

Chapter 10

"Scatter The Pigeons"

Baldness and the Performance of Black Hypermasculinity

E. Patrick Johnson

Northwestern University

This essay examines the performance of black masculinity through the image of the bald head. The essay argues that black heterosexual men who shave their heads use the style to invoke fear or desire from onlookers in an attempt to secure their masculinity. Black homosexual men appropriate this look for similar reasons, but also to combat homophobia. Ultimately, however, the author argues that the meaning of the bald head on either black heterosexual or homosexual men is contingent on history, context, and other visual cues that shifts how spectators read a bald head on black men. By incorporating an excerpt from his own one-man show, the author demonstrates how hair is a product of discourse that resists a static meaning and is also a site that neither solely reinforces oppressive forces nor transgresses them.

This chapter examines the performance of black masculinity vis-à-vis black male hairstyles, and specifically baldness. The bald hairstyle adorned by black men evokes a number of responses from onlookers—from desire to fear—that create an ambivalent discourse around the ways in which race and gender are read onto the black male body. Some black heterosexual men have employed this hairstyle to inspire such responses in an attempt to secure their masculinity and heterosexuality. Black popular cultural references such as actor Samuel L. Jackson's portrayal of the character Shaft, or Avery Brooks' portrayal of the television detective Hawk, are classic examples. Black homosexual men have also appropriated this hairstyle in an attempt to recoup their own black masculine identity and to disavow the homophobia of the black community. Such instances of black homosexual appropriation are witnessed less in popular culture due to the lack of representation of black homosexuality in popular media forms and found more in discrete spaces such as nightclubs or in common public spaces. Drawing on performance, gender, and cultural theory, this essay discusses how, through their adornment of the shaven

head hairstyle, heterosexual and homosexual men's performances of black masculinity are both successful and unsuccessful in acquiring the desired result. I make this argument by outlining how performances of identity are always ambivalent sites that neither solely reinforce nor transgress social conventions. To demonstrate this process of ambivalence and negotiation, I offer and analyze an excerpt from my one-man show, "Strange Fruit."

Initially, I wish to chart out the history of the image of the black bald man and its relation to racist stereotype. At the Real to Reel: Black Life in Cinema film conference held at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in April 2001, Clarence Smith, a graduate student at Florida State University, delivered a paper on the Hollywood movie, *Othello*, starring Lawrence Fishbourne in the title role. Smith's argument went a little something like this: Fishbourne's blackness has implications beyond the taboo of interracial marriage between a moor and a white woman. Indeed, it is Fishbourne's bald head that is key to how he figures in the film. According to Smith (2001), Fishbourne is a walking phallus, deployed in the film to reinforce the notion of the brutalizing black beast. This is accomplished, according to this critic, through the costume that Fishbourne wears throughout the film—a monk's robe. When he dons the hood, Fishbourne symbolizes the flaccid, uncircumcised phallus, soft, but full of excess. In these scenes with the hood, *Othello* is usually unthreatening, relaxed or hiding, as it were. When the hood is removed, however, *Othello* is the erect phallus, the glans penis. In this state, he is the most violent and virile. Fully engorged with rage, he kills Desdemona—that shiny black bald head the symbol of phallocentrism and dominance. Instead of "African American *Othello*," perhaps the presenter should have called his paper, "Black Head" or even more crudely, "Giving Skin." Either way, the imbrication of gender and race in the production of the black brutalizing phallus becomes startlingly visible.

I share this reading of *Othello* because it contextualizes the historical construction of the black man as a bestial, animalistic, rapist—a representation that became so "real" in the white imaginary that it was grounds to justify the lynching and/or castration of thousands of black men in the later part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century (Dray, 2003; Ginzburg, 1962; Harris, 1984; Madison, 2003; Markovitz, 2004). We need only look to films such as *Birth of a Nation* to see that in the white imaginary, the black beast is bald. It is this figure who threatens the hegemony of white male power, and particularly white male "ownership" of and access to white and black female bodies. As a response to this view of himself, the heterosexual black male reappropriated this image of the hypersexual, hypermasculine black male to use the racist image to his advantage, as a mode of protection and empowerment. If the black, heterosexual bald man is under the object of this racialized gaze, how is the black, bald homosexual viewed in this process? Further, how might the black, bald homosexual throw into disarray assumptions about black masculinity amongst black heterosexual men? Hair, in this instance, is clearly the key to disentangling this discursive knot—*Dark and Lovely* notwithstanding.¹ As Kobena Mercer (1994) reminds us, "hair is merely a raw material, constantly processed by cultural practices which thus invest it with meanings and value" (p. 101). Because of the ways in which blackness and masculinity have been linked historically to the iconography of baldness, the "cultural practice" of shaving one's head is invested with meanings and value that rely on particular kinds of gendered performances. In other words, when a black man chooses to shave his head, he knows that his image may be read in a certain way; thus, he is performing his gender as much as his gender is performing him. Indeed, he is aware, as Ingrid Banks (2000) argues, that "hair has not escaped political readings about how blacks construct

