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Pop Culture Without Culture: Examining the Public Backlash to Beyoncé's Super Bowl 50 Performance

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Abstract

On February 7, 2016, Beyoncé took the stage of Super Bowl 50 as a featured artist during the halftime show. Immediately after, her performance was classified as an anti-American act of terrorism. The public took to social media, not in the usual fan craze, but to condemn and damn Beyoncé for her celebration of Black culture. This condemning is a reflection of the marginalized treatment of Black popular artists which prohibits them from speaking out on Black issues. Consequently, Black popular artists are forced to shed off their cultural identities in order to achieve and maintain mainstream/pop culture success. This article provides a detailed examination of Beyoncé's celebration of Black culture and its aftermath, along with other contemporary Black popular artists and celebrities, and will highlight the contemporary damnation of Black entertainers. These analyses will create a foundation for challenging the race-neutral categorization of Black popular artists.

Keywords

popular culture, cultural identity, Beyoncé, racism

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> When we lose the dignity and respect of freedom of expression, we lose the beauty of its power.
>
> —Eartha Kitt

On February 7, 2016, Beyoncé took to the stage of Super Bowl 50 as a featured artist during the halftime show performance. Immediately after, Beyoncé's featured performance was classified as an anti-American act of terrorism because her performance was perceived as social justice oriented. The American public took to social media, not in the usual fan craze, but instead condemned and damned Beyoncé for her one-time celebration of Black American culture during Black History Month. During Beyoncé's featured halftime performance, she reportedly honored the 50th year anniversary of the Black Panther Party with her and her dancers dressed in berets. While singing her new song "Formation," Beyoncé and her dancers created a dance formation of the letter X and sported afro-styled hair. The majority of the performance displayed contemporary hip-hop dances, and the women were dressed in contemporary black leotards, close fitting one-piece bodysuits that expose the thighs and legs, which are not reflective of Black Panther Party attire. Whether intentional or not, in less than 5 minutes, Beyoncé's performance forced a very uncomfortable conversation to erupt in the homes of Americans across the nation. The discussion around Black power, rights, and strength is erased out of American history books and the larger American psyche (Harris & Graham, 2014; King, 1991; Watkins, 2005; Woodson, 2003), yet Beyoncé's national performance called attention to the continued social injustices faced by African Americans. Ironically, Beyoncé's 2013 Super Bowl performance labeled her as a feminist and women's rights supporter, which did not result in her being criticized or damned. Although subtle changes were made to her normal performance style during Super Bowl 50, they were enough to classify Beyoncé's performance as social justice oriented and this resulted in major backlash. Hence, the American public considered Beyoncé's celebration of girl power and women's rights as more socially accepted than her celebration of Black history. However, it is important to state that if Beyoncé did in fact use her art form to engage social justice issues, she would for the first time be upholding the African cultural responsibility of artists. According to Du Bois (1926), art for the African is never simply art for art or entertainment sake; art must be communal and address the issues of the society. Therefore, Black artists are culturally responsible for producing art that enriches their society (Du Bois, 1926), yet Beyoncé has not been able to operate as a Black artist with social consciousness because American popular culture prohibits this form of art (Gayle, 1971). Moreover, confining Black popular artists into foreign cultural productions constitutes what Kobi Kambon (2004) calls substantial

deviations away from African peoples' normal and natural ways of being. That is to say, it is natural for Black artists to celebrate Black culture and advocate for social justice.

In 2016, the number one rated pop artist used the power of the media to celebrate Black history, which was previously not up for discussion. Now, Americans were forced to answer the uncomfortable questions of who are the Black panthers, and who is Malcom X? The backlash to Beyoncé's performance is in large a backlash to American history. It is a rejection of the hidden and unspoken truths that exist in America's past and present (Loewen, 2007; Woodson, 2013). Many White Americans were able to escape all discussion of Black power because this part of America's history is excluded from the literature used in American public schools (Harris & Graham, 2014; King, 1991; Watkins, 2005; Woodson, 2003). In fact, in American public school books, even the enslavement of African people is erased or falsely written. Recently, McGraw-Hill received criticism for its falsification of the forced enslavement of Africans by writing the experience as a willful work migration. The McGraw-Hill World Geography textbook reported human patterns of immigration into the United States. Within this chapter, McGraw-Hill classified Africans' forced enslavement on American plantations as Africans immigrating to become "workers" on plantations. This falsification of American history makes it easier to reject overt acknowledgments of African Americans' horrid and unjust history in this country. The American public has promoted and accepted White American culture as the official culture of the country (Gordon, 1964) and therefore has simultaneously eliminated and ostracized other cultures from inclusion in what is considered popular culture (Kambon, 2003). According to Jenkins (2011), Black artists remain invisible and as a result are not included in what goes for the larger American culture. Jenkins (2011) states,

