Perceptions of the Black Woman: Deconstructing and Reclaiming Societal Myths

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Abstract

Black woman in the music industry are not valued or favored in the same manner as white female artists. When they do assert their femininity, sexuality, or political views, or they display emotions, they are reprimanded by society at large. By examining three female celebrities, I analyzed the way in which society has perceived and reacted to the stereotypes that these women have reclaimed. The underlying question is why does it matter how black women choose to position themselves in society? The women who are subjects within this thesis are examples of how society lays claim in the inability to glorify black women without first policing their actions. Consider whether being a black woman hinders one from “re-appropriating” the stereotypes—or whether society is claiming that black women can only be confined to a space that allows room for certain stereotypes to escape through the cracks.
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Beyoncé: Formation and the Super Bowl

On February 6, 2016, Beyoncé “broke the internet” with her new song *Formation* and a video to accompany it. Not only was it an ode to black women everywhere, but it also paid homage to the victims of Hurricane Katrina, queer males of color, and the Black Lives Matter Movement, while serving as a conversation starter to the issue of police brutality. Like many social movements that have occurred in the past, this new song serves as an anthem to the Black Lives Matter Movement. Currently, systematic oppression affects more people of color than ever, leaving many dead and others fighting for justice. If you push rewind, you will see that these events are just a slightly varied depiction of the past when black people were fighting their rights. Thus, many of the Movement’s leaders are bringing to light the inequality of black youth, men, and women in America. Beyoncé used her artistry and position of power to illustrate these issues. However, during her halftime show at Super Bowl 50, she and her backup dancers left a sour taste in the mouths of many nationwide.

Columnist Sarah Taylor claimed that “Beyoncé ruined last night’s Super Bowl Halftime Show … and maybe even 2016.” This sentiment alone shows that people are uncomfortable by the way Beyoncé affirmed her blackness via primetime television during the Super Bowl. Even though Beyoncé is considered a modern-day feminist, Sarah Taylor clearly missed the memo, so she criticized Beyoncé’s performance by stating that it was a “vulgar agenda anthem.” The agenda she is speaking of is the

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2 Taylor, “Beyoncé Ruined Last Night.”
Beyoncé also calls black women to get into formation with her and begin to love themselves. Taylor goes on to say that Beyoncé’s performance was classless and her motives were somewhat selfish. “It feels like classic Beyoncé climbing on the backs of better entertainers to reach the top once again, using them to pull at the heartstrings of those to whom the vibrant and beautifully multiethnic and multiracial city is dear.” Here, Taylor is attributing Beyoncé’s success to using the queer men of color, i.e., the “better entertainers” to advance her career. Though she does not specifically say that a black woman cannot make it to the top on her own, she implies it. In making the statement, Taylor suggests that Beyoncé’s motives are selfish because she is “using” the New Orleans imagery as well as the Bounce superstars in her video, and she skips the entire city on her upcoming tour. Taylor believes Beyoncé’s exclusion of Messy Mya and Big Freedia in her performance, slaps New Orleans citizens in the face.

Dressed in tribute to Michael Jackson, Beyoncé’s attire was “more Black Panther than King of Pop” according to Taylor “[...] just look at the signature berets on her backup dancers.” Take some time to digest that one for a moment.” For those who do not know, the Black Panther Party, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was “a black extremist organization founded in Oakland, California in 1966. It advocated for the use of violence and guerilla tactics to overthrow the U.S. government.” In other words, they were a group of black radical revolutionists who

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3 Taylor, “Beyoncé Ruined Last Night.”
4 Taylor, 2016.
5 Taylor.
wanted to change the way African Americans were treated using a by any means necessary approach. Since the Panthers have been labeled by some as an anti-white militant group responsible murdering numerous police officers, and many critics believe that Beyoncé’s Halftime Show was a distasteful act that had anti-police and black supremacy written all over it. While Taylor admitted that Formation was a “call to her strong women of color to unite and fight for social justice,” she immediately retracted what may have been a compliment by stating the following:

“throwing Red Lobster, talking about getting ‘f--ked good,’ and possibly slamming white folk is no way for any kind of ‘formation’ to be taken seriously... Beyoncé’s not getting better as she gets older -- to the contrary; she’s raunchier, more offensive, and more desperate than ever.”

As soon as people became aware of her blackness, Beyoncé was seen as a threat. She has used her privilege as a celebrity to make a political statement that is unapologetic to white people. Therefore, Taylor’s comments about not taking this type of formation seriously due to Beyoncé slamming white folks ignores the pervasive discrimination that black people have continued to face for decades, and Beyoncé just so happened to be the face of this “anthem.” To end her piece, Taylor suggested that Beyoncé’s performances are becoming more risqué and offensive which makes her desperate. Improper. Disrespectful. And, to put the cherry on top, desperate. Why is it, that when a black woman who made a conscious decision to come out with a song during Black History Month, and the song is extremely pro-black, white masses call her militant and claim that she is not appropriate for family entertainment? All of a

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7 Taylor, “Beyoncé Ruined Last Night.”
8 Taylor, 2016.
9 Taylor.
sudden, Beyoncé is seemingly “desperate” because people finally woke up and realized that she was and has been a black woman for years.

Conservative TV host Tomi Lahren believes “Beyoncé (and black people who fight for social justice in general) need to stop playing victim.” Within one week of Super Bowl 50, Lahren took it upon herself to share her “final thoughts” on Beyoncé’s Halftime performance by verbally attacking the Black Lives Matter Movement and many of the civil rights activists of today. She continued to say that Beyoncé’s performance “ram-rod ded an aggressive agenda down our throats,” and created a racial divide because “black lives matter more.” For the past few years, civil rights supporters have begun publicly speaking about racial tensions, promoting black empowerment, and black women empowerment, and raising awareness about institutionalized systems of oppression. Consequently, Lahren, like many right-wing critics, is uncomfortable that Beyoncé opened the floodgates. As such, some white people are a little nervous that their Queen Bey is no longer the fetishized version of the woman they have created in their minds.

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10 Taylor, “Beyoncé Ruined Last Night.”
11 Blue Telusma, “Tomi Lahren to Beyoncé: Your husband was a drug dealer, worry about that,” The Grio, February 10, 2016, http://thegrio.com/2016/02/10/tomi-lahren-to-beyonce-your-husband-was-a-drug-dealer-worry-about-that/
13 Sullivan, “Tomi Lahren launches attack.”
14 Sullivan.
Lahren continued her segment by stating the following:

“Guess what Beyoncé? White people like your music too. White people buy your songs on iTunes, memorize your lyrics and admire your talent and beauty. Little White girls wanna be like you just as little Black girls do, but instead of that, you’d rather perpetuate the great battle of the races.15”

Beyoncé is a well-known figure worldwide. Her fan base connects people varying in all facets of life, and somehow white people cannot see beyond her celebrity status.

Beyoncé’s Formation never uttered the words, this ain’t for white people, but it did allow her to reignite the conversation that has seemingly become desensitized. Desensitized in the sense that when white police officers murder black civilians, the publicized information is no longer shocking. Lahren, on the other hand, could not seem to grasp the concept that black women have voices too, which means that hers was not the only one making headlines.

“What is it you are trying to convey here? A salute to what? A group that uses violence and intimidation to advance not racial equality, but an overthrow of white domination? Beyoncé didn’t reference the Black Panthers to bring about some kind of positive change. She did it to get attention.16”

Again, the motif of the black woman using an agenda to advance her career has returned. Similar to Taylor, Lahren claimed that Beyoncé only made her artistic and performative choices for fame and accolades, instead of considering the bigger picture, a picture that is larger than Beyoncé. By paying a tribute to the Black Panthers, she has used her music in support of a social cause. Despite the fact that the Black Panther Party brought about change regardless of their tactics, Beyoncé’s methods were not

15 Telusma, “Tomi Lahren to Beyoncé.”
16 Sullivan, “Tomi Lahren launches attack.”
violent or confrontational. Lahren ended her segment by taking a personal stance rather than offering a professional opinion. “Your husband was a drug dealer. For 14 years he sold crack cocaine. Talk about protecting black neighborhoods. Start at home.” Now, this comment had no relation to the actual Halftime performance. Instead, it appeared as if she was taking personal shots at Beyoncé and husband Jay-Z. I could go on a tirade the stereotyping of black men in the United States, however, I will not. The fact remains the same. When white America realized that their black fantasy is actually black, and actually affirmed her blackness with pride, chaos arose and anyone and everyone had to talk about it, regardless of whether their opinions were relevant.

**Formation and Its Intentionality**

Jeff Guo, a reporter for The Washington Post, believes that there are a few inconsistencies between the narrative of *Formation* and the imagery used in the video. Essentially, he feels that intentions of the song, its lyrics and video do not relate to the Movement in which she is aligning herself with. Although he has recognized that Beyoncé’s Super Bowl Halftime performance was momentous for black women empowerment, he questioned her true intent for creating this pro-black song. At the end of her verse Beyoncé says “You just might be the next black Bill Gates in the making. I might just be a black Bill Gates in the making.” How might Beyoncé become the next black Bill Gates? Well, in his article, Guo asked a similar question, “how’s that?”

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17 Telusma, “Tomi Lahren to Beyoncé.”
He stated that “Bill Gates came from a middle-class family in Seattle. He went to private school, where he had a computer to play with.” Guo suggested that class and race contributed to Gates’ success, and he had access to what would later become his cash cow. His family invested in his future, and he became a billionaire ultimately. Guo went on to explain how troublesome it is growing up black and poor in the South. Despite the fact that I disagree with him completely, being that I was born and raised in Arkansas, he argued a valid point. He recognized that “it’s mighty hard to rise up when you’re a poor black kid in the South. The system resists upward mobility.”

While situational factors may hinder upward mobility, it is quite difficult to rise up when you are simply black in the South. The system, which is comprised of dominantly white institutions, does not like to see any black person succeed, regardless of their intellect or class. “There’s a drought of opportunity in the South, which is also the home of Beyoncé,” Guo argues. Below the Mason Dixon line, black people do not get to climb the ladder of upward mobility that often, but this mobility is not solely limited to the South. Blacks everywhere face discrimination based on physicality rather than work ethic, but for the ones who do get an opportunity to succeed, they are still treated as incompetent until they forgo their blackness in order to blend with the masses. Yet as time progresses, they realize that at the end of the day they are still black despite how far they have climbed.

Returning to the point concerning the advantages, or lack thereof, for black children in the South, according to Guo, “Beyoncé, who grew up in a two-parent

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20 Guo, “The strange contradiction.”
21 Guo, “The strange contradiction.”
22 Guo 2016.
middle-class family in Texas, is one of the bright exceptions. She succeeded despite the forces that could drag her down.\textsuperscript{23} The forces that he was referring to are race and class. Therefore, Beyoncé was an “exception\textsuperscript{24}” due to her upbringing in a black middle-class, two-parent home. Although he did not explicitly say it, Guo implied that children growing up in poor, black, single-parent homes are less likely to succeed in the same manner as those who come from privileged backgrounds. Guo also argued that “Beyoncé sings as if hard work leads directly to success. For black America, there is at best a vague correlation.\textsuperscript{25}” While he may have shed some truth regarding the fact that in America, a brown person’s work ethic is not taken into account as often as it should be. Guo insinuated that Beyoncé’s hard work did not lead to success. She was fortunate enough to come from a position that gave her a head start. Therefore, no, she did not have to work that hard for it. Most of Beyoncé’s critics are essentially arguing in circles. They are either against her display of power, or they are suggesting that her hard work is just one lucky example of black success.

Beyoncé made a political statement during the Super Bowl Halftime Show, and she included herself in the Black Lives Matter conversation. Guo states that “\textit{Formation} is a fantasia about black power, black beauty, and black success. It is political, but Beyoncé is not a politician\textsuperscript{26}.” He argued that this proclaimed anthem is a mere musical fantasy. Thus her intentions are disingenuous because the lyrics do not quite match her motives. “When she says things like ‘always stay gracious, best

\textsuperscript{23} Guo.
\textsuperscript{24} Guo, “The strange contradiction.”
\textsuperscript{25} Guo.
\textsuperscript{26} Guo, “The strange contradiction.”
revenge is your paper,’ you have to wonder about Beyoncé’s own politics. The fact that Beyoncé’s politics are even questioned by Guo illustrates how a black woman is limited in the way in which she chooses to showcase her wealth. Why should Beyoncé have to wait until every black person in America has acquired the same success as she has? If she did, I am pretty sure she would be waiting for the rest of her life.

Now dubbed a pro-black anthem, Beyoncé’s *Formation* affirmed that she is down for her people. Although she has been silent for quite some time regarding issues such as police brutality, when her backup dancers wore black berets, sported their afros, and threw up their fists when paying tribute to the Black Panthers, Beyoncé decided to not only use her artistry to align herself with black Americans, primarily black women, but she also subliminally asked when is the brutality going to end? However, Jeff Guo disagreed. He recognized the efforts that the Black Panthers made for the advancement of their people, and he also realized that they ensured their people were able to access the same resources as white Americans by any means necessary. Beyoncé on the other hand, is a “titan of capitalism,” according to him. Instead of seeing her as a business mogul, he implied that she is marketing the black struggle in order to gain economic wealth. Her online store is apparently selling merchandise with a few *Formation* catchphrases that range from $36 to $60.

“Beyoncé waited until black politics was so undeniably commercial that she could make a market out of it. This was a genius thing to do. It's part of why the song is so

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28 Guo. “The strange contradiction.”
glorious. Her talent for business is one reason she ‘sleys.’” Guo just stepped into the library and read Beyoncé for scheming. He has suggested that there is an ulterior motive to Beyoncé’s *Formation* due to her marketing choices. The Black Lives Matter Movement is definitely in the limelight, and everywhere you look, its supporters are broadcasting their concerns on television or via various social media platforms. While many have been ridiculed by the “All Lives Matter” protesters, none of them, to my knowledge, have been condemned for the ample amount of propaganda that is sold to raise awareness about said issues. Yet, Beyoncé, who chose to take a seat at the racial injustice table, who decided to profit from a campaign that is already making money, and who is also a black woman, is dragged through the mud because her motives seem selfish and seemingly immoral? Guo’s sarcastic commentary appeared to indicate as much. He continued by saying Beyoncé should be mindful that not all minorities have “equal access to the economy’s blessings,” and she should also think about “the activists who made it possible for an artist like her to release a song like *Formation*, a celebration of blackness, to near-universal acclaim.” Guo implied that Beyoncé needs not to forget who paved the way for her and who is not benefiting from her wealth. However, if we change the context of the situation, Beyoncé would not be monitored as heavily. Let us remove her celebrity status for a minute, and look at it through this lens. Lady X is a successful black woman who has a team that developed a product to encourage self-love and empowerment for all black people, particularly black women. She televised this

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30 Guo, “The strange contradiction.”
31 Guo 2016.
product with a pro-black theme via a prominent television station which ultimately increased her following. Although she encountered a few critics, people applauded her for her courage to introduce the world to something that her people needed during a time of tribulation. As a result, she has acquired a large profit from this product. Keep in mind that Lady X is a black business woman, who does not have fame attached to her name. Would Guo, along with the other critics, ridicule Lady X as they have scorned Beyoncé? No, they would not, and do you know why? Beyoncé is currently a threat to white masses because she is now pro-black everything, and it is terrifying for them to witness. Lady X on the other hand may be successful, but her success is not spoken of on a daily basis. Consequently, she is considered a non-factor—a mosquito bite that only itches for a while, but the bump soon goes away. This is similar to the Black Lives Matter activists. They are making waves, but only in small bursts. Beyoncé’s *Formation*, is an epidemic, and Guo along with countless critics, realize that.