¹"Dark and Lovely" is a well-known and widely used over the counter hair relaxer in the African American community.

identities, as well as how whites construct identities about blacks by reading the biological (hair) through a sociopolitical lens" (p. 14). And I might add, hair does not escape political readings about how blacks construct identities *within* black communities and *for* other blacks.

The cultural practice of shaving one's head may be viewed as a kind of gendered *performance*. Over the past decade scholars in gender and performance studies have theorized gender identity as a "performance" (Butler, 1990, 1993; Case, 1989; Dolan, 1994; Merrill, 1999). Femininity and masculinity, these theorists argue, are not "natural" social categories endemic to men and women; rather, they are discourses that are socially sanctioned, acted out (i.e., performed), repeated and cited variously such that they appear to be natural. Examples would include the fact that women are expected to shave their legs and underarms as an appropriate display of their femininity, whereas men are not; or, the fact that society approves of and expects women to wear dresses and high heels, whereas society views men who do the same as less masculine or homosexual. Ultimately, within a patriarchal society, gender hierarchy is maintained under this process of gender performance because those gender attributes associated with power and dominance are linked to masculinity and men, and those associated with passivity and vulnerability are linked to femininity and women, suggesting that men and women's performed gender identity is the "natural" order of things.

Ironically, it is the stylized performances of gender by both men and women that disrupt the equation of gender with sex or sexuality. Gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler (1993), for example, has suggested that drag performances may "[reflect] the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized and [undermine] their power by virtue of effecting that exposure" (p. 231). In other words, when a man performs "femininity," he calls attention to the fact that femininity is not only a construct, but also that it does not naturally abide in women. His performance also calls into question the natural relationship between gender and sexuality—such as when women who perform femininity are read as heterosexual and men who perform femininity are read as homosexual. This does not mean, however, that all such performances are subversive, for there is "no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion" (Butler, 1993, p. 231). What it does mean is that gender performance is a site of ambivalence for the performer and the spectator, the result of which can mean either the reinscription or subversion of gender norms and hierarchy—or both.

The performance of baldness by black men—straight or gay—then, registers as a discourse with multiple meanings depending on the context of the performance. It also substantiates the claim by performance theorists that one is never in control of the ways in which one's performance of identity—sexual, racial, gender, or otherwise—may be read in the social world. Hair—or the lack thereof—becomes a code for a particular kind of gender performance that is deployed by self-identified heterosexuals and homosexuals that, ultimately, neither have control over, but nonetheless may, under the right conditions and circumstances subvert oppressive social norms.

Hairstyles among black men and women are clearly suggestive of gender and sexuality norms in black communities—many of which adhere to a "politics of respectability" (Higginbotham, 1994; McBride, 1998) or those norms that "uplift" the (black) race. In Ingrid Banks' study on black women's hair politics, several of her informants confirm that one's hairstyle is directly linked to the way one's gender and sexuality is read. One informant, "Indigo" makes the connection in the following way:

For women, you know, it is a very important part of your appearance. Your face, your hair. I mean you can still be feminine and have no hair on your head. But you know, we have

these judgments that only certain women can pull that off. I mean actually be bald, and still be considered feminine. I know when I shaved off [my hair or the] many times I've had my hair short, I was trying to compensate with earrings and all this kind of stuff. Trying not to wear as many pants because I felt like I was going to be, you know categorized as a dyke, or you know, just deemed unattractive. (2000, p. 91)

