

THE EXCEPTIONAL

NEGRO



**RACISM, WHITE PRIVILEGE AND
THE LIE OF RESPECTABILITY POLITICS**

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Chapter 1

What Is An Exceptional Negro?

Let me unpack this concept for you so that we can address the “white elephant” in the room. I recognize that the word “Negro” was an acceptable term for white people to reference black people at one time. But that time has long since passed.

Today, it is wholly unacceptable, invokes memories of a time of the extreme subjugation and marginalization of black people and is only slightly less insulting than the word “nigger.”

It is derogatory.

It is demeaning.

It is disgusting.

It is egregious.

It is painful.

And still, it accurately reflects how black people are often viewed by certain others. Its dismissive, derogatory and insulting meaning is still expressed as features embedded in our institutions.

Overwhelmingly, black folks have close encounters on a regular basis with being marginalized, insulted, dismissed and discriminated against. It is the natural consequence of still being considered little more than a Negro in this country. Especially for the “Exceptional Negroes.”

I use this term to mean exactly what I think Master Ford meant when he called Platt an “exceptional nigger” – though I have upgraded the term to “Negro” to account for more

contemporary white sensibilities – that is to say, a black person who to white people seems unlike other black people they use as a reference point.

Exceptional Negroes are often well-educated, always articulate, cultured, and able to move seemingly effortlessly in white business, political and social circles.

Exceptional Negroes do not fit the stereotypical criminal, thug, welfare queen, baby mama, baby daddy, and myriad other negative labels usually associated with black folks. Hence, we are deemed “exceptional.”

But, as we will see, the truth is that even with our exceptionalism, we are still just “Negroes” to white America and in case we forget that, they will swiftly remind us.