Along with this epidemic comes a side effect called the “Bey-Hive”\(^{32}\), which according to Huffington Post columnist, Ernest Owens, is a “cult-like following that doesn’t question or challenge your decisions. It’s a blind allegiance that will shield one from seeing possible deception and manipulation.”\(^{33}\) Owens suggested that Beyoncé can do no wrong in the eyes of her cult, due to the idolization that allows her to lie to her fans in order to control them. Here, deception and manipulation equate to power and who is in control. During the Super Bowl, and shortly after her song’s

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\(^{33}\) Ernest Owens, “Appropriation, Capitalism, Blackness and Beyoncé.”
debut on primetime television, Beyoncé was known as the puppeteer who made America freeze for approximately three minutes. Being that she is a black woman, white masses and even black men are upset that no one gave her permission to do so. Owens’ claim that Beyoncé is conniving is based solely on her Halftime performance. So is Beyoncé’s morality brought into question because her actions were considered to be a capitalist scheme to boost her revenue, or is it simply because she is a black woman? The truth remains consistent; it really does not matter if Beyoncé was rich or poor, the real issue ultimately comes down to her blackness and her being in control. If we take a look at the intersections of Beyoncé’s life, we realize she is black, she is a woman, and she is wealthy, making her a triple societal threat. This control has also allowed her to gain a following that places her on a pedestal which many find reprehensible.

Beyoncé’s super fans have definitely contributed to her success as a black celebrity, and they aren’t afraid to stand up for their “Queen Bey.” However, Owens believes that Beyoncé is not socially responsible. She is one of the prominent figures of this modern feminist movement, but at the same time, she is not ashamed of benefitting from the songs that have empowered numerous people. Owens on the other hand argued that “being a visible face for female empowerment and black excellence is admirable, but exploiting that favor for capitalistic gains is disappointing.” Does this black man not realize that white people have benefited from black people for years? As we peer into the past, we find Elvis Presley. In recent years, we have Vanilla Ice, Iggy Azalea, Miley Cyrus, and the Kardashian clan, just

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34 Owens, “Appropriation, Capitalism, Blackness, and Beyoncé.”
35 Owens, 2016.
to name a few, who have exploited blackness for years. While they may be confronted for cultural appropriation, they are still profiting from what white society considers edgy and cool. Despite the fact that the majority of these celebrities situate themselves around black artists, they have yet to speak on black issues that plague the nation. Yet, Beyoncé is somehow exploiting black people for monetary gain because she added fuel to a fire that was already lit? It truly baffles me that Ernest Owens did not recognize what he was truly saying. By policing what he calls Beyoncé’s “capitalist” motives Owens ignored the fact that black people never really had a chance to get out of the barrel. Hence is why, he is a prime example of a crab in the barrel; pulling Beyoncé back in because he cannot be happy that a black woman is on top.

While Owens initially applauded Beyoncé for the pro-black aesthetics that were used in Formation’s video, he criticizes her choice for using previously developed footage and calls her out for appropriating someone else’s material.

“Being ‘inspired’ and a little too consuming of others’ original work isn’t new for Beyoncé. However, in this new revelation of heavily lifting other black artists’ work in order to disguise it as one’s own, it’s hard to not question the motive. [Thus] the documentary, That B.E.A.T., should not be undermined based on its appropriation from a more known artist.”

Owens implied that Beyoncé’s originality is fraudulent, which goes back to his original point that she uses deception and manipulation to acquire wealth. Even if she does not openly pay homage to the filmmakers’ documentary, the imagery is still brought to the foreground for many to see. However, the true problem has little to do

36 Owens, “Appropriation, Capitalism, Blackness, and Beyoncé.”
37 Owens, 2016.
with originality and disguising the footage as her own, the ulterior issue is that Beyoncé made money. A black woman profited from footage that had been previously developed and now critics consider her to be a selfish money hungry schemer that used blackness for income. That is the real problem here. Owen was uncomfortable by the fact that Beyoncé gained control. No matter how he attempted to mask the underlying issues, everything that he has said pointed to money. First, it was black excellence being exploited for capitalist gains. Later, it became the documentary used in the Formation video. This man, a black man at that, was uncomfortable that a black woman in power is playing the game of monopoly correctly and has acquired more wealth than he could have fathomed. Thus, he continuously berates her because her motives are “questionable.” “Let's not act like what Beyoncé is doing now has never been done before. When it comes to progressive black positivity against current institutional opposition many other artists have already made it marketable and salvageable to do so in the industry.”

Owens commended artists such as John Legend, Kendrick Lamar, and J. Cole for creating music that raises awareness about black subjugation. He also mentioned Rihanna’s American Oxygen, but states that “it never took flight.” Of the artists mentioned, all were men but one. The men were deemed successful in their execution for using a pro-black aesthetic that too resulted in capital, but none are scrutinized for doing so. Kendrick Lamar’s 2016 GRAMMY Awards performance was called “riveting, stunning, and powerful,” and received a lot of positive feedback. Despite

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38 Owens, “Appropriation, Capitalism, Blackness and Beyoncé.”
39 Owens, 2016
the pro-blackness of the performance, Lamar was not scrutinized and criticized for his actions, nor was his highly acclaimed album *To Pimp a Butterfly*. Contrarily, being a black woman in the industry and making political statements comes with more stipulations. A person can be like Rihanna—trying but failing, which is acceptable, or trying and succeeding, but receiving a ton of negative criticism. When it is all said and done, the black woman just cannot win.

Regardless of how much she tried to assert her blackness via *Formation*, according to Owens, Beyoncé is not a genuine artist. “What is even more saddening is that such pro-blackness in the video seems to further a more capitalistic agenda more than a sincere output of creative expression.” So Beyoncé cannot be sincere because she made money? There is a problem with how society treats its black women across race, gender, and class lines. These women’s bodies are literally policed from the way their hair is done to how they interact with people on a daily basis. Moreover, when finances are mixed into the equation, an even bigger issue comes to the forefront. It almost seems as if black women are labeled as money hungry or gold diggers, will do anything in order to increase revenue. A gold digger by default is typically a person whom dates or marries into wealth in order to satisfy their personal needs and/or wants. Beyoncé married Jay Z, a wealthy black man, yet she too had money of her own before the union. Why then, did Owens insinuate that Beyoncé is money hungry with gold digger tendencies?


41 Owens, “Appropriation, Capitalism, Blackness and Beyoncé.”
He went on to say the following:

“How convenient was it for Beyoncé to finally give us an unapologetically black message in 2016? For a star that's never actually confirmed rumors that she’s paid the bails of arrested Black Lives Matter activists, and now new speculation that her husband’s company TIDAL donated $1.5 million to the organization -- this musical move seems calculated.”

Of course it was calculated. Crimes against unarmed black persons are at an all-time high due to police brutality. Beyoncé just decided to kill two birds with one stone by making a song that was finally unapologetically black and making money from said song. What she chooses to do with her money is her prerogative, so why does she need to confirm rumors regarding paying the bails of Black Lives Matter activist? Will this make her more or less black? Is her black card still intact? Is Beyoncé’s *Formation* really more genuine if she is in fact supporting the Black Lives Matter Movement? Well Owens does not think so. “It doesn't feel like a natural evolution—but one that is manufactured.” Beyoncé is the type of artist that is not necessarily political, and her racial ambiguity allows her to integrate into various racial and ethnic backgrounds effortlessly. Therefore, she appeals to multiple people across racial divides. Now that she has asserted her black pride in 2016, Owens has indicated she is inauthentic. In addition, he stated that all of her motives were “another way to bring traffic to TIDAL's up-and-down traction, and a new tour to spend your income tax refund check on!” Let us examine the point that he was trying to make. Owens argued that Beyoncé is appropriating other black artists and

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42 Owens, 2016.
43 Owens, “Appropriation, Capitalism, Blackness and Beyoncé.”
44 Owens, 2016.
not giving them credit for their work. She is insincere because her pro-black approach was calculated, which means that her motives were manufactured to make it seem as if she and her husband are in fact Black Lives Matter supporters. TIDAL, which is her husband Jay Z’s company, supposedly donated $1.5 million to the same organization solely to direct more people to its streaming services. Beyoncé is marketing black oppression and “[she] is making bank off of a variation of blackness that she isn’t currently living in or experiencing.” Whether she is a saint or a sinner, the fact that most, if not all, of these accusations are directed toward her for making money is absurd. Beyoncé may have used methods that some may think are immoral, but she made something valuable and tangible for her people, for black women in general. Even if wealth was acquired, it should not be questioned as to what her motives were. Beyoncé may not have “won Black History Month” as Owens suggested, but she definitely added to the conversation centered on the injustice that black people routinely face.

**Formation and Anti-Police**

In addition to successfully raising eyebrows of critics everywhere as to her intent, Beyoncé has made a couple of members from the Grand Old Party (GOP) a little upset with her *Formation* video and nationally televised Super Bowl 50 Halftime performance. Republicans Peter King and Rudy Giuliani, both of New York, a seemingly progressive state, were not here for Beyoncé’s *Formation*. According to Colin Campbell of *Business Insider*, Pete King “condemned Beyoncé’s

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45 Owens, “Appropriation, Capitalism, Blackness and Beyoncé.”

46 Owens, 2016.
latest video and the media for embracing it.\textsuperscript{47} King indicated that Beyoncé is anti-
police and pro-Black Panthers, and her political views should not be taken seriously. 
In his full statement, Pete King began by saying, “Beyoncé may be a gifted 
entertainer but no one should really care what she thinks about any serious issue 
confronting our nation.\textsuperscript{48}” Beyoncé is a black woman living in America. She has a 
husband who is also black. She has a black child. Her parents are black. Did I 
mention that she was black? Being an entertainer permits certain behaviors, such as 
making political music, and for years, many artists have used their celebrity status to 
join in various movements through song. For example songs such as \textit{Fight the Power} 
(Public Enemy), \textit{U.N.I.T.Y.} (Queen Latifah), and \textit{Fuck tha Police} (N.W.A) were all 
anthems to a certain degree that addressed various concerns plaguing the nation, 
primarily in black culture. Beyoncé, as well as many other artists, have used their 
music not only to address institutionalized racism and systematic oppression, but also 
to align themselves with those being oppressed. No Beyoncé does not have to be a 
politician to make a political statement, and her voice matters regardless of how she 
chooses to let it be heard.

King also argued that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{“[The] mainstream media's acceptance of her pro-Black Panther and anti-cop video 'Formation' and her Super Bowl appearance is just one more example of how acceptable it has become to be anti-police when it is the men and women in blue who put their lives on the line for all of us and deserve our strong support.”}\textsuperscript{49}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48} Campbell, “GOP congressman.”
\textsuperscript{49} Campbell, “GOP congressman.”
Apparently, Mr. King has yet to pick up a newspaper, watch any television station, or even login to his social media accounts. Has he not realized that police brutality is running rampant in today’s society? So many unarmed black people have been murdered for unjust reasons, and somehow Beyoncé is anti-police and pro-Black Panther because she laid atop a sunken police car in her video and paid tribute to the Black Panther Party during the Super Bowl? King did not admit it, but he is afraid that the once beloved racially ambiguous Beyoncé is not so ambiguous anymore, and her support of the Black Panthers shows to some degree a now-militant black woman. Thus, in his eyes, Beyoncé’s actions are representative of this “extremist” group who fought against the tactics used by the police in minority communities, and her now pro-black aesthetic is intimidating to these “men and women in blue.” I have noticed that the racial tensions presented via the media takes on an “us” versus “them” mentality, naturally creating a divide among the dominant and subordinate groups. Black people are being portrayed as aggressive, which ultimately makes them seem life-threatening to the police—men and women who are trained to handle various situations especially when subduing aggressors. An unarmed person can only do as much as you allow them to. Yet, unarmed black men, women, and children are dying at the hands of white vigilantes. White America wants to sweep the conversation under the rug by claiming that these actions are justified, and Pete King seems to be one of those who agrees that the police officers’ actions are warranted.

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50 FBI, “FBI Records: The Vault.”
51 Campbell, “GOP congressman.”
“The video [Formation] makes the ritualistic reference to Michael Brown and Ferguson, Missouri by featuring a scene of innocent people with their hands raised high above their heads in surrender. This fable of an innocent Michael Brown being murdered by police while attempting to surrender, which dominated the airwaves for months in 2014, has been thoroughly discredited. In simple language it was and is a lie from beginning to end.”

To a lesser degree, these comments, deal with Beyoncé the “militant,” but have deal less with masking the truth that black folks are dying in record numbers. You see, Mr. King is a steadfast white American who refuses to empathize with the oppressed group. Similar to Guo, King compared Beyoncé’s visuals to a fantasy, you know, since the police would never actually surrender to an unarmed black person. He further implied that surrendering police is almost impossible. King continued to tell the story of Michael Brown, and explained that “Officer Wilson should be praised, not condemned, for his courageous action against a dangerous criminal." It is unnerving to hear that the deceased Michael Brown being regarded as a dangerous criminal, while his the assailant is considered a hero. Neither King, nor I, witnessed the incident. Therefore, I can only speculate as to what truly occurred leading up to Brown’s death. One can point the finger all day and try to convince people to agree with their opinions, but an opinion is just that…everyone has one. Hence, King may state that Officer Wilson should be praised instead of condemned for his actions. Maybe the same should be afforded to Beyoncé. She acknowledged a political issue that is affecting people within her identified racial background, she provided them with an empowering anthem, and no casualties occurred when they assumed

__52__ Campbell, “GOP congressman.”
formation. For Congressman King, this was beyond comprehension. Instead, he closed his statement with the following:

“Maybe it's because I've attended too many police funerals and because my father proudly served in the NYPD for more than 30 years but I strongly believe that this false and irresponsible narrative of police violence premised on lies and distortion endangers police officer lives and is extremely damaging to our nation and to people of all races and backgrounds. For example, no organization has done more to save innocent black lives than the NYPD.53”

Death should not be the result of individuals who appear to be resisting arrest…Eric Garner. Police drawing guns the evening before a groom’s wedding should not have resulted in death. Had the officers taken the proper procedures to identify the accused person, Sean Bell could still be alive. Being in the stairwell of an apartment building at the “wrong time” should not have resulted in death…Akai Gurley. Stop and frisks should not result in death…Kimani Gray. The list is infinite, but supposedly this organization has done more than anyone else to save innocent black lives. I will believe it the day that the breaking news headlines stop saying “unarmed black suspect dead, killed by police in self-defense.” If Beyoncé’s Super Bowl Halftime performance was anti-police, then the world Pete King lives in is clearly just black and white, and the officers are just doing their jobs.