Indigo's feelings about her short hair are indicative of the ways in which, in this case, short hair or a bald head is read as "masculine" or at least "unfeminine," which is in turn read as "lesbian." She tries to counter her bald performance with other feminine performances (i.e., wearing earrings and dresses) in order to disavow any association with the unwomanly (read, "masculine") or nonheterosexual (read, "dyke"). Despite her desire to wear her hair in a certain style, there is still an investment in how that style would be read by others inside and outside her community, especially if the assumption about her appearance (performance) ties her to a gender or sexuality with which she does not identify. This disavowal has as much to do with pride in being a (heterosexual) woman as it does with internalized sexism and homophobia. The point is that her performance of gender and sexuality vis-à-vis her hair is conditioned on the social context in which she lives.

Just as closely cropped hair or a bald head on black women registers as masculine and homosexual, long hair or braided hair may signal femininity and homosexuality in black men—but this is not always the case. There seems to be room for more of a variety of hairstyles among black men that do not necessarily equate the style with the opposite gender or with homosexuality. This is partly due to the fact that black men who don stereotypically "feminine" hairstyles such as cornrows, dreadlocks, perms, braids, and so forth, may draw upon "other characteristics [that] speak to a particular type of black masculinity" (Banks, 2000, p. 96). These other characteristics may range from iconography associated with gang culture, rap music, black Nationalism, and professional sports, among others. Thus, the conk hairstyle worn by black leaders such as Malcolm X in the 1960s or the permed hair that the Reverend Al Sharpton sports, do not read as feminine or homosexual. Besides confirming the hegemony of gender hierarchy, this range of hairstyles available to black heterosexual men as opposed to black heterosexual women suggests that there is a relationship between the limited ways in which short hair or a bald head on black women is read and the ways in which hair on black gay men is read, especially given the link that homophobic and misogynistic discourses make between straight women and gay men.

Accordingly, gay men have been associated with limited and specific gender performances—most of which cast them as deviant and equate them with the womanly, which, in a patriarchal society means in a subordinate position. According to Martin Levine (1998),

... from the end of the Second World War until the first eruption of the AIDS epidemic in the early 1980s, America stigmatized homosexuality as a kind of gender deviance that required strict social control. Gay men were regarded as "failed men," men who deviated from masculine norms because they were either mentally or morally disordered. Gay men had a limited range of stigmatized identities from which to choose, including "hopeless neurotics," "moral degenerates," and "nelly queens." (p. 20)

One response to this stigmatization, according to Levine, was the emergence of the gay "clone"—"a specific constellation of sociosexual, affective and behavioral patterns that emerged among some gay men in the urban centers of gay American life" (p. 7). These gay clones engaged in stylized performances of hypermasculinity in order to counter the stigma placed on homosexuals in society as well as to counter the image of the emaciated AIDS-stricken

body. These performances often took the form of "stereotypically macho sign-vehicles [such] as musculature, facial hair, short haircuts, and rugged, functional clothing to express butchness. Clones developed 'gym bodies,' which denoted the physique associated with weightlifters. A gym body included tight buttocks, washboard stomachs, and 'pumped-up' biceps and pectorals" (Levine, 1998, p. 59). This iconography of "butchness" was performed self-consciously to both parody and emulate normative masculinity.

Although Levine's historicization of the gay clone accounts for the experiences of a generic (white) urban gay male, some aspects of his theorizing may be applied to the specific case of black gay men's response to the sanctioned construction and performance of normative masculinity in black communities. Indeed, the machismo images of black masculinity disseminated by heterosexual black men are often those that affirm his authentic blackness, his power and dominance, and his sexual prowess (Harper, 1998; Johnson, 2003). Granted, as stated above, much of this performance is in response to the historical confines placed on black masculinity under the institution of slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and institutionalized racism. On the other hand, some black heterosexual men also employ such performances to compete with straight white men for power over women and homosexuals (hooks, 1981; White, 1985).

The image of the black, bald heterosexual male is, as Clarence Smith suggests, one of power. It should be understood, however, that not only is the power associated with this image contextual, but also that it may be appropriated by black men who do not identify as heterosexual. Black gay men who wear a shaved head may also feel empowered by the response they receive to the image; they may also experience the racism that the image evokes. The bald or shaven head on straight or gay black men is an equivocal image that relies on a semiotics grounded in the historical discourses of race and its looking relations among various spectators. I tried to capture this complexity in my one-man show, "Strange Fruit."

