# Unmothering Black Women:  Formula Feeding and the Legacy of Slavery

On May 23, 1946, in the rural southern town of Reidsville, North Carolina, a small miracle occurred. The woman responsible for this miracle was Annie Mae Fultz: a tall, beautiful Black-Cherokee woman who was the deaf and mute mother of six children. Beginning at 1:13am, Annie Mae gave birth, at three-minute intervals, to the world's first recorded identical quadruplets. Against the odds, each of these four strong, tiny girls survived their first few hours and began to grow steadily. Annie Mae's joy at her perfect new daughters was irrepressible, expressed in exuberant debates with friends and relatives at her hospital bedside about possible names for the girls. But Annie Mae's happiness was short-lived.

Fred Klenner, the White doctor who delivered the quads, began testing his controversial theories about Vitamin C on the girls from their birth. Klenner also named the girls himself, after his wife, sister, aunt, and great-aunt. Finally, Klenner negotiated with formula companies seeking to break into the untapped market of Black mothers by becoming the newly famous Fultz Quads' corporate godfather. St. Louis' Pet Milk Company won the honor. The deal Klenner made set in motion a series of events that would lead Annie Mae to lose, not just the right to name her girls, but her beloved girls themselves.

Catalyzed by Pet Milk's groundbreaking advertising campaign, formula marketing to Black women increased over the next few decades. Simultaneously, popular images of Black women breastfeeding decreased, both reflecting and encouraging the actual decline in the number of Black children who were breastfed. By 2008, only 59% of Black women ever tried breastfeeding, compared to 80% of Latina mothers and 75% of White mothers, with only 12% of Black mothers still breastfeeding at 6 months, compared to 26.3% of Latina mothers and 24.3% of White mothers. These disparities in breastfeeding rates correspond with a number of other racial health disparities among women and children, the most significant of which is infant mortality, which strikes three times as many Black babies as White babies.

Racial disparities in breastfeeding represent first food injustice, which is a form of food oppression. Food oppression is facially neutral food-related law, policy, or government practice that creates health disparities along race, gender, and class lines. Cultural myths about personal responsibility that ignore structural determinants of food choice, as well as racial stereotypes, make these disparities appear natural. Therefore, to reverse the effects of food oppression, attempts to reform law and policy must be accompanied by efforts to change societal perspectives on food and racial justice.

Building on my previous paper exploring the laws and policies that create and perpetuate first food injustice, this Article interrogates the problem of racial disparities in breastfeeding by looking at the history of infant feeding from a race and class perspective and engaging in an in-depth analysis of how marketing and racial stereotyping affect societal and cultural perceptions of who should be breastfeeding. The Article argues that formula marketing, popular culture, and racial stereotypes work together to discourage Black women from breastfeeding and create a climate of indifference to the laws and policies that support the formula industry and cause disproportionate racial harm.

The story of the Fultz Quads punctuates the Article, illustrating how the racial project of selling formula to Black women relies on the exploitation of Black women and girls, while bringing to light the extraordinary lives of these exceptional women. In its final part, the Article examines the extent and potential of constitutional protections of breastfeeding, and surveys international laws designed to address similar problems. The Article concludes by offering a blueprint for both social and legal reforms that could, in conjunction, reduce racial disparities in breastfeeding and their concomitant harms.