

Nasty White Folks

ATHE 2016 (Chicago)

Session Tester I

What I'm interested in exploring through nasty white folks:

- What is nasty? Filth?
- Who has the privilege to be nasty?
- How do cultural, gendered, generational, and economic factors shape perceptions/performances of cleanliness?
- How can talking about our cleaning practices further illuminate room for racial (gender, cultural, intergenerational) growth?

Vote from Your Seat

- I am a clean person.
 - Before someone comes over to my place, I must have a moment to tidy.
- Growing up I heard the phrase "Cleanliness is next to Godliness"?
- As a youth, I had regular chores to complete.
 - The incompleteness of these chores had consequences.
- Someone outside our family unit complete the chores.
- As a youth, my appearance directly reflected on my guardian(s) and their parenting skills.
- I have lived/live in interracial housing units.
 - I have lived with folks outside my identity markers.
- I believe that if you use a space, then you should leave it cleaner than when you found it.

Nasty White Folks (Writing #1)

I grew up in a family unit, foundationally, held together by black women. Until 5 years ago, Granny, Marlee Ester, was at the forefront of this matriarchy with a ride or die calvary behind her. Amongst the many things that I learned from my grandmother, (her ever popular "7UP cake," how to peel a potato without losing most of the potato, or that family would always be there), she also made sure that I never had a lack of chores when I visited her. Sure, in my free-time I would sit in the kitchen and we could kiki about various topics, and I would learn the process and history behind her recipes. And this is what I enjoyed most; however, it didn't

matter if I was at Granny's, Aunt Mary's, Aunt Jane's, or my home. It was always understood that the children did all of the chores. And, yes, I mean things like taking out the trash, vacuuming/mopping floors, washing dishes (without a dishwasher!!), and dusting the furniture. And I also mean, washing floor boards, cutting the lawn, whipping down the blinds, sweeping the steps, wash/press the laundry, chopping firewood, cleaning the bathroom (tub, toilet, sink, floors, walls, shower curtain) were all apart of my chores. Oh, and if you didn't complete these chores when asked (or sometimes when you weren't asked), you got an ass beatin'.

Marlee Ester spent a good amount of her working life in the servitude of white folks. Often times, when we were in her kitchen as she prepared the next family meal or after church dessert, my Granny would be struck by something and an awful look would cover over her face soon followed by, "Oooo, I just can't stand nasty white folks." Growing up I had some context for what she was talking about, but it wasn't until I started living with white people that I began to understand how we receive varying messages about cleanliness and the performance of being clean. Growing up, my cousins and I were not allowed to leave the house unless we were "presentable." Presentable is a loaded term. It not only evokes physical aesthetics, but it also holds behavioral implications. Granny Marlee couldn't give a shit about theoretical double consciousness, but I don't think any of us realized how much it was at play. For Marlee Ester and many of the other women in my family, we (my cousins and I) were a direct reflection of them (i.e. their parenting skills/home training). To leave the house unbathed, in wrinkled clothing, unkempt hair, and stank breath was unheard of...well until I went to a private liberal arts college. Here are a couple of examples of how this has manifested itself in my life:

NWF (Writing #2 - 6th grade sleepover with MacKenzie 1996)

- The packing of luggage.
- College dorms + Faulkner House (2006)
- My current living situation. (2016)