workplace management. Discussions, and particularly condemnations, of Deen seem to list being fat as both a part of her history of wrongdoing and as further visual evidence of such wrong – something others can see written on her very body to speak for her character.

Avoidant Behavior: Substituting Individual Failures for Accounts of Structural Racism

15 Ultimately, we see two processes at work here in the discussion of Paula Deen. First, Paula Deen's racist actions are seen as understandable, predictable even, because of her relationship to fattening foods, which are seen as out of control. As a result, she is seen as lacking discipline over her physical desires, a fact which is then linked directly to her racist sentiments. Ultimately, Deen's lack of discipline means that she is unable to control both her own weight/appetites and her own internalized racist thoughts.

16 This lends itself to the second process: namely, the disavowal of structural racism through liberal discourses of individual irrationality. Focusing on Paula Deen's actions as proof positive of "authentic" racist sentiment, pundits have managed to inscribe Paula Deen as an ancient relic whose actions are out of step with contemporary American society (see Stoler). Such a view, however, reinforces the notion that racism exists only in flagrant verbal displays, like Deen's use of the n-word. As blogger and essayist Chauncey de Vega argued,

Paula Deen's transparent and guileless racism is also a tool and object of national catharsis. Institutional racism remains a significant problem in post civil rights America. Those who embody "old fashioned racism" like Paula Deen can be condemned as a means for the (White) body politic to bathe in the self-congratulatory rays of just how "far" we/they have come. By suggesting that Paula Deen is a social and political dinosaur, one best fit for the dustbin of America's racial past, colorblind racism of the present is overlooked--if not nurtured. (de Vega)

These two processes are interlinked. As Deen's racist speech is interpreted as a form of individual malfeasance, divorced from larger circulations of racism in the United States, it is also justified through her lack of self-discipline. In this formulation, Deen's actions are read--on a social and personal level--as individual failings through her failure to control what goes into or comes out of her mouth. The subsequent public scapegoating of Deen is imbricated in a form of social shaming. The body policing of Deen's supposedly uncontrolled eating is reinforced by the mass judgment of her inappropriate statements. The solution offered for Deen's transgressions, then, is a form of social shunning; in place of her lack of self-control, public response instead becomes a means of enacting control over her body.

17 While Deen's words should and have been judged harshly, the way in which this judgment has occurred, has been inextricably linked to fat-shaming, body policing, and control. Deen is thus rendered as an unchecked menace due to her inability to limit her consumption of food or production of injurious speech. The discourse also marks her as a threat to an imagined post-racial order. She therefore must be eliminated, lest institutional forms of racism be more critically observed. The scapegoating of Paula Deen for her lack of bodily discipline is, at its heart, also deeply bound up in ideas of individual responsibility that ignore larger structural ways in which racism (or obesity, for that matter) occurs (cf. *WeAreTheSavageNation*).

18 In her work on nineteenth-century American literature, theorist Kyla Wazana Tompkins has argued that "eating reveals the self to be reliant upon that which is beyond its epidermal limits" (3). The dependency of the body upon eating is referenced through social taboos of shaming and restraint in ways that can resemble social responses to racist speech. Thus, the evocation of Deen's fatness allows commentators (and, by extension, their viewers and readers) to pat themselves on the back for their own self-discipline in addition to condemning Deen for her (supposed) lack of discipline. As noted above, fatness is associated with temptation, something we might succumb to if we are incautious. And racism is often constructed as a personal failing on the part of individuals and not as what it actually is: an

institutional exercise of power. What if we were to combine these two observations to help explain our case study on the rhetoric used to describe the Paula Deen scandal?

19 The self-congratulatory rhetoric deployed by commentators writing and speaking about Deen suggests that, like fat, racism is something that is sometimes constructed as secretly tempting even as it is seen as something shameful; something that must be actively resisted because of its delightful naughtiness; something that readers and viewers can be proud of eschewing (as opposed to the bare minimum standard of decent behavior). It is constructed as an impulse that must constantly be fought and yet, perversely, it is also occasionally admired in those who are imagined as “brave” enough to display it unabashedly. Take, for example, the accolades we give to comedians who claim to be rebelling against the constraints of “political correctness” when they tell racist and sexist jokes. Their defenders praise them for “telling it like it is” in the face of censorious “political correctness” (Favreau 212).