Sharing similar sentiments, the GOP’s very own Rudy Giuliani provided a few choice words on “Fox & Friends” regarding Beyoncé’s Halftime performance. “This is football, not Hollywood54,” he said, “and I thought it was really outrageous

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53 Campbell, 2016.
that she used it as a platform to attack police officers who are the people who protect her and protect us, and keep us alive.\textsuperscript{55} By indicating that \textit{Formation} is anti-police and so is Beyoncé, Giuliani pitted himself, a white American, against her, a black woman in America. The only reason this performance is so seemingly outrageous is due to the fact that a black woman had an opportunity to bring blackness front and center and confront those who do not believe that black lives really do matter.

Giuliani says that police are people who protect her and us and keep us alive. I find this statement to be quite problematic due to the “us” versus “them” rhetoric. The “us,” also known as white people, get to go home at night, sleep, and wake up the next morning and never have to think twice about what it is like to be a black person living in America. Furthermore, the “us” has the privilege of not being gunned down by police because it is their job to keep white people, i.e., “us,” alive.

Giuliani suggested that Beyoncé attacks police officers, and his choice of words insinuated that she is points aggression towards the same people that protect her. According to Pete King, Michael Brown was being aggressive. According to Giuliani, Beyoncé is an attacker. While these words are different, the definitions are synonymous. These ideologies suggest that African Americans are a disorderly, defiant group that disrupt the racialized institutions put in place to control them. People often say “Oh do not pull the race card,” but how can you not? What has been done to provoke said attackers? Can a black person not feel threatened by the men and women in blue? The representation depicted in the media says they cannot feel threatened. Beyoncé deliberately made a racial, yet political, statement as soon as she

\textsuperscript{55} Sterbenz, “Rudy Giuliani condemns Beyoncé's Super Bowl halftime performance.”
released *Formation*. Consequently, she is now uncontrollable because she is not whitewashing her blackness anymore, and that, in my opinion, is the only justifiable explanation as to why Beyoncé is anti-police and pro-Black Panther.

Like Pete King, Rudy Giuliani, views today’s society as a two-dimensional entity, and he cannot quite pick up on the third dimension. As a result, many of his opinions are one-sided because he has not had to live the black experience. He argued that:

> “What we should be doing in the African-American community, and all communities, is build up respect for police officers. And focus on the fact that when something does go wrong, OK. We'll work on that. But the vast majority of police officers risk their lives to keep us safe.”

I will not go in depth on the racist undertones of this comment in particular, but I will say is that respect is one of those tricky words that is also fairly loaded. One, respect is not a God-given right to everyone. Two, it is meant to be reciprocated. Lastly, when a white man says that all communities, particularly African-American communities, should build respect for officers, the message implies that there is an understood power of dominance. Hence African Americans should act accordingly. However, as stated previously, that is another conversation for a different day. At the end of the segment of “Fox & Friends,” Giuliani stated that performing at the Super Bowl is a “political position” that Beyoncé was “probably going to take advantage of.” If this position is political according to Giuliani, why is it problematic that she politicized her performance? Is it because Beyoncé’s politics do not mirror his?

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56 Sterbens, “Rudy Giuliani condemns Beyonce’s Super Bowl halftime performance.”
57 Sterbenz, 2016.
58 Sterbenz,.
differentiation alludes to a division among white and black, male and female, and wealthy and poor. Though Beyoncé is not of a lower socioeconomic status, she belongs to a racial group that typically is. Consequently, her performance, as well as her video, emphasized police brutality—a strong representation of the current plights of black Americans. Aside from calling Beyoncé anti-police, Giuliani also implied that she is immoral. He presumed that the Halftime Show should have been “decent wholesome entertainment.” Another immoralist has come forth because Beyoncé was so unapologetically black that no one knew what to do. This moral panic suggests that America, primarily white America, is not ready for that much blackness to be presented in a positive light. Instead, they are used to the Beyoncé that is prim and proper and fights for the equality of all women, not black people.

Formation & Feminism

Beyoncé is known to some as a modern-day feminist. Her songs - *Single Ladies, Flawless, and Pretty Hurts* , to name a few—typically seem to encourage and empower women from all backgrounds. However, her 2016 Super Bowl Halftime performance caused a few white feminists to feel “left out.” According to the writers at *NewsOne*, an R&B singer by the name of Arika Kane used social media to voice her concerns regarding Beyoncé’s new hit single. “Sorry Bey! I won't be getting in ‘formation.’ A true feminist unites, not divides...& chooses to empower, not

59 Sterbenz.
flaunt their power #arikakane. For those who do not know, Ms. Kane is a white woman from Killingly, Connecticut, and is a self-proclaimed women’s rights activist. She believes that she and Beyoncé share a bond due to their involvement with modern feminism. Subsequently, the familiarity of her tweet implies that because Beyoncé and she hold similar views regarding feminism, Beyoncé would guarantee her a spot in the formation if she wanted one. Maybe to some, feminism is uplifts and supports all women by allowing them to gain equal access in society. Yet again, there exists a continuous racial divide as to whom is included and what that inclusion looks like, and often times white women feel inclined to accept or deny whomever they feel meets the criterion. Instead of Kane denying an offer that was not even extended, she should see this song for what it truly is…an empowerment for black women. A white woman’s oppression differs from a black woman’s oppression, and no woman’s struggles are identical. Beyoncé finally exhibited pride for her race, but in the end she was ostracized for not including white women this one time. However, there is still this thing called being an ally. Instead of Kane directing her attention toward being uninvited to the party, she should have supported Beyoncé’s ambitions and applauded her for her courage. Allyship is not a stationary position, ultimately, action has to be taken. Therefore, one has to truly be invested in understanding the intersectionality of feminism rather than taking offense to not being included.

Like Owens, Kane suggested that Beyoncé is inauthentic. According to her, “A true feminist unites, not divides, and chooses to empower, not flaunt their power.” One thing to note here is the word “true”. A true feminist at that. Kane,

61 NewsOne, 2016.
62 NewsOne, “White Feminists Attack Beyonce.”
does a “true feminist” really exist? From what I have been exposed to, feminism can have various meanings to different supporters. Conversely, women’s rights vary based on class, race, sexual orientation, as well as many other contributing factors. Therefore, these and many other intersections imply there is no one prototype for a “true feminist.” Why then, does Kane hold this belief to be factual? Apparently, Beyoncé’s critics have realized that she has been pretending to be a feminist 364 days out of the year, just like she pretends to be black. Neither do I think there should be a standard of what feminism looks like, nor do I believe that “true feminists” should be policing other feminists. Although Arika Kane is a woman, she has the privilege of being a white woman. As such, she has never been required to endure the same trying situations that various non-white women may have had to live through.

Kane also implied that Beyoncé is an arrogant show off. Going back to her statement regarding unity and division, she argued that a true feminist chooses to empower, not to flaunt her power. Again, black women flaunting power is a recurring motif that is indicative of white people throwing a tantrum when a black woman has ignored their rules. Can Beyoncé not be a powerful black woman? No, because she was never meant to have that much control, and when they could no longer control her, she then become a threat. Ms. Kane was not angry that Beyoncé did not include her in the formation; she was fearful that her feminist sister paid absolutely no attention to her white oppression and that she smeared her blackness right across her face. This is what the dominant group calls disrespect. It is already too much that Beyoncé’s power was televised, but flaunting it was the cherry on top of an ice cream sundae in which Arika Kane did not indulge happily. According to the Oxford
flaunting means “to walk or move about so as to display one's finery; to display oneself in unbecomingly splendid or gaudy attire; to obtrude oneself boastfully, impudently, or defiantly on the public view.” A defiant black woman is argumentatively a white person’s worst nightmare. Not only was Beyoncé proud to proclaim her blackness and empower other African-American women to do so as well, she intentionally did not include white feminists like Arika Kane. It is okay if Kane refuses to get into formation, because Beyoncé’s show of black women empowerment was never meant for her. Conversely there are black women who are not supportive of Beyoncé’s formation either.

For example, Dianca London, columnist for Death and Taxes, is not a huge fan of Beyoncé’s feminism. She believes that what Beyoncé stands for is not a good representation of her black femininity. “For me, her brand of feminism (and the brand of feminism assigned to her identity as a pop icon) is severely limited, and her latest activism via ‘Formation’ feels more like strategic consumerist dramatism rather than empowerment.” London is a self-proclaimed black feminist, as is Beyoncé, but she implied that Beyoncé’s brand is restricted. It appears almost as if Beyoncé is not real enough to genuinely support black feminism and the endless forms of oppression this group has had to encounter. Although London does not delve deeper into the statement regarding Beyoncé’s brand, this “severe limitation” that she spoke of has a couple of different connotations. One implication may be that Beyoncé’s feminism is all bark and no bite. Meaning, she is a black female activist whenever her “pro-black

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feminist” songs are on the radio, but she cannot quite mobilize herself in a way that allows her to personally interact with black women, reducing her a surface-level black feminist. On the contrary, London could be claiming that Beyoncé’s brand is just so cookie-cutter that she is able to have multiple versions of herself making her marketable to whatever audience she appeals to more, and therefore making her assigned brand of feminism disingenuous.

The many faces of Beyoncé’s feminism seem to make her confined to one over the other. On one hand, if she strays too far away from the path then she is not black enough to align herself to black women. On the other hand, if she downplays her blackness, her marketability increases tremendously. The fact that London publicly disapproved of the assigned feminist identity given to Beyoncé is a problem in itself. The latter represents more than the grey area of Beyoncé’s feminism because it highlights the agency that black women do not possess. Aside from Beyoncé’s celebrity status, she is a black woman who is given various labels that she is expected to abide by. Additionally, this is something that black women have encountered for centuries. Whether they are labeled as being too promiscuous, loud, rude, independent, or angry, black women are not allowed to create their own identities without these and other stigmas being attached to them. Although Beyoncé’s feminism may not be representative of London’s choice feminism, how does London know that this is the form of feminism Beyoncé wanted for herself?

The narrative of a black woman being dramatic is a stereotype that is too familiar. These women are typically obnoxious and exaggerated which makes it harder for others to take them seriously. Dianca London stated that Beyoncé’s latest
single was a “strategic consumerist dramatism” and did not seem as empowering as others claimed it to be. Many have said it, but I will reiterate it once again: no one likes to see a black woman making money, not even other black women. This crab-in-the-barrel mentality plagues the African-American community. No one crab can climb higher toward the top than the others, but if one does succeed, the others in the barrel attempt to pull it back down to their level. Undeniably, crabs were never meant to be in a barrel. They were meant to live freely. While Beyoncé was fortunate enough to “make it”, black women like London would rather see her fail than to succeed. Thus London has placed blame on Beyoncé for not representing her black femininity and for her capitalist schemes, rather than giving approval to another black woman who uplifts and liberates other black women.

**Formation & Hair Politics**

According to Huffington Post writer Kadia Blagrove, Blue Ivy created a large stream of chatter within the African-American community due to her “unruly curly locks.” Over the years, Beyoncé and Jay-Z have been placed under a microscope when it comes to Blue Ivy’s hair. She is often seen in public with free hair with kinks and coils, and she is absolutely adorable. However, many were shocked that Beyoncé allowed little Blue to wear her hair in the state that she was born with. Blagrove believes that in the African-American community, it is taboo to proudly rock natural hair. Within this community, “the kinky curly locks have been considered unworldly,

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65 Dianca London, “Beyonce’s capitalism.”
unkempt, and ‘nappy.’ Therefore, many African-American women relax their hair in order for it to be straightened. I now present a quick history lesson. Madame C.J. Walker was a black woman who invented the relaxer after having a prophetic dream. She created a substance that is now called “creamy crack” so that black women, or women with extremely thick hair, would be able to manage their tresses, thereby allowing others around them to feel more comfortable. Once relaxed, the hair is bone straight and is fabulous. However, so is natural hair. Yet, so many women shame each other for the way in which they wear their hair. The “natural warriors” berate the “creamy crack” lovers and vice versa. This pitting against one another contributes to black women loathing themselves because their choices are not acceptable within their own society. The problem with the natural versus relaxed hair has caused many to scrutinize how one chooses to sport their hair. THEIR HAIR. There is a campaign slogan that has been floating around for a while: “my body, my choice.” Well, the same can be applied to black women’s hair: “my hair, my choice.” Blue Ivy is far from being a woman; therefore, Beyoncé is responsible for the way in which she chooses to maintain her daughter’s hair. Ultimately, she is a child, so why bash her for the decisions that her mother makes for her?

The controversy over Blue Ivy’s hair has been the highlight of many conversations since she entered into the world. In her latest hit single, Formation, Beyoncé addresses her daughter’s hair haters by stating that she likes her “baby hair, with baby hair and afros”. Roughly two years ago, a person known as JT from Brooklyn, New York, started a petition on change.org to comb Blue Ivy’s hair. At this

67 Blagrove, “Beyonce Responds to Hair Drama.”
time, Blue Ivy was a toddler, but 5,771 supporters signed this petition because they felt as if Beyoncé was not doing a good enough job with the maintenance of her daughter’s hair. The petition is as follows:

“As a woman who understands the importance of hair care. It’s disturbing to watch a child suffering from the lack of hair moisture. The parents of Blue Ivy, Sean Carter A.K.A Jay-Z and Beyoncé [have] failed at numerous attempts of doing Blue [Ivy’s] hair. This matter has escalated to the child developing matted dreads and lint balls. Please let’s get the word out to properly care for Blue [Ivy’s] hair.”

Beyoncé was alleged to have written a handwritten note that said, “Fine I’ll do it. Ya’ll happy? Damn!” and posted it on Instagram. Apparently, Beyoncé succumbed to the pressure placed on her by the hair haters and relaxed Blue Ivy’s hair; although it was neither confirmed nor denied. Blagrove claimed that fans will be “pleased with Blue Ivy’s newfound conformity. The cute little diva will no longer have to be criticized for her inability to grow silky straight hair, [and] her new look will also save mommy and daddy face.” It is evident that regardless of one’s celebrity status, no one is safe from scrutiny, not even a child. Beyoncé is a black woman who married a black man, and they had a black child. This black child has hair that is of a natural texture amongst black people. Furthermore, conformity, is a construct that was created so that black people could follow the rules, something like follow the leader, the white leader that is. If a black woman decides that she wants to defy the standards of beauty that were put in place in order for her to blend with the masses, let her. Choosing to relax, leave hair natural, or get extensions should not

69 Blagrove, “Beyonce Responds to Hair Drama.”
70 Blagrove, 2014.
result in a public petition causing one to lose agency over one’s being. So even if Beyoncé put a weave in Blue Ivy’s hair because she wears a weave, critics would claim that Blue Ivy is too young for that type of hair style. If she were to relax her daughter’s hair, she would be ridiculed by the natural hair enthusiasts because there are so many dangerous chemicals in the product. And you see what happened when Beyoncé chose to allow Blue Ivy’s hair to go free. She had to make a song about the love that she has for her daughter’s afro. There are no easy routes for Beyoncé to have taken because a black woman’s hair is a construct in itself. There is no right or wrong way it should be worn; thus Beyoncé and Blue Ivy lost their agency and were coerced into these standards of beauty. Consequently, Blagrove suggested that “this controversy is sure to have a great effect on the youth, proving your beauty standards do matter.” Yet no one thought about the effect that public scrutiny of Blue Ivy’s hair care had on Beyoncé and her family.

