

# White on White

by Marianne DOWLING

"He's the whitest man I know." Although this may be surprising to some, this was actually a complement back at the end of the nineteenth century, meaning the most honourable, dependable, and trustworthy man around. Times have changed, and fittingly, so has our language. A word that typically was (and still is) associated with purity and goodness, now is just as easily connected with the awkward, the "nerdy," and those who lack basic rhythm. For instance, a person might exclaim, "I am *so* white!" or "I'm the *whitest* person in here" at a dance club if he or she is uncoordinated and therefore, incapable of dancing decently to the beat. It seems as if there is a shift in the meaning of "white," and it is now connected to more negative words than ever before.

**"The whitest guy is the one who looks the stupidest trying to look cool."**

**-Dr. Anne Furlong**

But how did the word *white* become associated with goodness or purity in the first place? The furthest back this tradition is seen is with the Ancient Egyptians, who equated fair skin with beauty. In Egyptian art, many of the Queens were depicted as having light skin while the kings were relatively dark. Remarkably, the Egyptians had never even seen a Caucasian before in their lives. This fair-skinned ideal was later adopted into Western art.

Dr. Anne Furlong, Linguistics professor at UPEI, says that over the centuries, "white" became associated with much more than beauty.

"Fairness of skin was connected with purity, which is connected with cleanliness, which is connected with money and power."

Nowhere was this connection with skin pigmentation and class more prevalent than in Victorian England.

A pale woman meant a wealthy woman, because only labourers who worked outside all day would have a tan.

Dr. Furlong says that "language—especially slang—is always a sign of the times," so it is no wonder that the term "white man" was a compliment in Victorian times, when it seemed as though all of English society was trying so hard to live up to this upper-class, pale-skinned ideal.

In the twentieth century, white musicians started incorporating elements of Black music into their songs and eventually Black culture was absorbed into the mainstream pop-culture.

So, although the word *white* enjoyed thousands of years connected to nobility, beauty, and purity, it was no match for the magnetic Black culture to which Whites were eventually exposed. It is *the* culture the youth of the West looks to when deciding what to wear, how to speak, and what to listen to, or what is (sigh) ... "cool."

And so, even though we have made a mad dash through thousands of years of history in an attempt to put the word *white* in context, perhaps this new definition of *white* can be explained in only one sentence, says Dr. Furlong:

"The *whitest* guy is the one who looks the *stupidest* trying to look cool."

And this is probably why picturing Leonard Nimoy, Kenny G, or Richard Simmons in a rap video is amusing to most. Hip-hop is the most popular genre of music today, and any decent attempt made by these men to look natural and respectable in the context of a rap video would be a challenge to say the least. Clearly, these white men would look very, very stupid trying to look "cool."

When asked about what words come to mind when picturing Kenny G in a rap video, UPEI student Catherine Sweet cringes, but sums it up nicely.

"That is the *whitest* thing I've ever heard."

# Coffee House for Literacy a Success

by Brad DEIGHAN

On Thursday, March 14th, Students for Literacy held a coffee house at BeanZ, co-ordinated by UPEI students Jennifer Galle and Tara MacPhail. The price was two dollars at the door and one dollar for raffle tickets. Many small prizes were given out, so many that I'm sure most people received something. All together there was \$108.05 dollars made with an audience of 31 people, not including the performers.

The coffee house was quite entertaining, with a good comfortable atmosphere. I felt as though I were at home, only here I was being kept on the edge of my seat with an assortment of live music, poetry, and readings. Many faces from UPEI were present, including a couple of professors. Many of them (the faces) took part in the show, which was quite well done.

One reading included Jeremy Livingston pretending to be a hillbilly who claims his wife has been stolen

by Bigfoot. His evidence consisted of his missing wife, a pop bottle left on the table, the fridge door being left open, and the smell of hair in the air. In conclusion, it became fairly obvious that she *had*, actually, been stolen by Bigfoot, which is no surprise considering the fact that Bigfoot did not get his name for nothing. Bigfoot does have a reputation for having, ah, big feet. Next, Bigfoot (Jeff Coll) came up and fore-warned everyone that when Bigfoot calls, the ladies come. Classy, vulgar, perhaps truthful.

There were many others, but one performer that really made me look up - though they all did this - was Caolan Moore. He played his guitar and sang three songs, all self-written, and I was impressed. Other performers included other different human faces, all well done. I wished I had participated and I would encourage you all to participate if this event is held again.

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