In January 1999, I debuted my one-man show, "Strange Fruit," at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The show is an autobiographical meditation on my journey into racial, gender, and sexual identity. Chronicling my experiences growing up as the youngest of seven children in a single-parent household in western North Carolina, I explore how my mother "gendered" me by dressing me in wigs and drag as a young child, but then how she refused to acknowledge my gayness when I came out to her. I also relate my experiences as an openly gay professor at Amherst College where I taught for several years, and how that affected my interactions with colleagues and students. Regarding gender, I riff on "hair" as it relates to sexuality and race, discussing my transformation into a "threatening black man" when I shaved my head for the first time. Other aspects of the performance include homosexuality and the black church, spirituality in gay nightclubs, a critique of Black Nationalism, and gender and sexual negotiation in Ghana, Africa.

In the excerpt from the show that I share below, I open with the story of how my hair length always signaled femininity and gayness, but how when I began to lose my hair and shaved it for the first time, I was immediately perceived as a "threat" and soon learned to use the look to my advantage. I liken this experience to that of Brent Staples who, in his book, *Parallel Time* (1994), recounts his experiences of frightening white people simply by walking home from the University of Chicago on the South Side of Chicago. After numerous experiences, Staples embraces and plays up the menacing black image in order to seek revenge on those whites who are fearful of him. Staples' personal experience of performing black machismo to counter racist stares on the street is preceded by a narrative performance of black machismo to engage in a homophobic description of a gay hairdresser by the name of Gene, who lived in his hometown of Chester, PA. In one section, Staples describes the hairdresser's talents adoringly, describing his work as art. In another section, however, Staples describes Gene as

a “faggot,” who swishes down the street with his behind in the air. In “Strange Fruit,” I perform the exchange between Staples and myself that took place at a reading from *Parallel Time* that Staples gave at Amherst College in which I ask him to account for these two disparate descriptions of Gene.

Dis Hair Thang [An excerpt from “Strange Fruit”]

[tape of the song “Macho Man”]

[Performer steps out of dress and puts on sneakers, shorts, and a tank top and begins lifting two dumb bells; Music fades when Performer is dressed]

Performer: [looks at audience] My butch drag. Come on, you didn’t think I was a femme fatale did you? But seriously, if you really want to “unveil” your masculinity, all you have to do is cut off all your hair—especially if you’re a black man.

[slide #32 of the word “Hair”]

Performer: Now, during my college days I was the queen of big hair. Check it out.

[4 slides (#33–36) of Performer with “big” hair]

Performer: But dis hair is *discursive*! I mean, I’ve never seen so much purse grabbing, door locking, fast walking, child protecting in my life until I shaved my head! It opened up a whole new world to me! I had always theorized about how threatening the black man can be in the psyche of some white folk, but because I’m gay I thought that I would never experience that kind of race-based fear. All that changed when I shaved my head. [slide #37 of Performer with shaved head]

Performer: And then, I decided that I would use my new look to my advantage and perform hyper-black masculinity by playing what Brent Staples calls, “Scatter the Pigeons.” At a talk I attended, Staples read from his work:²

[Performer begins to do curls with the dumb bells and voice-over plays excerpt from *Parallel Time* by Brent Staples]

Voice-over: “I tried to be innocuous but I didn’t know how. The more I thought about how I moved, the less my body belonged to me; I became a false character riding along inside it. I began to avoid people. I turned out of my way into side streets to spare them the sense that they were being stalked. I let them clear the lobbies of buildings before I entered, so they wouldn’t feel trapped. . . . Then I changed. I don’t know why, but I remember when. I was walking west on 57th street, after dark, coming home from the lake. The man and the woman walking toward me were laughing and talking but clammed up when they saw me. The man touched the woman’s elbow, guiding her toward the curb. Normally I’d have given way and begun to whistle, but not this time. This time I veered toward them and aimed myself so that they’d have to part to avoid walking into me. The man stiffened, threw back his head and assumed the stare: eyes dead ahead, mouth open. His face took on a bluish hue under the sodium vapor street lamps. I suppressed the urge to scream into his face. Instead I glided between them, my shoulder nearly brushing his. A few steps beyond them I stopped and howled with laughter. I call this game Scatter the Pigeons” (Staples, 1994, pp. 202–203).