“How is it that Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, who are worth a lot less [than] Bey and Hova, manage to have their daughter Nori in nothing but the finest clothes and jewels, but the powerhouse couple cannot? Instead of taking expensive trips around the world pretending to be happily married and trying to quash divorce rumors, they might consider fixing up their daughter’s hair. You’d think that [they] could have time for both? You guys are worth $1 billion – do something about that hair! Why let Kim Kardashian make you look bad?”

Blue Ivy is often criticized for not having silky straight hair, and it’s quite problematic that people have continued to compare her and her mother to Kim

71 Blagrove, “Beyonce Responds to Hair Drama.”
Kardashian and North West. The blogs are notorious for doing such, and the opinions made regarding Beyoncé’s refusal to do her daughter’s hair is endless. One source in particular, Celeb Dirty Laundry (CDL), indicated that “if Beyoncé and Jay-Z can afford the best of what life has to offer, then why haven’t they done poor baby Blue Ivy Carter’s hair?” This site acknowledging more than the “power couple’s” wealth. They also compare Beyoncé and Jay Z to Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, which is much a larger issue. Both couples are quite successful in their own rights. Yet, Kim Kardashian and Kanye West birthed a biracial child. Consequently, she has a fairer skin complexion and a finer grade of hair. On the contrary, Blue Ivy is the offspring of two African-American parents. While she is also lighter skinned, she has a kinkier grade of hair. The fact that these children are compared based on physicality is not only reprehensible, but it also suggests that Willie Lynch was right.

Willie Lynch was a British slave owner who voyaged to the West Indies in the 18th century. In 1712, the same year that he wrote the “Willie Lynch Letter: The Making of a Slave,” he was brought to Virginia because he was thought to have had a method of controlling slaves that was better than any tactic known to man. The word lynching is derived from his last name. In the letter, he stated that “you must use the dark skin slaves vs. the light skin slaves, and the light skin slaves vs. the dark skin slaves.” On a macro level, society is definitely “using” the lighter-skinned individuals over their darker-skinned counterparts in order to keep this slave mentality cyclical. In keeping with this trend, the writers at Celeb Dirty Laundry did

73 Celeb Dirty Laundry, “Beyonce and Blue Ivy.”
just that. By comparing the hair texture of North’s to Blue Ivy’s they were suggesting that one’s hair is linked to one’s racial identity, making silkier hair more acceptable. Although it may not seem obvious, hair politics are linked to slavery, and it is unfair that today’s youth are made to feel less than by the way in which society judges them.

The writers at CDL asserted that the Carters should be focusing more on the maintenance of their daughter’s hair rather than spending their money frivolously. I see two issues with this train of thought. First, the word “their” is possessive, meaning Beyoncé and Jay Z have the say in how they handle their finances as well as their child. The only problem that these critics have is the fact that a wealthy black couple decided not to pressure a toddler into falling victim to society’s standards of beauty, from the way she dresses to how she wears her hair. Instead, Beyoncé and Jay Z gave Blue Ivy a sense of comfortability, what makes her comfortable and what makes her feel beautiful. Society should not tell these parents how their daughter should look especially in comparison to a biracial child. Celeb Dirty Laundry implied that because North West is biracial, the “finest clothes and jewels” look better on her because her parents make sure that she looks like a million bucks.

One cannot compare apples to oranges. Although they are both fruit, they are completely different, and therefore, they should not be categorized in the same manner. Another thing to note is the way in which the writer suggested that Beyoncé is too good for handouts. While it is not explicitly stated, the handout stereotype is one that has had a negative connotation for black women since the government assistance program was put in place. Black women who manipulate the system into

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35 Celeb Dirty Laundry, “Beyonce and Blue Ivy.”
giving them more money than needed, and typically spend said dollars on themselves despite having children, are referred to as “welfare queens”. They receive the handouts, but their children usually do not experience the financial benefits. Hence, the writers at Celeb Dirty Laundry made an association by insinuating that Beyoncé’s actions resemble those of a welfare queen. “How can someone call themselves a queen and voluntarily let their child look like a peasant; I’m just confused.” Just as I do not know Beyoncé personally, the same applies to the writers at CDL. From an outsider’s perspective, Blue Ivy is fed regularly, she is clothed properly, and she wears her hair natural. However, the conclusion that Beyoncé willingly allows Blue Ivy to resemble a lower class citizen based on her natural hair suggests that someone at Celeb Dirty Laundry is reaching. Why is it problematic that an African-American woman, who is also wealthy, intentionally decided to not pressure her daughter into feeling like she has to look like everyone else? In the end, Blue Ivy is a child. According to Beyoncé, she likes her baby hair with baby hair and afros. That should not be anyone else’s concern.

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76 Celeb Dirty Laundry, “Beyonce and Blue Ivy.”
Nicki Minaj: Perpetuating a White Female Beauty Standard

In February 2012, Nicki Minaj released a song entitled *Marilyn Monroe*. According to *The Grio’s* Ronda R. Penrice, during black history month of that same year, “Minaj’s flaunting of her internalized white American standards of beauty [stood] out more.” Here flaunting was not used in the same manner as how Arika Kane referred to Beyoncé. To Penrice, this flaunting proposes that Minaj is trying to parade around as a white woman, which is indicative of self-loathing in black culture. Anytime a black woman wears colored contacts, lightens her natural hair color, or even alters her body, she is succumbing to a standard of beauty that was not even designed for her. However, Minaj is of Trinidadian descent and identifies as a black woman. So why does choosing to wear blonde hair and having fair skin, not by choice, automatically equate to a white standard of beauty? One can aspire to adopt said standards, but this particular institution of beauty has excluded people of color for centuries. Although Minaj is a light-skinned black woman, she is not whitewashing her blackness in order to pass for white. Based solely on her current features, she could not pass for white even if she tried, and wearing a blonde hair weave would not necessarily work either.

Why then, are these choices problematic? If white women can receive butt enhancements, perm their hair to mimic black textures, or even tan to become a darker complexion than their true skin tone, are they also self-loathing? I think for black women, the problem is not in the choices that they make, rather, it has more so

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to do with how society reacts to their decisions. Consequently, this is why I believe that colorism still plagues black communities. White society has historically chosen who is more beautiful and who is ugly among African Americans, and typically, the lighter the skin the more “beautiful” they were in contrast to their darker-skinned counterparts. This previous held ideology is the reason there is a #lightskin versus #darkskin trending topic on various social media platforms in 2016. I digress, but when Minaj chose to wear blonde hair and colored contacts, she did not say “I want to be a white woman.” Yet, society chose to label her as such, which ultimately creates a colorist division that was not even spoken by Minaj herself. Instead of seeing it as a creative expression, black Americans have called it self-hatred and problematic, and white Americans have pardoned Minaj because she is apparently perpetuating a white standard of beauty.

Penrice continued to say that Minaj’s image is controversial especially among the African-American community. “Her Barbie-like small waist coupled with her Venus Hottentot backside and almost-always Marilyn Monroe blonde hair certainly sends mixed messages regarding black beauty values.” Being that I am a black woman, I do not really understand what black beauty values are, but in my opinion, all variations of blackness are beautiful beyond measure—regardless of a woman’s outward appearance. Whether Minaj wants to have a cinched waist or an extra-large derriere, or even platinum blonde hair, none of that is my concern. Penrice on the other hand complains about the superficial by comparing Minaj to a Barbie doll and a sexualized historical figure known as Venus Hottentot. Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman,

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78 Penrice, “Nicki Minaj and ‘Marilyn Monroe.’”
also known as Venus Hottentot, was a young woman from South Africa who was taken from her home and put on display in a traveling circus. Exhibited as a scientific and sexual marvel, Baartman was objectified and endured endless trauma as a “freak” in the human circus. As a result, she died in her early twenties from syphilis that she contracted while on display. Many of Minaj’s critics have claimed that her backside is the only reason she is famous, and Penrice joined the party in criticism. The fact that she compares Minaj to Baartman is absolutely insulting. Baartman’s body was sexually exploited by Europeans, which resulted in death, and her death should not be taken in vain. Although Minaj has an exceptionally large derriere, she should not be defined by it. The fact that Minaj’s butt is even showcased in this light suggests that the black woman has no agency in how her body is handled in society, despite how she chooses to accentuate herself. It is one thing to openly market your backside for economic gain, and it is another thing to place negative associations onto a person without their consent. Who is actually in control of Minaj’s body?

People often associate Minaj, and the black female body in general, with being hypersexual even if she has chosen to re-appropriate this stereotype. I perceive re-appropriation as the revitalization of negative stereotypes that typically degrade subordinate social groups. These groups then reclaims said stereotypes and control how they are used. For example, take a look at Amber Rose’s reclamation of the word slut. Instead of critics shaming her for dressing a certain way or being sexually active, Rose started taking ownership of how her body is regarded, began celebrating the once offensive term, and is now proud to be a slut. While Amber Rose identifies as a

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black woman, she can choose to pass as a white woman, which ultimately grants her the privilege of being a proud “white-passing” slut. Minaj on the other hand just becomes a promiscuous black girl regardless of how she has chosen to reclaim the hypersexual stereotype.

Typically, when a person calls you a doll, you take it as a complement, unless they are being shady. Well, Penrice was definitely a palm tree because she implied that Minaj is fake due to her Barbie-esque physique. Barbie dolls are probably one of the most controversial children’s toy collections in the world. These dolls typically have a wasp waist that is symmetrically proportional to the rest of their body, and they traditionally favor a white beauty standard because they are not an accurate representation of a black woman’s figure. Aside from the assertion that Penrice made about Minaj’s “Barbie-like small waist”\textsuperscript{80},” she insinuates more than what is obvious. The Barbie is a plastic doll that one can manipulate. Barbie is not a person, so you can do anything you want to do to the doll. You can dress her and comb her hair, and she will not talk. You can even keep her in the box as a collector’s item. Essentially, you control her every move. Minaj is known for her multiple alter egos, many of which are Barbie inspired, but she chose to wear the costumes, just like she chose to take them off. The fact that she is compared to a doll suggests that Minaj is plastic from the way she looks to how malleable she is. Being a doll can be interpreted as being a sexual object rather than a person.

\textsuperscript{80} Penrice, “Nicki Minaj and ‘Marilyn Monroe.’”
“While it is indeed true that black women come in various shades and shapes and have a long history of doing outlandish things with their hair, Minaj’s image as a hip-hop blow-up doll of sorts is dangerous. Pop culture has beaten up black girls enough and, unfortunately, Nicki Minaj has elected to fuel the problem rather than solve it.81”

Although Penrice did not state it, she practically implied that Minaj is not in control of her body; which goes back to my argument that black women have no say in how their body is handled in society. She stated that Minaj is a blow-up doll, reiterating the point that Minaj is seen as an object rather than a woman. While she did argue that this representation of Minaj is dangerous, she ridiculed her at the same time. Nicki Minaj is a character that easy to misconstrue. By only focusing on the costume, Penrice forgot that underneath it all resides Onika Tanya Maraj, a black woman trying to make a name for herself in a male-dominated sphere. And though Minaj is wearing the blonde hair and colored contacts, she is not adding fuel to the fire. Instead, she is giving little black girls the chance to tap into their creativity regardless of what standards are put in place to hinder them from trying to become someone other than what society has constructed for them. Thus, she wears these over-the-top costumes and wigs, while sporting dramatic makeup to play into this image that she has created for herself.

However, Penrice did not see it as such. “[The] anointing of Nicki Minaj as an emerging fashion icon encourages young black girls especially to manipulate their looks. The more fake and outrageous one appears, the better. The less that look resembles more common black features the more acceptable one becomes in

81 Penrice, “Nicki Minaj and ‘Marilyn Monroe.’”
mainstream arenas.” One thing to note here is the notion that when black bodies receive plastic surgery they resemble whiteness, and black girls who aspire to alter their image do not love themselves according to Penrice. However, Minaj is a caricature who embodies everything that society does not want her to be, so she defies the standards. Granting there rumors allege that Nicki Minaj received plastic surgery, she has never confirmed those allegations. Penrice asserted that it is problematic to alter your body, and further insinuated that Minaj is encouraging young black girls to “manipulate their looks”. When you typically have an issue with something, what do you do? Well, you fix it. So, what if Minaj changed her body to her liking? It should not be anyone else’s concern, but somehow Penrice made it her concern. White people have tried to regulate black bodies for centuries, so why is a black woman doing the same? Penrice’s critiques exemplified how common it is to bash black bodies when they go against the preset standards. It is almost a brainwashing of sorts. She has been conditioned to black people, black women in particular, encouraging them to stay in their lanes and resemble a preconceived ideal of black beauty. But there are no rules. Thus, Minaj does not meet the criteria that Penrice approved.

Plastic surgery is quite taboo among the African-American community, but, it is also a $20 billion industry that caters to all. Some may believe that it is a market designated for older white people who can afford these enhancements. However, many black celebrities and non-celebrities have been recipients of the industry’s services as well. Yet, when black people do go under the knife, they rarely admit that they had work done due to the possible scrutiny from others. Consequently, there is
this fear of proudly claiming to be a recipient of plastic surgery because they are then viewed as self-loathing. Penrice argued that the more alterations Minaj receives, the closer to whiteness she is. Let us speculate that Minaj had some work done. In figure 1.1, Minaj is seen with a much smaller frame, and her breast and butt are not as large as they are in figures 1.2 and 1.3. These alleged alterations do not resemble a white beauty standard. In fact, this “hourglass” frame that Minaj has possibly created for herself illustrates that she embraces a black woman’s physique. You know, the one that is the blueprint for the Kardashians. Minaj’s existence is not a case of self-loathing, in my opinion, Minaj resembles dignity and self-love regardless of the measures taken in order to receive her ideal body.
In March 2012, one month after Penrice’s opinion piece, *MadameNoire* writer, Brande Victorian stated that Nicki Minaj was “dyeing to be white.” No the quote is not misspelled. Victorian asserted that Minaj wanted to change the color of her skin so badly that she literally dyed herself.

“It’s not even just Nicki’s skin that makes me call her escape from black America into question, it’s her music as well. Nicki’s had ‘crossover’ success before she was even really fully accepted by the rap community or the black community. Initially, people were excited about the presence of a female MC after years of rap being a man’s world, and merely a year after stepping onto the scene she’s traded in the hardcore lines she once spit for bubble gum [...] Her traditional rap songs are failing commercially while her pop songs climb the charts so we know who she’ll be catering to if she wants to keep spending $50,000 a month on Louis bags.”