20 By combining fat jokes with coverage of Deen’s racist follies, are these commentators protesting too much? They emphatically distinguish (and ultimately enable their audiences to imagine) themselves as the type who are disciplined in the face of temptation. But they simultaneously expose an urge to indulge in the kind of racism that Deen was caught engaging in, just as they might occasionally sin (so to speak) with one of Deen’s full-fat meals (but only when no one is looking, of course).

The Southern Connection: Racialized Labor and Southern Cuisine

21 In these discussions of Deen, there is an implied connection between Southernness, fatness, and racism that needs teasing out. Take for example, the claim by The Rude Pundit that, “you know that a racial epithet or two, at least, passed through those lard-slicked lips.” If, as the blogger suggests, this is an observation based on looking at or hearing Deen alone, we have a few potential visible and audible pieces of evidence at hand to come to this conclusion: gender, age, clothing and hairstyle, body shape, accent, and potentially dialect and figures of speech.

22 It would be easy for people to jump to presumptions that Deen is or has been outwardly, verbally racist based on her visible age, interpreted socio-economic class (clothes, speech patterns, the fact that she has a television show), and the fact that she is Southern – a potential social and political dinosaur. The most concretely detailed, visceral, and memorable portion of this claim, however, is the speaker’s description of “those lard-slicked lips,” which forcibly takes the focus off Deen’s age, class, or other characteristics that people frequently

use to understand, explain, and even excuse an individual's racism (again, finding ways to blame individuals rather than acknowledging racism as institutional). This visceral description calls attention not just to Deen's body and diet in its mention of lard but directly ties her body and diet to a lack of control over not only what goes in, but what comes out of her mouth. We can purportedly know, just by looking at her, that racial epithets have passed through her mouth because they can pass easily through "lard-slicked lips." It is what she has taken in her mouth that makes her speech so slippery.

23 While her "lard slicked lips" indicate greed and lack of control, they are also a form of cultural positioning that particularly marks Deen as Southern (as lard is a cooking fat that is strongly associated with Southern cuisine, see Ozersky) and other from "normal" American discourse. This othering implicitly grounds Deen in a Southern past, a spatial and temporal boundary ahistorically cast as the unique repository of antiquated racial animus. To do so serves liberal discourses of progress that position racism as an individual failing and obscures continuing structural discrimination in a supposedly postracial era.

24 Yet the lard on Deen's lips signifies a different type of historic South as well. It also marks Deen's Southernness as sanitized from its historic violences at the same time that it posits a uniquely antique, racist time/region. Deen has certainly profited from a particular commodification of Southern charm; it is entirely this form of folksy white culinary culture that is being re-referenced as rationale for the simultaneous uncontrolled sins of obesity and racism in media depiction. Yet this easy equation of Southernness to portliness and prejudice obscures the much racialized labor that produced the culinary culture from which Deen profits.¹ As food historian Michael Twitty has argued, "the Southern food [Deen has] been crowned the queen of was made into an art largely in the hands of enslaved cooks, some like the ones who prepared food on your ancestor's Georgia plantation." Thus, the food culture that Deen markets has itself been appropriated from black labor. This is a crucial aspect missing from the obesity/racism equation surrounding Deen; it has rendered her a relic to be shunned, but in the process ignores the institutional whitewashing that creates the very brand of Southern cooking she espouses. It is in this whitened lacuna that a "Paula Deen Southern" can be imagined; one that is simultaneously timeless and profoundly ahistoric, where racism structures the individual choices of actors, but where blacks themselves are nowhere to be seen. It is perhaps these competing Souths in the American popular imagination, ancient and

¹ For more on white women's appropriation of black cuisine, see Williams-Forsen, p. 166 – 71.

sanitized, that give non-Southern pundits the discursive power underlying such statements such as “a racial epithet or two, at least, passed through those lard-slicked lips.”

25 Deen’s entire career has been about presenting “Southern” culture and hospitality as a lifestyle that is provided to white families by their white matriarchs. Other brands like the exceptionally white-washed *Southern Living Magazine* do similar work (Fry 186). Deen’s family-centered business model is built upon these logics: she passes her culinary skill and her brand on to her sons, who in turn open their own restaurants, sell their own cookbooks, and star in their own Food Network television shows (Finn). She even has a flagship restaurant called Lady & Sons. The implication is that Deen’s lifestyle brand is something passed down within the family. There is no mention of those from whom Deen “inherited” (read: appropriated) her cuisine.