²The preceding excerpts are among those that Staples read. Our exchange occurred during the question and answer session of the talk.

Performer: What amazes me about that passage is how beautifully Brent Staples captures how empowering it is for black men to reappropriate racist stereotypes and use them as weapons against whites. How ironic then—and unfortunate—that in the same book, he invokes that same masculinist discourse to castigate his mother's beautician:

Voice-over: "My mother's beautician, Gene, was the star of Saturdays. He didn't appear every Saturday but just when he was needed and when, as he said, 'some heads need doin'. Gene was a faggot. He minced and twisted as he walked. But his body had wrenched itself into a caricature of a woman's. His behind stuck out so that he seemed to be wearing a bustle. He chain-smoked as he walked, with his cigarette hand at a girlish angle in the air. His other arm pressed to his torso the brown paper bag that contained his curling irons. . . . Teenage boys hooted and howled when he passed. Gene minced more brazenly then and blew smoke—POOF!—that curled over his head like steam from a passing train" (p. 39).

Performer: And, perhaps it was a coincidence, but I couldn't help but think of James Baldwin as I listened to Staples describe this "Gene" character further:

[slide #38 of James Baldwin]

Voice-over: "His voice was raspy and cawing and came out of him in a deep Georgia accent. He began his sentences with "chile" or "girl," as in: "Chile, guess who I ran into walkin' over here today?"; "Girl, I'm glad I got here when I did. This head sho needs doin'." His eyes were bulging and widely set, always bloodshot from drinking. The eyes, over his enormous mouth, made him look like a frog. He laughed with his head thrown back, and the froggish mouth open, showing the capacious spaces among his teeth" (pp. 39–40).

Performer: Staples went on to describe Gene doing hair. His description of Gene's hair styling was nothing short of lyrical and flattering. I was confused. How could he paint him as a stereotypical "queen" on the one hand, and as a creative hair artist on the other? My heart began to race as it always does when I'm about to ask a pointed question of someone who's really important. But, I couldn't let this one go. [Performer raises his hand] Mr. Staples, in that last section you just read, you do a wonderful job of describing Gene doing your mother's hair. I mean, your description was so methodical and lyrical and poetic. Yet, in the preceding pages, you describe Gene as a "faggot." Can you talk about those two disparate images? And in the most machismo posture he could muster, his shirt unbuttoned down to his navel and his legs straddling the podium, his response to me was: "Well, he WAS a faggot. I mean, it was 1957 and that's what he would have been called. There's no other way to say it. But I tell you this, whoever plays Gene in the movie (and there *will* be a movie), he's going to win the Academy Award." Dis hair is definitely *discursive*.

[5 slides of different black hairstyles #39–43]

As the excerpt from the show attests, in his almost dismissal of my inquiry and his further denigration of Gene, Staples' response to me embodied the persona of the self-assured, aggressive, and domineering black heterosexual male. What is also ironic about this exchange is that, at the time, Staples had a shaven head, while I wore a high top fade. In this particular setting, the black, bald heterosexual dominated and exercised control over the two black "faggots" with hair: Gene, the hairdresser, and me, the effete professor. But other ironies exist that speak to the ambivalence of how hair signifies differently depending on the context. In the section of *Parallel Time* in which Staples describes his embodiment of the frightening black man, he notes that his hair is long. He writes: "It occurred to me for the first time that I was big. I was 6 feet 1 1/2 inches tall, and my *long hair* [italics added] made me look bigger. I weighed only 170 pounds. But the navy pea jacket that Brian had given me was broad at the shoulders, high at the collar, making me look bigger and more fearsome than I was" (p.

202). In this instance, it is long hair, which represents a different kind of excess in the racist imaginary, and not baldness that conjures and inspires fear. It is important to note, however, that it is the particular context of the South Side of Chicago in Hyde Park on the border of the elite University of Chicago as well as the other signifiers of masculinity (e.g., the navy pea jacket, his stature) that morph Staples into a "beast" to be feared. His (hetero)sexuality in this scene is reinforced not only by his playing up the stereotype, but also by the image of the black rapist being projected onto him. His ability to "scatter the pigeons," as it were, is facilitated by the historical dialectic between white racism and black machismo. Thus, as a black heterosexual man, Staples' hairstyles—from long hair to shaven head—allow his masculinity and heterosexuality to go unquestioned because of the other characteristics of masculinity from which he may choose to draw—some of which are appropriations of racist stereotypes.