As an artist, one is able to use their artistry in order to not only brand themselves, but also to use their music as an outlet for creative expression. Although Minaj’s expression is quite unique, I have never questioned her blackness. I feel as though many of her critics are solely focused on her ability to appeal to multiple audiences rather than the black community, and it seems as if they believe that Minaj’s caricature is not representing the black audience that is supporting her rap career. This goes back to point that black women cannot step outside of their designated spaces. Minaj is too eccentric, too plastic, too whitewashed to be black, despite the fact that this is not an accurate portrayal of her “true self”. However, her critics can only see what meets the eye, which is a light-skinned black woman catering to a white audience. Additionally, Victorian argued that Minaj was not fully accepted as a

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83 Brande Victorian.
female rapper or in the black community. As a result, her “crossover” music was the only thing saving her career. Recognize how Victorian pointed out Minaj’s spending of her money. Here is an example of a black woman condemning another black woman for profiting from white people, despite the fact that this black woman made it apparent that Minaj was not welcomed into the rap world or the African-American community. Personally, if I had to prove myself in order to gain acceptance into a community that I called my own, I would not even try. Contrary to my feelings, Minaj did try, and she still was not black enough to sit at the table. For people like Penrice and Victorian, they cannot see artistry for artistry. Instead, they point the finger at Minaj and revoke her black card because she does not fit into this mold that black Americans have created for one another. Minaj is the only black female emcee that has been topping the charts for the past six years, yet that alone is not enough.

Much like Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj has had a ton of chatter regarding her brand as an artist. She is the type of musician that is not as racially ambiguous as Beyoncé. Nevertheless, her music allows her to gain access into many realms making her more appealing to a white audience. Penrice and Victorian shared beliefs that Minaj is perpetuating a white standard of beauty, and Victorian also lamented that her music reflects whiteness. To package it nicely, she insinuated that Minaj is downplaying her blackness in order to be successful.

“I know mainstream success and acceptance by white America is the Holy Grail for so many black artists, but when you get it this way, I have to question whether it’s a triumph at all. Sure, deep down she knows she’s black (maybe) but does the audience? Or are they more comfortable with her being a pink girl with a blonde wig and an English accent that looks just like any other Barbie rather than a threatening black woman? It’s fine
to play dress up every now and again but when are you going to be your real self? You know, the black girl from South Jamaica, Queens, who stepped on the scene saying ‘playtime is over.’" See figure 1.4.

The music industry is a predominately white institution that only leaves the door slightly ajar for black artists. As a result, many of them have converted to pop music in order to be heard in this white-dominant institution. However, Victorian does bring to light a serious issue regarding the “triumph” of being visible by white America. While this visibility allows black artists to venture into a world that is not as welcoming as it should be, black artists are still not on the same tier as white artists.

Nicki Minaj can have a white fan base of a million, but in the music industry she is still a black woman. Although she does acknowledge her black roots, Minaj’s identity is separate from her music. Remember, Nicki Minaj is not synonymous with Onika Maraj. Therefore, when a white fan hears her songs, her identity becomes lost in translation, and she is no longer visible to said fan. Instead, they hear a catchy tune and never have to associate it with a black woman. This article was written in 2012, and if we move forward by three years, I am almost certain that Victorian’s ending statement would not be the same.

The controversy regarding Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift, and Nicki Minaj is evident. Despite the fact Victorian implied that the audience may like her more as this character rather than a “threatening black woman,” she was correct. At that time, Minaj was doing everything she possibly could in order to make a name for herself. In the end, she became this eclectic pop star that did not have to be the Azalea Banks

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84 Victorian, “Is Nicki Minaj Dyeing to be White?”
86 Victorian, “Is Nicki Minaj Dyeing to be White?”
of music; the tired angry black woman that everyone loves to hate. However, in recent years, Minaj has shed her adopted “whiteness” and focused on her pro-black aesthetic which is now evident in her music.

![Figure 1.4](image)

**How to Win a White Friend**

When you are not black enough for people who look like you, and too out of the ordinary to white people, the situation leads to intimidation. No one controls an individual, except for that individual, and for Nicki Minaj, that is nothing new. She soon shed this persona and manifested into someone the world grew to adore. In Victorian’s piece she reasoned that Nicki Minaj is not an accurate representation of Minaj’s real self, and many believe this sentiment to be true. As a consequence, the quickest way to please white and black audiences, is to strip down, bare all, and show the world your “true” self. Kevin O’Keeffe, former editorial fellow with *The Atlantic*, was definitely pleased with Minaj’s transformation as she debuted a version of herself that shocked many. With her much anticipated *The Pinkprint* album she did not
introduce “Nicki Minaj, but the woman behind the work, Onika Maraj.” Who is Onika Maraj? Onika is the diluted version of the “hip-hop Barbie.” She does not rap, wear wigs, or transform into “bizarre alter egos.” All things considered, Nicki Minaj is a black female rapper, known by her colorful hair pieces and eccentric attire, which is her signature look. For a white man to say that Onika is more appealing than Minaj suggests that her non-conformity as an artist was too unpredictable. Subsequently, Minaj’s actions were never anticipated and she did not fit into the black woman box that society created for her.

According to O’Keeffe, the birth of Onika allowed Minaj to create piano ballads that were “quite lovely,” and she was able to share her life with the world. Therefore, she is no longer seen as a threat because she is vulnerable and real. Vulnerability is one of those emotions that connects us to one another. Instead of focusing his attention on her physicality, O’Keeffe shifted gears to listen to Minaj’s story. Nevertheless, I feel as though he is more fascinated with her struggles as a black woman rather than the Nicki Minaj with countless alter egos.

“It's a pleasant surprise, then, that in the context of the record, all these songs make sense as the different stages of heartbreak, from post-breakup sex, the death of her cousin in 2011, her abortion as a teenager, a proposal she did not seem ready to fully accept [...] Much of it is brutal to hear, especially from a woman who’s really never made talking about her personal life part of her career.”

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88 Penrice, “Nicki Minaj and ‘Marilyn Monroe.’”
89 Kevin O’Keeffe.
90 O’Keeffe, “The Pinkprint.”
91 O’Keeffe, 2014.
O’Keeffe concluded that it is a pleasant surprise to hear some aspects of Minaj’s life. Although her pop singles were geared toward a whiter audience, that too was not enough to satisfy O’Keeffe. He simply wanted more. “It's worth celebrating the fact that the public got such an impressively personal record from Minaj—or, rather, from Maraj.” In his eyes, a woman who he considered has “lived.” Ultimately, O’Keeffe, implied that this woman who was once considered to be a whitewashed pop sensation is actually a black woman with real struggles. This is the “real self” that white America loves to see. Minaj is not all bubblegum and rainbows. In fact, she has had to endure real life, and to his surprise, O’Keeffe enjoyed seeing her pain publicly broadcasted. Nicki Minaj is an artist who pushes boundaries and appeals to various audiences, but no one has gotten the opportunity to see what is underneath the costume. Onika on the other hand, is praised because she is a reminder to white America that being a black woman is synonymous with struggle.

Outside of the African-American community, there is a fascination with black women’s hair. Whether hair is relaxed, natural, pressed, weaved, colored, or braided, people are intrigued by the versatility of black hair. Many non-blacks try to mimic these hairstyles because they are deemed more beautiful on white women; whereas black women are labelled ghetto or unkempt. Consequently, many black women are vilified for choosing to express themselves creatively. Nicki Minaj is no stranger to this creative outlet, but due to her self-expression, several critics have started obsessing over her hair. Similar to the Blue Ivy obsession, most of the attention has

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92 O’Keeffe, “The Pinkprint.”
93 O’Keeffe, 2014.
94 Victorian, “Is Nicki Minaj Dyeing to be White?”
been focused not so much on the maintenance of Minaj’s hair, but rather on what lies beneath the wigs. Consequently, admirers wonder what took her so long to adopt such a mature look. “The ‘Super Bass’ singer, 31, has ditched her trademark colorful hairstyles and wild makeup in favor of a more ladylike style.\textsuperscript{95}\textsuperscript{95}

In 2014, \textit{US Weekly’s} Sharon Tanenbaum wrote an article dedicated solely to Minaj’s natural hair. Again, we witnessed a white person backhandedly approving Minaj’s transformation. Tanenbaum inferred that Minaj’s peculiar sense of style was not becoming of a woman. Her comments reflected what is supposed to be appropriate black beauty standards in white America, especially if someone has wealth, as opposed to what is viewed as rebellious expression. Meaning, if people have gained economically, they should look the part, which further implies that they should be able to fit into a structure without fear of breaking the mold and doing whatever they believe is appropriate. Tanenbaum noted, “With her long brown hair, muted makeup, and modest dresses on red carpets as of late, Nicki Minaj may have you wondering, ‘Who's that girl?’\textsuperscript{96}\textsuperscript{96}” Thus, she claimed that Minaj’s au naturel is more sophisticated than her previous looks. So what was she before? A hood rat looking for her next come up? Is Minaj a lady now that she is not flamboyantly clad? Apparently, being classy these days is based on one’s attire and how they fit into society. Being a lady is definitely associated with class, which is representative of the socioeconomic status from which one derives. Let us assume that Minaj came from very humble beginnings, more so extremely humble. As a result, she decided that rap

\textsuperscript{96}S. Tanenbaum, “Nicki Minaj Ditches the Wigs.”
was her way out the hood, so to speak, and allowed her to do more for her family than she could have even fathomed. Let us imagine that her aesthetic was derived from what she previously knew before her wealth. And this image from which she drew inspiration was indicative of a young girl creating a fantasy world so that she would not have to constantly be reminded of her family’s situation. Hence, is the reason her vivid imagination transitioned into her adult life because the little girl inside of her was still trying to mask the pain that she endured as a child. Yet, at some point in time, Minaj decided that she was able to stand on her own as a strong black woman. She no longer needed the child-like persona. Well, Tanenbaum did not see it as such. Instead, she insinuated that because Minaj had acquired wealth, it was time for her to start dressing the part, a perspective which ultimately disregards Minaj’s personal growth.

**Anaconda & Sexuality**

When Nicki Minaj released the cover art for the *Anaconda* album, and dropped the video shortly thereafter, the world had come to an end. Well, not really. However, that was how many critics reacted to her album’s debut. The cover art depicts Minaj in a squatting position, looking over her shoulder in a bra and G-string, Figure 1.5.
According to Tiffanie Drayton, writer for *Frisky Rant*, “the image was met with mostly support from fans and critics but some questioned if the image was ‘too racy.\(^7\)” Minaj soon got word of the critics’ reactions and posted pictures on Instagram and Twitter with various white models in similar attire and poses, and captioned said pictures with “Acceptable”. The issue that Drayton brought to light is the fact that black women’s bodies are regulated in a way that makes it harder for them to assert their sexuality in a positive manner. As a result, their behavior is considered hoe-ish… thot-like…and as Minaj put it herself “unacceptable”. Drayton also suggested the brand of sexuality that Minaj proudly claims, is built on a spectacle, which she identifies as Minaj’s backside.

“The stereotype of the over-sexed Black Jezebel has long been America’s go-to archetype used in entertainment since the country’s inception. This image is rooted in White supremacist, patriarchal ideas developed when Europeans first encountered African tribal women and in America’s history where White slave holders blamed Black hypersexuality for the rape of women slaves. For that reason, there has always been an incentivized space to display, exploit and monetize the myth of black female lewdness through images and music. Historically, it has been the easiest way for White men to avoid taking responsibility for the abuse and misuse of Black female bodies.\(^8\)”

Drayton considered that this branding perpetuates the stereotype of hypersexuality and stated that “Minaj and her multi-million dollar empire represents everything

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\(^8\) Drayton, “Frisky Rant.”
wrong with our current perception of blackness and more specifically, Black female sexuality.\textsuperscript{99}

Drayton viewed Minaj’s display of her sexuality as problematic, whereas Minaj considered the cover art for her album was sex-positive. I understand that the hypersexual stereotype is rooted in slavery, and no one denying Drayton’s assertions. The issue, however, lies in how she placed blame wholly on Minaj. Drayton contended that the “Black Jezebel\textsuperscript{100}” was used to justify white dominance over blackness during slavery and afterward. At what point in time will black women reclaim what was historically forced upon them, and assert their sexuality in a way that makes white America feel uncomfortable? Minaj successfully asserted her sexuality, she was not only ridiculed by white America, but also by the black community, which felt her actions were problematic as well. Nevertheless, the only reason her behavior is such an issue is due to her unapologetic decision to express her sexuality in a way that she chooses. When a white woman wants to shake her ass, no one questions it. If she decides to sit atop a wrecking ball nude, she is liberated. Even if she uses black bodies as props in her video, she gets a slap on the wrist. Some have questioned the reason for the obvious disparity. White women get excused for the way they showcase their sexuality and the decisions that they make because whiteness is acceptable.

Drayton contested that “if Nicki Minaj existed in a world where racial bias and stereotypes did not reign supreme and the Black female body was treated with the same respect as the White female body, then her brand would be a major fail. For that

\textsuperscript{99} Drayton, 2014.
\textsuperscript{100} Drayton, 2014.
reason, it is best that she not challenge the status quo — not if she wants to continue having a successful career, anyways.¹⁰¹ Let us consider this. Equality should not matter because her “hypersexual image”¹⁰² allows her to make money? The fact is simple: a black woman’s body should not be regulated in the first place, and how she chooses to display her sexuality should not come into question. This is the point that Minaj is trying to make. White female bodies and black female bodies should be viewed through the same lens without anyone policing one more than the other. By Drayton asserting that Minaj should not challenge the status quo, she was suggesting that Minaj should be compliant with how black sexuality and bodies are viewed in society. Compliance indicates that African Americans are satisfied with the treatment of their bodies. The white man created the oppression, but it is the sole responsibility of black Americans to rewrite how they are acknowledged. The rewrite cannot be acheived if strides taken are not fully acknowledged. Likewise, if society continues to disregard the efforts, black women will continued to be regarded as sexual objects.

After the release of the Anaconda video, Minaj was presented with her very own wax sculpture, but the figure was placed on all fours with an arched back and dressed quite provocatively (Figure 1.6). Although the Madame Tussauds’ wax sculpture was seemingly innocent, the portrayal of Minaj serves as a reminder that black women’s bodies are objects, useful yet disposable. According to Baker Machado, writer for E Online, “the rapper’s new wax figure was unveiled earlier this month in Las Vegas, and features the bootylicious vixen [...] from her ‘Anaconda’

¹⁰¹ Drayton, “Frisky Rant.”
¹⁰² Drayton, “Frisky Rant.”
music video. We all have seen her. Nicki Minaj has a huge backside, it is very distinguishable. We acknowledge Minaj’s undeniable figure, and she acknowledges it. Nonetheless, she avows that her body does not define her being. Even so, the only thing that Machado visualized was a bootylicious vixen. Machado is a white male who is following in the footsteps of his predecessors. He regards Minaj as a sexualized object rather than a black woman displaying a sex-positive image.

Figure 1.6

Throughout Minaj’s career, she has branded herself as woman comfortable with her sexuality. The moment she decided to play into a stereotype that traditionally possesses a negative connotation, society could only comprehend that she was being suggestive. Several other poses could have been selected for the wax statue, but a highly submissive one was chosen instead. Although this is not actually Nicki Minaj, the figure is a replica of how the creator envisioned her. The designer had agency over her body, how it was manipulated. Ultimately, the creator was responsible for the reactions the figure rendered. Minaj is known for her Barbie persona, but I am quite certain she was not prepared for the treatment received by her wax figure.