26 Well, there was not any mention of the African-American origins of this style of Southern culture until Deen’s fetishization of the plantation-themed wedding (THR Staff) and the alleged request that a female African-American employee of hers wear an “an old-style Aunt Jemima outfit” (Severson, “Paula Deen’s Cook Tells of Slights”) came to light. These accusations are perverse admissions of the true origins of Deen’s brand of Southern hospitality. They reference a different kind of inheritance that wealthy whites could pass onto their children to maintain their genteel lifestyles: their slaves. Perhaps what is so shocking about the Deen scandal is that it pulls back the curtain on the aesthetic of Southern charm, revealing it as nostalgia for a time when labor-intensive homemaking was easy to do, providing one had the help of several enslaved servants and cooks. Perhaps the scapegoating of Deen allows us to retain our fantasy of Southern hospitality while attributing all of the racist baggage that goes along with it to a single figure.

Conclusion: Racism as Individual Indulgence

27 Deen’s food, and Southern food in general, is thought of as indulgent. Deen is a cultural icon not just in the sense of a TV chef but whenever anyone needs a shorthand mention of decadence in terms of preparing and eating food and serving it to others. One of the fascinating aspects of Deen’s show is that admits, even flaunts, these cultural dietary no-no’s through a medium with a broad reach and a long memory; when she broadcasts and commits herself to film, she is both a potential teacher of these practices and a potential other at whom we may look askance over her dietary indulgence. We know what she puts into her food because she shows and tells us. We have the choice to follow her influence, to look down on it, or both, as it suits us. Her show is equally about reveling in (appropriated)

Southern history and the indulgence of Southern food, and I think that this is an important point to return to - the temptation of Deen's cuisine unites with the temptation of falling into racist actions, which is why people feel comfortable and deserving of a pat themselves on the back when they think that they have resisted these temptations.

28 The summer of 2013 marked more than the culmination of Deen's *annus horribilis*, however; it was also the summer of the George Zimmerman trial, arguably the year's most visible national media spectacle centering on questions of racism, violence, and Southern history. The trial of Zimmerman, a volunteer neighborhood watchman in Florida tried for the murder of seventeen year-old Trayvon Martin, a young black man who lived in the neighborhood, became a lightning rod for conversations about racism, bodies, and security. It should be noted that to a lesser extent, Zimmerman also became subject to comments about his body size (he gained over one hundred pounds between his arrest and the trial), but none to the extent that Deen received. More significantly, much of the larger discourse revolved around Zimmerman's role as unofficial security against potential "thugs" or "criminals." Zimmerman's ultimate acquittal hinged upon a defense that argued against structural racism and instead positioned the night of the killing as both an act of self-defense and a "tragic accident." Such a rhetorical positioning disavows structural racism and instead underlines the notion of racism as individual failure, one that could happen "to any of us." The rhetorical similarities of such "accidental racist acts" between Zimmerman and Deen were underlined by an October 2013 episode of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, where a thinly-veiled Deen analog (celebrity chef Jolene Castille, played by Cybill Shepherd) mistakes an innocent black teenager in a hooded sweatshirt for a potential rapist, shooting him in the street. Castille is a beloved Southern chef with a private penchant for saying racist comments about African-Americans, yet she in turn is acquitted, amid public outcry. The conflation of Zimmerman with Deen in popular media serves to reinforce the idea of racism as individual failing, and in so doing, makes the actors both scapegoats for structures of racism, but also warnings for the viewing audience that such actions are one mistake away.

29 The Paula Deen case, and Paula Deen's performance as a Southern food icon, makes such a fascinating case study because of these multiple levels of temptation and resistance in food, appropriation, racism, and the like. It may well be easier than many would like to admit to actually be Deen, secretly (or not so secretly) thinking that it would be quite comfortable to sit as a guest at a Southern plantation wedding with ten sticks of butter in one's corn bread while a comforting Aunt Jemima figure attends to us, even if we find it problematic at a moral, ethical, and/or intellectual level. This is why so many writers link her racism to her

fatness in their condemnations of her and in their self-congratulatory pats on the back for not falling into this trap. As Tompkins has argued, “the mouth is understood as a site to which and within which various political values unevenly adhere and through which food as mediated experience imperfectly bonds with the political to form the fictions that are too often understood within everyday life as racial truths” (5). Media discussion of a public white, overweight celebrity spilling racist discourse from her mouth reveals much about the simultaneous and interrelated constructions of race, gender, and consumption. Thus, the mouth that is seen to lack control over the fleshly attributes that fill it is linked to the denigrating invective that also poured, unrestrained, from lard-slicked lips.

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