This is not always the case for black gay men who, as stated earlier, are often stigmatized as effete or "nelly." Due to the misogyny undergirding this homophobic stigmatization, black gay men's range of hairstyles, like that of black women when they choose shorter styles, is limited if they do not want their gender or sexual identity called into question. As someone who wore "big hair" for 28 years of my life, I never expected my body to signify anything other than femininity, for in addition to big hair, I, like Staples' "Gene," also have a big behind and a high register voice. Therefore, being read as masculine was never an option—that is, until I shaved my head.

Two years after my exchange with Staples, my hair began to thin and I finally started shaving my head, which marked my transition from the "nelly queen" to the "lurking beast." The response from (white) passers-by was definitely an unexpected surprise. I have never had an investment in hegemonic forms of black masculinity and thus experienced the advantages and disadvantages of being read as a "soft" man or worse, a "faggot." The response to my newly shaven head, then, made masculinity available to me in a way that it had not before—in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, I received more attention from potential suitors who were attracted to my new look. I could also embrace the "beast" persona when I wanted to "terrorize" white folks. But these responses to my bald head are undergirded by a fetishization of hegemonic masculinity, by a disavowal of the feminine, and by racist stereotype. In the case of men who paid more attention to me in bars, they were attracted to my *look* but not *me*, for as soon as I began to have a conversation with them, their interest would wane because of either my voice or other "feminine" mannerisms they detected. The black bald "fag" was not an object of desire after all. They wanted a "real" man. While the look inspired desire in some, it inspired fear in others—a fear owing to age-old racist images of black men of any sexual orientation. This is not to say that I do not enjoy my shaven head. I do. It is only to point out that my relation to my hairstyle is an ambivalent one due to the ways in which I cannot control how its meaning will function in any given context.

In "Strange Fruit," my repetition of the phrase, "dis hair is *discursive*" seeks to point out how the meaning of hair shifts with the social and cultural contexts in which it is cultivated. Gender, race, class, and sexuality are all constitutive forces that produce the meaning of hair on bodies. In the span of just a few dozen pages Brent Staples demonstrates how the symbolism of hair (how it is done or how it is worn) connotes gender and sexuality. Staples may wear his hair long or shaven and have his masculinity remain intact. Gene, on the other hand, whose hair was "patent-leather slick, pressed to his head in waves that made you dizzy if you stared at them," but who nonetheless had "hands [that were] enormous and clawlike" and "fingers [that] were thick and grotesquely swollen fingertips like talons" (Staples, 1994, p. 39, 41)—hands that signify those of a hardworking "man"—can never signify masculinity because of the stigma attached to being a "faggot."

As discourse, hair, or the lack thereof, has radical potential to transgress racial and gender norms. But that transgressive potentiality may always be eclipsed by the regressive potential of hair to reinforce hegemonic forms of oppression. In the instance of the black, bald heterosexual male, he may refract the racist gaze cast upon him to refute its menacing logic and to affirm his own manhood. Implicit in that repudiation of the white other, however, is a repudiation of the black fag, the disavowed, dissident, other. Not to be undone, the bald black homosexual may refashion both gazes, the shine of his crown casting light on the discursive paradox of representation, while throwing shade on his detractors. In their adornment and appropriation of the bald head, black gay men may be read as "straight," and thereby benefit from heterosexual privilege by demonstrating that gender performance and sexuality are not naturally linked. Black gay men may employ this performance of baldness for reasons other than simply to mock black heterosexuality, however. In some instances it may be a survival strategy in which to protect themselves either from being victims of racism or homophobia. It may also be deployed to inspire desire. In any case, there are no guaranteed outcomes—only the messiness that is the politics of hair.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the relationship between baldness, masculinity, and race?
2. How might Johnson's argument change if he were writing from the perspective of a bald white male—regardless of sexual orientation? In other words, is there something specific about baldness that makes it more threatening or desirable, or does race play a crucial role in how it is perceived?
3. Is Johnson's assessment of Staples' response to him at the lecture fair? How might the notion of performance be used to discuss other fashion and grooming choices?

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Blackberries and Redbones

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