Figures 1.7 and 1.8 represent actions people wish they could take if granted access to her body. People may wonder, who has access to Minaj? If we were to actually place her on this sexualized pedestal, and make her get on all fours, how many people would attempt to degrade her body? Absolutely none. In real life, Minaj’s reclamation of her sexuality is threatening. Men and women alike cannot comprehend that a black woman is taking ownership of her sexuality, and is not afraid to do so. Therefore, these bystanders had to play make-believe to “teach” Minaj a lesson. But little do they know, the jokes are on them. Liberatory practices often create a sense of power and control in order for the black woman to own her sexuality without fear of imposition from others. Minaj sets the rules as to how her body is accessed, which means that people need permission before interacting with her.

And then there was this:

Figure 1.7

Figure 1.8
I’m Not Mad, Why is She?

“Angry black woman” is a title that implies loathing, pity, desolation. A title that represents the downward mobility for the black woman in America. In August of 2013, Julia Craven, columnist for Huffpost Black Voice, released an article regarding Miley Cyrus’ view on Nicki Minaj’s feud with Taylor Swift. Craven emphasized the statements made by Cyrus—a white female artist—indicated that black women in the music industry do not have the same freedom as white women, to be themselves with no scrutiny. Black artists are subjected to living under a microscope and being called out every time they say or do something that is viewed as controversial. Typically the implied controversy is an innuendo for any action that may confirm stereotypes about black women. Craven noted Cyrus who claimed that Minaj should not be upset for not winning a Video Music Award (V.M.A). Essentially, Cyrus implied that Minaj’s behavior was distasteful:

“If you do things with an open heart and you come at things with love, you would be heard and I would respect your statement. But I don’t respect your statement because of the anger that came with it. And it’s not anger like, ‘Guys, I’m frustrated about some things that are a bigger issue.’ You made it about you. Not to sound like a bitch, but that’s like, ‘Eh, I didn’t get my V.M.A.’”

Cyrus did not attempt to comprehend Minaj’s claim that, “Black women influence pop culture so much but are rarely rewarded for it.” Instead, she took a colorblind approach to Minaj’s tweets and fixated on what came across as angry. Thus she

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104 Julia Craven, “Nicki Minaj Has Every Right To Be Pissed At Miley Cyrus,” Huffpost Black Voices, August 31, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/nicki-minaj-has-every-right-to-be-pissed-off_us_55e4ad61e4b0ce818f618c5ef
105 Craven, “Nicki Minaj Has Every Right to Be Pissed.”
appeared to be insensitive since she ignored the fact that she was reproducing the stereotype of the angry black woman. This stereotype has been a term used for decades to describe black women who express themselves in a seemingly aggressive manner. Perceiving a small portion of their behavior, society considers these women volatile and intimidating. While, anger is a normal emotion, and everyone has experienced it at some point in time, Minaj is black, and her display just so happened to be public, and therefore, she made a few white Americans uncomfortable. However, the anger was taken out of context by two white female artists. Cyrus and Swift too shared feelings publicly, but no one criticized them in the same manner as Minaj. It is evident that white women are able to showcase their anger without being ostracized. Yet, this favoring further perpetuates the stereotypes that are given to black women. According to Craven, “[Minaj] shouldn’t be bashed for demanding [power and respect], or told to express those demands in a way that makes white people feel more comfortable.”

Cyrus used color-blind ideologies to mask her ignorance in a way that allowed her to deny reality. A reality that she does not have to endure because her whiteness dismisses inequality, whereas Minaj encounters more discrimination as an artist, but more so as a black woman. By ignoring the reality, Cyrus ignored the fact that being black in the music industry limits ones creativity, and black artistry is not as respected in the same manner as white artistry. Craven reiterated a point made by Jessica Goldstein, writer for Think Progress, who alleged that “White women do get celebrated (or, at the very least, forgiven) for things that women of color get punished

106 Julia Craven, “Nicki Minaj Has Every Right to Be Pissed.”
for. […] That is the disappointing, screwed-up reality.\textsuperscript{107} Consequently, Craven affirmed that Nicki Minaj’s tweets were simply conveying that if she had a slimmer body that many white women possess, her music video \textit{Anaconda} would not have received as much criticism as it did. However, since she is a black woman who chose to take ownership of her body without asking for permission, society felt threatened by her actions. Craven illustrated a double standard regarding sexuality, and what it means to own said sexuality. When white women in the music take ownership over their bodies they are regarded as “sex-positive feminist icons\textsuperscript{108},” whereas black female artists “objectify themselves.\textsuperscript{109}”

Although Craven tackled the policing of Minaj, and developed insightful assertions regarding Cyrus’ privilege as a white woman, she failed to mention that Cyrus blatantly labeled Minaj as a selfish black woman. There seemed to be an almost subconscious political correctness about this piece, as if Craven was monitoring herself to ensure that she did not come across as a defender for the selfish, angry black woman. If Minaj were to state that she was in fact being selfish, where would this story have gone? Would Craven have come to her defense? The policing of the black woman places her in a box. She cannot be too angry, too boisterous, or too sexy; ultimately, she cannot be too much of anything due to the criticism she will receive.

\textsuperscript{107} Craven, “Nicki Minaj Has Every Right to Be Pissed.”
\textsuperscript{108} Craven, 2015.
\textsuperscript{109} Craven.
Azealia Banks: How to Assemble the Angry Black Woman

“I am black, and I am a pain in your ass. But I’m not really talking to you, and that’s what makes those people mad. You’re not invited to this conversation. This is not about you.”

-Azealia Banks

Azealia Banks is definitely not afraid to make noise as an artist, relatively and figuratively speaking. Due to her seemingly aggressive temperament and off-putting attitude, Banks is remembered not so much for her music, but rather what she says and how she acts when her fingers start speaking for her. This is the visualization that white America wants you to hold. Rachel Syme, writer for Billboard, wrote an article attempting to highlight the positive aspects of Azealia Banks’ character. Somehow, her focus managed to shift from an approving stance to a strong emphasis on the angry black narrative that has followed Banks throughout her career. Syme began the piece by stating at “Nine o’clock one Monday night, Azealia Banks is demanding a rolling pin. The 23-year-old rapper-singer-controversy magnet wants to show off her cooking skills, so she has decided to make her grandmother’s chicken and dumpling soup from scratch. Under the umbrella of anger lies an array of words, demanding being one of them. Syme called her demanding because Banks is continuously being portrayed as angry in the media more often than not. Therefore, due to her overzealous personality, any small gesture is taken out of context. Asking translates

to demanding, and being a controversy magnet is reminiscent of past times in which Banks’ actions literally spoke louder than the words she posted on Twitter.

Syme also affirmed that Banks chose a “ritzy” space to show off her cooking skills because her apartment “where she lives alone, is a wreck” and “is full of multiple pets, tarot cards and hair extensions.” She continued to lament that Banks arrived late because she was getting a new weave put in. Although it was not explicitly stated, Banks recognized that if she had arrived for the interview with untamed tresses, bloggers would have had another story to run with. Therefore, she made sure her image would not be tainted for appearing unkempt. Nevertheless, her image was still tainted. Banks arrived late with a new hair weave for the interview, and it was clearly implied that Syme viewed Banks’ behavior as selfish in a sense. It appeared that Banks was unconcerned that she was operating on other people’s time, constraints, and Syme wanted others to know that Banks made her hair a priority, an indication that no one matters but her. The fact that Syme even mentioned Banks’ tardiness signified that she was upset that a black woman made her wait for something as trivial as hair. Unfortunately, being the face of the angry black woman mob does not give a person much latitude. Instead, people constantly watch every move to focus on that individual’s mistakes. Additionally, Syme depicted Banks as a person who is unable to coexist with anyone else due to her “demanding” nature and filthy lifestyle. Hence, going to an upscale dwelling instead of Banks’ own apartment was a great choice to appease Syme’s whiteness. However, Syme fixated

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111 Syme, “Billboard Cover.”
112 Syme, 2015.
113 Syme.
114 Syme, “Billboard Cover.”
on Banks’s empty apartment rather than appreciate the fact that Banks went out of her way to provide a decent atmosphere for the interview. Again, we see a white woman infatuated with the struggle. One thing that I must address is the difference between being alone and being lonely. Being alone means that one is in solitude. It typically occurs by chance rather than choice, whereas being lonely is temporary, which suggests that the person is willing to forgo their loneliness in order to be with others. According to white America, the black woman, primarily the one who is always angry, will forever be alone. Syme implied that Banks is too confrontational, so the only company she is able to keep are her pets. Essentially, Syme alleged that Banks is not good enough to be loved by a real person. While this example showcases the complex nature of being the angry black woman, no one truly knows how it feels to be in Banks’ shoes. Society is on the outside looking in, but the only glimpse they are able to see is a negative one. I have to question whether Banks is really as angry as everyone claims she is, or are her actions just misunderstood.

Syme indicated that Banks is more personable when her twitter fingers are not shooting to kill everyone she has an issue with. “[She] is in her element in the kitchen, and she wants America to know that -- to see her tender, domestic side. This is not, to put it gently, the side that most of us know.” Why did America need to see this side? Why could people not just take Banks as is? And to which America is Syme referring to? From Syme’s viewpoint, “Banks cannot stop whipping up controversy on social media and in interviews. Even on her self-described best behavior while making dinner, she can't resist reverting to her unfiltered self.”

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115 Syme, “Billboard Cover.”
we know to which America, Syme was alluding. White America wants black people to filter themselves in a way that reminds them to bite their tongues whenever they are about to say anything that may be considered contentious. The fact that black women have to adjust and readjust to their surroundings every time someone is upset or uncomfortable is a problem. Self-regulation means they are aware that they are perceived as threatening, which requires them to consciously change their disposition in order to seem more approachable. And apparently, in this interview, Syme was not the only person policing Banks’ actions… Banks was too. She realized that she had to let the world see that she is not just an angry controversial woman who is always getting into altercation with people. Rather, she is tender and domestic. Banks is a black woman who society has cast as angry. Conversely, she had to ensure that this time, she would be seen in a better light. In spite of attempt at good will, this is problematic in itself. Banks should neither experience pressure to make white America feel more comfortable with how she chooses to express herself, nor should she want people to see her as a black woman who is always politically correct. Censoring the behavior does not change internal feelings. So if Banks wants to be overly passionate about the things she cares for most, then people should let her be. But in doing so, she should not be labelled as a problem child. Despite the efforts made to ensure that Syme was comfortable in her presence, Banks was still considered to be the uncontrollable, unfiltered black woman.

The manner in which the media represents Banks exemplifies a woman who is always adding fuel to the fire; she likes to be all up in people’s faces, and does not care if she offends them. Still, no matter how hard she tries to discredit the
aggressive, angry, overly emotionally label given to her, Banks will forever be portrayed in this light.

“Banks will seemingly go to war with anyone -- or anything, including institutions ranging from hip-hop to Fox News. But she is also at war with herself. Her flip and bullying tweets can obscure her intellectual agenda as much as they reveal it. Banks speaks her mind about white privilege, women in rap, female desire and personal demons. She's also a provocateur in the purest sense: She wants to get a reaction, to shatter comfort zones.”

If Banks wants to “shatter comfort zones”, why does society have to attach negative stigmas to her name? To be frank, it is easier to paint Banks as a cynical character, rather than accept her views and opinions. Yet, Syme quibbled that “[Banks] is well-read and thoughtful in person, bright-eyed and able to discuss race, politics and gender with nuance, even grace,” but she continues to feud publicly with multiple celebrities, causing her to be severely scrutinized by others around her. Aside from a nice sob story, it is also quite obvious that white critics really adore articulate black people. Being a cultured black person who is able to speak eloquently and sensibly is acceptable in a world that places whiteness on a pedestal. To Syme’s surprise, Banks caught her off guard with her wit and charm because she always seems to be in attack mode. As such, Syme contended that Banks was an agitator, a bully, flippant, and self-righteous, which symbolizes that she is “at war with herself.” Banks is not at war with herself, she was and is at war with everyone who has ever called her an angry black woman, including Syme. If I were confined to a

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117 Syme, Billboard Cover.
118 Syme, 2015.
119 Syme, “Billboard Cover.”
specific label, I too would lash out. Society is all too consumed with skin color and assuring that black people fit into the preconceived molds. Whether the label is a thug, a deadbeat, promiscuous, or angry, society’s concern is more concentrated on ideas with complete disregard for what black people truly have to say. Therefore, if Banks were at war with herself, it would be due to the fact that white America made her do it. Some may assume that it is easy to point the finger, particularly when Banks should be taking responsibility for her actions. However, she should not have to take responsibility for her actions, especially if there is no direct threat to anyone. In any event, white America says she must.

Be that as it may, Banks is quite familiar with being the black sheep of hip-hop. According to Syme, “if any 23-year-old can expound on the nature of failure, it’s Banks: When ‘212’ made her rap’s brightest up-and-comer, she had already been dropped by her first label, XL Records. Banks stated that XL saw her as a “novelty rap chick” and wanted to “capitalize off her coolness.” Since the record label would not allow her to express herself freely, Banks lost the deal within one year. Consequently, she fell into a deep depression. She became employed by Starbucks as well as a strip club just to make ends meet. Dissection reveals a white woman subtly insulting Banks thereby becoming synonymous with her album title—Broke With Expensive Taste. A woman who had it all is now destitute, and it is all her fault, right? Wrong. The fact remains the same. When black women decide to overstep boundaries, push people outside of their comfort zones, and do not conform

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120 Syme, 2015.
121 Syme.
122 Syme, “Banks on Why No One Really Wants to See Her Naked, Her Impure Thoughts About Barack Obama and Why She’s ‘Not Here to Be Your Idol.’”
to whatever standards society has put into place, they are then seen as uncontrollable. White people like to tame black bodies; otherwise, said bodies become too intimidating, which causes white people to feel victimized. Additionally, the non-threatening black people to whom Azealia Banks speaks of also find her behavior demonizing and believe that she needs to tone it down, or else her career will plummet.

Lauretta Charlton of *New York Magazine* pointed out that Banks is “increasingly difficult to work with” and “isn’t likely to find a home at another major [label] anytime soon.” Therefore, Charlton declared that “[Banks] could benefit tremendously from a trusted, close-knit group of seasoned professionals who could help shape her talent into a sustainable career, but who’s going to make that investment at this point?” Charlton was essentially claiming that Banks’ bad attitude ruined her career, and it is too late to apologize for it now. It is enough that black women are policed by white men and women. It is another issue entirely when black men and women start regulating their own people. It is black people like this that make it harder for other black people to march to the beat of their own drums. They are so obedient that they do not realize their bodies are being bound to a particular setting—the non-aggressive, non-defiant, self-regulatory black person that can appease white America. Banks concedes that this is the reason it is so hard for her to be liked. Black women like Banks appear so unapologetic, that others around them

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124 Charlton, 2015.
125 Charlton, “Has Azealia Banks Trolled Her Way Out of a Career?”

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cannot handle their existence. Due to the fact that she dons a combative attitude, it becomes fairly difficult for people to take Banks seriously whenever she has an issue and feels mistreated.

Similar to Nicki Minaj, Azealia Banks is no stranger to being portrayed as an angry black woman. In September of 2015, the infamous tabloid *TMZ* released a piece about Banks’ experience on a Delta Airlines flight, which resulted in a confrontation with another passenger. The entire article placed Banks under a microscope, and all of her actions, reactions, language, etc., were broadcasted as if to scold her for being upset. Despite Banks’ tweets, which suggested that she was hit by the man with whom she had a confrontation with, *TMZ* depicted her less as a victim and more of an attacker. The tabloid also claimed that an eyewitness disagreed with Banks’ statement that she was actually hit by the man. “The eyewitness says Azealia tried to squeeze by the couple when the French man put his hand out. Azealia, we're told, went nuts. The eyewitness says she spit in the man’s face, punched him in the face and clawed at his shirt.” After watching the attached video, which by the way did not show the supposed altercation, I could see how and why Banks acted in that manner. While I am neither agreeing nor disagreeing with her actions, regardless of her celebrity status, Banks is a black woman. From what I could determine of the incident, she was surrounded by white bystanders, and it seemed as if she was truly uncomfortable in the situation. I cannot speak as to how she felt at that

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exact moment, but as a person of color, I can provide my perspective on the situation. I interpreted the situation as though she was being attacked as well. I do not know the race of the writing staff at *TMZ*, and I do not think I would care to know.

Nonetheless, something became increasingly evident was that there may have been multiple people documenting this account; yet, no one was sympathizing with Banks. Instead, they pointed fingers and insisted on insulting her by calling her insane and belligerent.

This article was completely critical of Banks’ actions. Whether or not her actions were justified, the fact that *TMZ* proclaimed her to be insane suggested that Banks was more than just an aggressor on that flight. The article showed that the staff at *TMZ* viewed her in light that is senseless, unreasonable, and crazy. Although they did not blatantly state she suffers from a mental illness, the fact that her response to an altercation was called insane goes back to the issue of black women being unable to express themselves in ways they see fit. *TMZ* implied that Banks is an insane, angry black woman, but why could she not just be Azealia Banks—the woman who had a minor altercation on an airplane? Better yet, why was her behavior being monitored with such a high level of scrutiny?

According to said eyewitness, “Police caught up with Azealia at baggage claim and spoke with witnesses as well, but the French couple decided not to press charges because they were here on holiday and didn’t want the hassle.” The framing of this sentence proposes that Banks was too much to handle. The couple did not want to be bothered with her, the police did not want to deal with her, and *TMZ*

127 *TMZ*, “Azealia Banks Ballistic.”
wanted to make that clear. Although the article did not directly state it, *TMZ* hinted at the stereotype that black women are often difficult to manage, i.e., they do not make situations easier, and they often escalate when it is unnecessary. This entire article is a prime example of the policing of black women in America. *TMZ* began on one end of the spectrum with “[Banks] adds, ‘I don’t tolerate bitchassness and I don’t tolerate men putting their hands on me.’” The article shifted to the other end of the spectrum with *TMZ* asserting that “Azealia has a history with the word ‘faggot’ -- she uses it frequently on social media -- and earlier this year she explained why she gets a pass, in her mind.” The tabloid completely ignored the fact that Banks felt threatened. Can a black woman not feel attacked by a man despite his race? Of certainty, *TMZ* took on the role of attacker by portraying Banks in such a negative way. The staff avoided the purpose of this article, instead, shifting back to pointing out that Banks used a homophobic slur. No questions were asked because she was a black woman who became angry.

**Why Race Matters**

In an interview for *Playboy Magazine*, Azealia Banks opened up about the reason she is so unapologetic about everything she does. When asked by Rob Tannenbaum whose career she wants to emulate, she replied:

> “Jay Z. That’s the only person I have my eye set on. The race thing always comes up, but I want to get there being very black and proud and boisterous about it. You get what I mean? A lot of times when you’re a black woman and you’re proud, that’s why people don’t like you. In American society, the game is to be a nonthreatening black person. That’s why you have Pharrell or Kendrick Lamar saying, ‘How can we expect people to respect us

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128 *TMZ*, 2015.
129 *TMZ*. 
In roughly five sentences, Banks explained why society is more accepting of black people who come across as mild-mannered and complaisant, whereas she is a woman who defies what society asks of her, and proudly asserts her blackness which is immediately construed as intimidating. Tannenbaum also asked Banks if people read her Twitter account and did not like her, is that because of race? She stated “it’s always about race. Lorde [a white artist] can run her mouth and talk shit about all these other bitches, but y’all aren’t saying she’s angry. If I have something to say, I get pushed into the corner.” One thing that I find important to note, no one can take an individual’s voice. While some may try to silence and censor black women, the power to do so allows them to have the upper hand. No one should take this power for granted. Azealia Banks is one woman who is not afraid to let her voice be heard. Whether she is speaking on issues that plague black women, or the lack of representation in the LGBTQ community, she is not afraid to step on a few toes to get her point across. Furthermore, since her behavior is never pardoned, Banks constantly has to fight for a place as a black woman musically and socially. Taking into account that she is considered to be extremely challenging to those whom she encounters, she has definitely had difficulty excelling in her career. Consequently, she stumbled upon a fairly impactful a weapon called social media.


One of the biggest celebrity feuds that Banks had was with Iggy Azalea. After tweeting that Iggy’s music was not “excellent” enough to win a GRAMMY, Banks was confronted for being the angry black woman. As reported by Tanya Chen of Buzzfeed Canada, in a series of tweets, Iggy wrote the following:

Aside from the shade Banks threw in reference to Iggy’s music, she struck a nerve that hit close to home. Iggy Azalea is an Australian native who came to America at age 16. She woke up one morning and decided she wanted to rap. As a result, she soon became the poster child for cultural appropriation due to her inability to give back to the culture that she adopted as her own and from which she profited. As a result, Banks chose to target Iggy because she was not as aware of the black issues as perpetrated in her music. Apparently, Iggy, did not realize that Azealia Banks is a conscious black woman and that everything Iggy publicized in reference to Banks has already been stated? The real reason that Iggy Azalea went on a verbal rampage was due to the fact that a black woman in the same industry as she called her out for not being good enough. If an individual is black and not good enough for white people, that is one issue. However, if an individual is white, and a black person tells the individual that they are not good enough, the receiver cannot digest that information because his or her whiteness will not allow it.

For this reason, Iggy Azalea’s Twitter tantrum clearly indicates that a white woman can be as angry as she wants, can voice her opinion as loudly as she wants, and no one will tell her that she is threatening to others. Throughout this stream of consciousness, Iggy Azalea made numerous allegations. She stressed that Banks has a bad attitude, is uncontrollable, dumb, unlikable, poisonous, miserable, and angry. And to top it all off, Iggy alleged that she is the only reason Banks is relevant in the music industry. I would like to reiterate: Iggy Azalea truly claimed that the attention Banks receives is due to her. A white woman subliminally declared that a black woman needs to thank her and remember who is saving her career. Iggy, was out of
line. Racial stereotypes create boundaries, and these boundaries say whether or not certain behaviors are appropriate. No one made a huge deal about Iggy Azalea’s rant. Instead, her followers and the various Azealia Banks critics applauded her for standing up for herself. She was personally attacked for not being good enough to win a GRAMMY, and she was upset. Iggy was angry at Banks for calling her out, so she had to finally defend herself against the bully who has been tormenting her for the longest. Unfortunately, Iggy Azalea was never called an angry white woman. Her behavior was excusable due to her whiteness. The problem that I have with society is that it picks and chooses whose attitude is acceptable and who has to be reprimanded. And the fact of the matter is that race is always at the core.

There are no instructions on how to assemble the angry black woman. According to these critiques it is apparent that such assembly is not too difficult. Simply find a woman who is so conscious of her mind, body, and soul that the world around her is caught off guard by her candor. The people she encounters are literally at a loss for words because she does not care that her presence offends them. Once they take a glimpse into her life they see hardship, like rock-bottom hardship, and they bask in it. They are then able to witness the suffering first-hand and begin to create an image of what they believe the black woman most resembles. Based merely on the generated perception of the black woman, the outsiders instinctively react to their preconceived ideas whenever her actions seem unjustifiable to them. Meaning, if she defends herself, she is an aggressor. If she is too boisterous, she is emotional. If she calls people out for their ignorance, she is a bully. And if her name is Azealia Banks, she is angry. In their minds she is the make-believe monster that has been
hiding under their beds, but is actually more alive than ever. Contrary to popular belief, the monster is fictional, but, the more people believe that something is real, the more real it becomes. Thus, white America has allowed itself to conceptualize an image of Azealia Banks, depicted as a mad black woman due to her unwavering nature and inability to adapt to their standards. The angry black woman is a myth that was made as an excuse for those who were uncomfortable with a black woman speaking her mind candidly. White Americans do not and cannot interpret the natural emotions that black women have not only because fear clouds their judgment, but also because they have never walked the same paths. Society’s construction of the angry black woman is due to the misguided perceptions developed throughout the generations. In addition, once someone’s mind is already made up, it becomes more challenging to change what is believed to be fact.
Conclusion: Hypothetical Realities

Daddy Issues

Dear Nicki Minaj,

I own AllHipHop.com.

AllHipHop has been historically uber supportive of the rapper Nicki Minaj. That’s YOU, homie! When I say historically, we can take it all the way back to when you had to stand in line to get into parties or those grimy underground videos you once pumped out on the streets. You know, that period of time before Lil Wayne and Young Money. Along the way, something changed. This isn’t the change everybody wants to talk about though. Not hate there. AllHipHop had published an old image for some reason or another some years ago. You remember the one of you licking a lollipop and evoking the now-classic image of Lil Kim in all of her crotchiness? Of course you remember your version of that image, because you asked us to take it down through a member of the team. The team member let us know that Nicki is no longer on that and is doing a lot to promote a new image – “blah blah blah.”

But, guess what? Not only do I run AllHipHop, I’m a father, too.

For a moment there, I felt like I had briefly peered into the deepest recesses of Nicki Minaj’s true inner self, a being that cares how this ratchet shit affects my kid. I said to myself, “Self, how cool is this? Nicki is already evolving into somebody that my daughter may get to listen to on my watch. Maybe.” I’ve been in the music game a minute now so I know how it goes. So, when I peeped the artwork for your latest single, I wasn’t even shocked, I was just disappointed. The song: “Anaconda.” The art: your booty in a thong. As a man, I can appreciate the virtues of your perfect posterior. The dad guy is not a happy camper, particularly now that his lil’ girl is transitioning into a young lady.

Now, the most popular, current Black female rapper starts overtly pushing her hyper-sexualized image again?

Just my luck.

I’m trying to raise a young girl that will eventually grow into someone greater than the both of us. I know that this requires great parenting, great education, great luck and an assortment of great influences. I’m sure you know the influence you wield, but now, if you told the “Barbs” to scratch my eyes out, some would attack without thinking about it. I’m sure some will also replicate the “Anaconda” image without thinking about it too. Your original image already has 256,817 (and counting) likes under the original Instagram picture you posted, so I venture that your average girl could strive to get a couple hundred likes from her friends. Is this the path you want to lead impressionable kids down?
Make no mistake about it, you’re a leader now.

I love the era of Hip-Hop where I found my influences. They were all over the place, ranging from Chuck D and Public Enemy to LL Cool J to KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions and others like De La Soul. Even the so-called gangster rappers had something to offer. Ice Cube, Scarface and Willie D of the Geto Boys, and Ice-T all get nods for being influential in my upbringing. I don’t know all of those that impacted you as a young woman, but how dope would it be if you transcended what people expected of you? Like, how cool would it be for your transformation to extend beyond NOT wearing blonde wigs and crazy clothing?

This year alone, Black people lost titans in Maya Angelou and Ruby Dee. Those women were entertainers as well and the impact they have had on the lives of their constituency can never be understated. They SERVED the people and they knew that—without that mutual love and respect, we both cease to exist. Ruby and Maya didn’t live perfect lives, but their imperfections made their greatness all the more clear. Imagine you being regarded in such a way? The way Lauryn Hill, Queen Latifah and MC Lyte have been for their communities? I know, times have changed, but one thing is for sure: careers can come and go. Legacy stays.

I can’t lie. My kid barely knows who you are and if she does, it’s rooted in “American Idol” or something like that. (She does like your bars on “Shanell’s song “Cupid’s Got A Gun.”) I’ve sheltered her on purpose though, all the while letting her read about heroic females in music and culture. As she gets older, it will be harder for me to limit her exposure to you, especially if you continue to do headline-grabbing moves like the “Anaconda” cover. I don’t want to EVER see her posted up one day emulating you the way I “fought the power” like I was Chuck D’s little brother back in 1989. Or, the way you emulated Kim.

For a moment, forget my daughter and let’s talk about you. My interactions and observations tell me you are this sweet, kind person at heart. When you get a quiet moment answer the following questions.

How is Onika Tanya Maraj doing?
How does she truly feel about Nicki Minaj right now?
What is your higher purpose with young girls (and boys)?
What is the message you are sending when you determine how you will inspire these young people?
How will boys, already conditioned to sexualize girls at a young age, internalize this big booty of yours?
Where does the gimmick end and you begin?

Believe it or not, I care. I think you are dope. You’ve bodied some of my favorite artists on songs like “Monster.” Yet the possibly of you transcending this gnaws at me, because I know you don’t have to succumb to bottom feeding.
When the request was made to remove that image from my site, I complied. I complied – not because I had to – but because I truly respected you for taking that position. On the lecture circuit, I’ve even defended you from those that feel you are a detriment to the community, down to the Barbie imagery. (I have no love for Barbie, you know.) I’ve done this based on what I think is a glimpse of what you really desire, which is to be a more positive role model of some sort for young girls who are under siege out in these streets. Now, you take this squatting position on the cover of a song called “Anaconda,” which I am sure radio will play until it’s played out. I’ll be on Spotify though and so will my daughter when she’s with me.

All in all, this is a letter born from love. A love of my kid, a love of Hip-Hop and a love for the potential that lives in one Onika Tanya Maraj aka Nicki Minaj.

One,
Chuck Creekmur
P.S. You think you could follow me on Twitter again?

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Dear Dad,

I’m the one you were referring to in your letter to Nicki Minaj some years ago, and I disagree with everything you said.

“It is rumored that we were soft. Had cumulus cloudy laps a man could lay his troubles upon. Honey-dipped tongues that spoke sweetness in the mornings. Embraces that chased the devils away. We were soft. Rumor has it that we could tame the beast of a man with a whisper. Grew and glued our families together. We were angels that walked on land…a silent strength. We uplifted each other. We were soft. I don’t know exactly what happened. We are hard now. Rigid, bruised, and broken. We have lost our magic. Now we curse the morning. Where is our elegance and mystery? Our dignity and grace? For our daughters’ sake, we were soft. Weren’t we?”

I stumbled upon a video that had a voiceover reciting the words of this quote one night while I was on Facebook. I tried to find the source, but I had no luck. The video was quite interesting though. It depicted what you would call strong black women. Phylicia Rashad, Billie Holiday, Coretta Scott King, and Rosa Parks, just to name a few. Dad, it’s rumored that we were soft. Where this rumor started, I’m not sure, but black women represented everything thing that a man could ask for. A wife, mother, homemaker, confidant, lover, and more. Dad we were soft. And that’s how you like us to be, isn’t it? Would you prefer a woman that is a little mysterious? One who shields every aspect of her being to keep the wandering eyes away?
As the video progressed, a shift occurred. The generation of docile black women subsided and the modern rigid, bruised, and broken ones emerged. It showed Beyoncé, Trina, Rihanna, and even Nicki Minaj as hypersexual vixens. Barely dressed, not respecting themselves, essentially playing into the hypersexual stereotype. Ultimately the video suggests that these women represent those who have no dignity and grace. I don’t find that to be true, but apparently you do.

All my life you sheltered me from the exposure of women who you thought were inappropriate role models. Nicki Minaj was your biggest target. I found the letter that you wrote her, and I cringed while reading its entirety. Dad, you wrote that letter in 2014. I’m 21 years old now, and men still think like you. Society still thinks like you, and I’m ashamed to say that you’re my father. Misogyny plagues our nation, and you might as well be the ringleader for patriarchal values. Black women should not feel pressured into being soft for their daughters’ sake, because who knows? One day they may grow up and realize that everything that was fed to them was a lie. Every standard that was put in place was created to keep them bound to ensure that they would never get to a point at which they’re beings threaten those around them. Dad do you understand now? These women shouldn’t be vilified because they are no longer what society wants them to be.

It is men like you who hinder the positive advancements that black women try to create for themselves. Dad, black women are the ones that breed black men like you. Despite that, you would rather them be so soft; easy to mold, manipulate, and
dispose. However, black women are much more than that dad. So on behalf of black women who have reclaimed this sexual identity, and don’t mind stepping on a few toes which makes others uncomfortable, sorry not sorry dad. But you are welcome. Welcome to embrace this new found freedom that allows us to be so unapologetic, so comfortable in our own skin, so happy that we no longer have to abide by the standards that society has made for us that you want for us. We are now more woke than ever, and I want the wrath of the sex positive, steadfast, influential black woman to continue to make black men like you, people in general for that matter, to be terrified of what we now have to showcase for ourselves. Dad, realize that the black woman need not be confined to a space that she doesn’t want to be in, and stop forcing her to conform to your standards, okay?

Signed,

Your daugher

P.S. I spoke to Nicki and she said nah.
Darker Berries

“Sometimes I wish my ass was fatter. Not like the artificial kind that you see plastered on Nicki Minaj and @missnikkibaby from Love and Hip Hop Hollywood. I mean, I want a fatty that looks natural, but good enough to eat. You know?”

“Okay Di,” I said while yawning. I peered over my laptop, and noticed Dionne examining her body in the mirror. I tried not to think about it too much because I needed to study, finals were just around the corner.

“As shallow as it may seem, I want my body to be envied girl! I want to feel wanted, I need to feel appreciated. Plus, everybody knows that the fatter the ass, the more niggas you get, aaaaand the more attention you get … good and bad. Look at Amber Rose for example!”

“I hear you Di, I get it! But do you really want to put yourself in that light? We, meaning black women in particular, are continuously fighting against a system that one, doesn’t love us, and two, has confined us hypersexual roles that solely appeals to men. Girl, you’re the one who told me this about a month ago! Remember?”

Rolling her eyes Di became defensive.“Ugh! Why you always gotta be so damn deep August? Let me just get my point across!”

Why do I even bother? It’s not like she’s going to listen. Having a conversation with Dionne was talking to a brick wall. Nothing registers, she hears what she wants to, and ignores the rest.

“Now, back to what I was sayin’… being a black girl with no ass is like drinking Kool-Aid with no sugar. Shit don’t make no sense. You can’t have one
without the other… I mean you could, but you might as well just pour yo ass a glass of water, and keep it pushin’. Yeah, I definitely need a fatty!”

I couldn’t take it anymore, so I shouted angrily, “Girl! Can you please stop talking?”

With a surprised look on her face, Dionne actually got quiet. “I get what you’re saying, I really do. You want a fatty so that daddy can grab it! But no good can come from you exploiting yourself for 25 likes on Facebook and Instagram Di.”

“Whateva.” Just like that, the conversation was over.

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Hold up. Let me explain how we got here. I’ve known Dionne, also known as Di since we were in the third grade. We’ve shared laughs, shed a few tears, and even used to fight over snotty nose lil boys when we were younger. Now we’re college roommates, and are still laughing, crying, and fighting over lil boys. Di is currently pursuing a modeling career. She’s been exposed to the hip-hop industry all her life because her father, Ron Lee, is a big producer in Atlanta. Going to the BET Awards, listening parties, and even video shoots, was nothing new for her. This summer we’re heading back to our hometown of Atlanta. Luckily, I got an internship at Time Warner that will teach me the ends and outs of marketing. Di on the other hand hasn’t been as lucky, but I think she has a good chance at finding a job really soon. I wish I elaborate a little more, but I have an econ midterm in about three days, so I need to focus.

“August!”
I stopped staring at my econ book and removed my headphones because I heard Di’s loud ass voice.

“August! Girl guess what?”

“What Di? You pregnant?”

“Haha very funny.”

She looked at me with a tilted head and slight grin.

“Nah. I was booked for a shoot with the director my dad introduced me to during spring break.

“Oh my god Di congrats!” I exclaimed loudly. “Who’s the director?”

“Girl you won’t believe it…I’ll be working with the illustrious Mike Cash!”

“Shut up!!!” I shouted “Girl what?! Mike Cash is like the hottest director right now!”

Di couldn’t contain her excitement, and neither could I. “I knooooooow! I can’t believe it!! But on a serious note, I need to step my squat game up to get this Georgia peach lookin’ right,” she said jokingly.

I rolled my eyes, smiled at Di, and put my headphones back on. I was worried for a minute because that refund check from her student loan this semester wasn’t going to cover all her bills this summer. Oooh lawd, now I’m good ‘cause she is finally doing something she’s wanted to do all her life. Anyway, back to studying. A few days passed and Di was trying to figure out how to build her brand, so she did what she does best. Instagram and Google searches.
“So I was on Instagram the other day, right, and I saw Kim K’s naked ass on The Shade Room. Like this bitch been makin’ money off her ass since she first came on the scene. Like damn! Is showing your ass crack and titties for a couple of dollahs really worth it?”

“Listen Di,” I laughed hysterically, “in all seriousness you can’t judge a book by its cover. Maybe, just maybe, Kim K is liberating her body and is trying to be a role model for the younger generation.”

“Girl bye!” Di said angrily. “This white, wanna be black girl is trying to take what’s ours.”

“What do you mean,” I chuckled softly.

“Okay look. Kim K has been with black men all her life. She finally married a black man after divorcing the white one. She has a blackish baby. And now this heffa is sporting ‘boxer braids.’ Like what the fuck, they’re called cornrows, and black people been wearing them all they life.”

“Yeah, but what does that have to do with her flaunting her body? Black women like Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj, and Rihanna do it all the time! Plus they make millions from doing it.”

“August, you and I both know that black women aren’t represented in the same light as these white girls.”

True, I thought to myself.
“They wanna walk like us, talk like us, fuck black men, but don’t want to go through the struggles of being a black woman.”

As she was going on, and on, and on, I couldn’t help but to think that maybe she was right. Why can’t black women be sex positive icons?

“You see August, no matter how hard black women in the media try to be this image that everyone will love, they will always been seen as thots and hoes.”

As I sat on my bed, I tried to wrap my mind around everything that Di was tellin’ me. I understand that there are not many black women who can positively assert their femininity. If we take a closer look, black women in general are limited to how they assert themselves period. Whether it’s the way they dress, speak, or act around others, they are typically not respected in the same manner as white women. The more I thought to myself, the more answers I needed. Since Di was the queen of her brand of feminism, I decided to ask her a few questions for clarification.

“But Dionne, isn’t that true of anything black women do? We as black women have it hard just existing. We are unable to express our sexuality in a way that we want, and we have to monitor all other aspects of ourselves as well.”

“See, that’s why I fuck with you,” Di laughed loudly. “But seriously though, I just want to be accepted for choosing to liberate my body how I want, and not feel pressured by society’s beauty standards, or anyone else for that matter, you feel me?”

Although Di made it her goal to be viewed in the same manner as white women, she understands that the brand of beauty she designed for herself doesn’t quite fit the mold that society created for her, but she says she’s up for the challenge.
Classes finally ended, my internship is about to start, and Dionne is now working for a legit modeling agency. However, her recent behavior has begun rubbing me the wrong way. She is now obsessed with being the perfect girl, always comparing herself to celebrities and Instagram models, but it’s too much to handle right now. I’m trying to make sure that I do my job thoroughly so that I can come back next year. I am planning for my future, but this mess that Di has going on has been a big distraction lately. After work, I want to come home and wind down. Yet every single day, and I do mean every single day, I come home and Di’s running up to me, phone in hand saying “look, do you think she’s prettier than me?” And in a tired voice, I always tell her, “Dionne, she’s beautiful and you’re beautiful. I love you, now leave me alone.” Like damn, can you at least ask me how my day is first? The reason she’s become even more annoying is due to the fact that she’s trying to exude confidence. However, her method is only making it harder for her to accept herself. She needs to start practicing what she used to preach, instead of getting needier with the praises. She wants to know that she can make it in the industry, which I completely understand, but comparing features? Com’ on Di. Do better.

You’re all caught up with how Di and I started falling out. She was doing too much for real, and it was just messing up my energy. I mean, we cool and whatever, but I just want more for my girl you know?

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“I think that beauty is subjective. I’ve heard that statement [less classically beautiful] my entire life. Being a dark-skinned black woman, you heard it from the womb. And
‘classically not beautiful’ is a fancy term for saying ugly. And denouncing you. And erasing you. Now ... it worked when I was younger. It no longer works for me now. It’s about teaching a culture how to treat you. Because at the end of the day, you define you.” –Viola Davis

For the past month or so I have noticed a few drastic changes in Dionne. She’s more reserved, sleeps all the time, doesn’t shower regularly, and she’s killing my vibe. I remember when she first got the callback working as the lead video girl for one of the dopest video directors in the Atlanta. She was so happy! Mike Cash claimed that my girl Di was gorgeous. So her “charisma and natural abilities” made him want to hire her for the next couple birthed a relationship. Now every weekend, no lie, these fools are posted on Instagram boo’d up, talking about “bae” this and “woman/man crush” that. They were cute together, I can’t lie, and I looked forward to creepin’ up on them on the low. But all of a sudden, the pictures started coming down one by one and that’s when I knew something was up. Dionne never told me what happened, I didn’t bother to ask, but I should have. Deep down I knew Mike Cash was the reason why my friend started acting funny.

“Hey Di, I’m off for the Fourth of July weekend. You tryna go to Destin with a few of my friends from work?”

“Nah girl, I’m really tired, I think I’m just going to stay in and catch up on Orange is the New Black.”

I knew she was going to say no, but I thought I’d ask anyway.

“You sure? I think it would be fun, and it would take your mind off of you-know-who.”

“Don’t even bring his ass up,” Dionne said quietly.

“If you say so. I’ll bring you back a souvenir if you’re nice.”
Di smiled, said okay, and resumed watching her show as if nothing I said registered.

Even though I didn’t want to leave my girl at home alone, I decided to take that trip to Florida with some of my coworkers. The weekend ended, it was cool or whatever, but it there’s nothing like being with my bestie. I wanted to make Di a nice home cooked meal so we could talk since she’s been kinda distant these past couple of weeks.

“Dionne, it’s time to eat!” I yelled loudly.

She entered the room, and oh my god. When I tell y’all she looked like someone ran her over with a Mack Truck three times… like gah damn! I don’t know exactly what happened when I was gone, but we had to get to the bottom of this.

Dionne is the type of person who is always happy. And her energy is so contagious it’s hard to not laugh whenever she’s around. But the girl standing in front of me was unrecognizable. Her eyes were sunken, she looked tired, and her face was stained with yesterday’s tears. So I took it upon myself to ask her what was up. She told me over and over that “everything was fine, August,” but I knew she was lyin’.

“Girl, tell me what’s going on, you got me worried. This ain’t like you Di.” I said sympathetically.

With a sigh, she said, “August, I’m not pretty like the other girls who work with me.”

Like this took me by surprise for real. The girl who was voted most beautiful in high school is insecure? Now I know something is wrong.

“What do you mean you’re not pretty like the other girls? You’re the most conceited person I know!” I said jokingly.

“They all light skinned with long ass hair, how could I compete with that?”
Trying to wrap my mind around what was being thrown at me, I just let Di unload.

“I’m tired of getting the ‘oh you cute for a dark girl’ bull shit. That’s all Cash used to tell me. I just wanted him to see past my complexion, and tell me I’m beautiful too,” Di cried softly. “And he said the only reason he ever pretended to love me ‘cause he knew I was easy.”

Tears started streaming down my face. How could anyone tell another person that? This man has a black mama, a black grandma, and black aunties. But somehow, he was conditioned to think that black women were less than desirable.

Di inhaled deeply, and finished telling me the events that led up to her depression. “August, something changed. He used to love me. But he told me the other day that the only way he would put a dark bitch as a lead girl in any of his videos is if I get on my knees and choke until I cry. So you know what I did? I got on my knees and” … Di began to weep uncontrollably. Her unspoken words and broken speech pierced my soul. I couldn’t accept it. I wouldn’t accept what she was telling me.

“But I’m liberated August! Remember? I’m free. I can do whatever the fuck I feel like ‘cause I control my pussy! I control who gains access to my body. And even if a nigga wants it, I get to tell him whether or not he can come inside me. But August, it don’t matter what I do. It don’t matter what I do, ‘cause a nigga gon’ be a nigga regardless of how hard we try to try to make reclaim a sexuality that is traditionally scorned. And after I was done, he laughed and told me to try again later August.”
At that point, I was fucking livid! I wish I could just give him a piece of my mind, but he wasn’t. And all I could do was console my friend with my words. Softly I said, “Has Mike Cash forgotten the fact that we were once queens despite how society depicted us? Or has this bad bitch movement and thot culture skewed his vision, so that he continues to treat black women like society has for years? We are the hypersexual beast. Right? It has been painted of us, and is engraved in the minds of so many! Cash is a prime example Di.”

Di’s soft cries hit my ears like a thunder storm in the middle of June. I could only imagine what she was going through. I gave her a hug, and continued to be as supportive as I could.

“Even though we can now choose to be bad bitches, hoes, and sluts. Everyone around us is ten steps behind. I don’t want to say you’re right, but why do we try? Why do we even bother if it’s just makin’ our lives harder?”

Sitting in silence, anger quickly entered my body. I could feel the blood boiling in my face. My temperature was rising and all I could do was cry. The black woman needs to realize that the mold can be broken, and can be reconstructed into something that is representative of her liberation from a world that always sees her as a fetishized object. However, when will society accept her as she is?