> In contemporary society, there is only an illusion of inclusion. The real identity of many Black people (as strong, culturally grounded, and intelligent) still remains invisible. This is a society in which even our president is criticized for being too smart (professional) and walks a thin line of being seen as too ethnic (Poor, 2009; Rappaport, 2009). If the man holding one of the most critical positions in our society must succumb to a manufactured and socially palpable identity, what role could artists possibly occupy as strong and vocal intellectuals? (p. 1235)

Consequently, Black pop artists must perform "popular culture," that is, White culture, without full acknowledgment of their own culture and cultural values. Instead, Black popular artists are ridiculed, judged, and ultimately damned when they attempt to transform the media by partaking in their own cultural celebrations or when promoting social justice. This article examines

the damnation of Black popular artists and their attempt to challenge the status quo of "Popular Culture." Here, "Damnation is defined as the purposeful condemning of [Blackness] as inferior, inhumane, and ungodly" (Gammage, 2015, p. 4). Therefore, Black popular artists are restricted to performing White culture, and when they practice, support, or celebrate Black culture, they are damned. This is because America has labeled Black culture as inferior and not an acceptable culture (Moynihan, n.d.). This is cultural racism, and when practiced in American institutions such as the media or the music industry, it is institutional racism. In this article, I examine the historical practice of excluding Black culture and in particular, Black rights from popular culture. An examination of Beyoncé's celebration of Black culture and its aftermath, along with other contemporary Black popular artists and celebrities, will highlight the contemporary damnation of Black entertainers. These analyses will create a foundation for challenging the race-neutral categorization of Black popular artists.

Historical Background

The development of film and television media created a unique opportunity to broadcast representations of people and cultures throughout the world. Early American film and later television productions primarily created media that reinforced elite White American culture, values, and perspectives (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gammage, 2015; Gandy, 1998; Staples & Jones, 1985). This particular approach to media was designed to socialize the public around the values deemed most appropriate for American citizens and to highlight the "superiority" of White American culture (Gandy, 1998; Gray, 1995). This meant that other cultural groups' representations were only depicted through the lens of the White American and therefore lacked an intimate portrait of other racial groups. In fact, this new medium gave way to the wide-scale promotion of anti-African propaganda (Gray, 1995; Parenti, 1992). Consequently, film media was used to socialize public opinions about Blacks, promote racist ideologies, and socialize society to be anti-African. As a result, Blacks were portrayed as savage, ignorant, lustful, and criminal. In the 19th century, Black entertainers were primarily excluded from mainstream entertainment arenas. Instead, their White counterparts would perform their perception of Black reality in mistral scenes called Blackface, in which White male actors would paint their faces black and perform stereotyped portrayals of Blacks (Gammage, 2015). "Birth of a Nation" was one of the first motion pictures designed as anti-African media charged with the task of socializing the White American public away from accepting Blackness and Black culture as an adequate cultural model that could exist alongside

whiteness in America (Riggs, 1986). Created in 1915, this film represented Blackness as a direct threat to the White American public and the chastity of White womanhood. This film and similar media productions carried the dual task of prioritizing White American culture as the only and most appropriate cultural model suitable for existence in America and American television and film (Riggs, 1986).

Once Black entertainers were able to enter into the public domain, they were regulated to stereotyped characters that classified Black men as bucks, toms, and coons, and labeled Black women as mammies, sapphires, and jezebels (Gammage, 2015; Riggs, 1986). Despite their eminence amount of talent, many Black actors, singers, and dancers were excluded from performing in "white" theaters and films. Once, a few extraordinary Black entertainers were able to break the color divide; they were once again marginalized to a confined fame (Gammage, 2015; Riggs, 1986). Many quickly learned that their talent and skills were limited to entertainment that did not threaten the White power structure that exists in American society and that they could not use their stardom to address cultural or political issues, given that this medium was not created to counteract the stereotyped perceptions of Blackness (Williams-Witherspoon, 2006). Instead, Black entertainers were forced to uphold anti-African media by performing as simple-minded, savage, and in need of social control. Once Black artists' star power grew and they crossed over into white entertainment arenas, their existence as popular artists become even more marginalized and race-neutral (Gray, 1995; Smith-Shomade, 2002). These artists could only perform popular White cultural norms and not represent their Black culture or heritage if they were to maintain their fame (Staples & Jones, 1985). Few Black entertainers attempted to battle this confined reality and use their star power to address social concerns affecting the Black community. Yet, whenever Black popular artists and entertainers attempted to transform the media away from anti-African entertainment, they were harshly ridiculed and damned out of stardom.

20th Century Damnation of Black Popular Artists

Entertainer and activist Paul Robeson was highly educated and talented and used his gifts to entertain and address social issues (Robeson, 1988). Robeson was one of the first Black male entertainers to perform roles that were not subject to the stereotyped buffoonery previously occupied by Black actors (Robeson, 1988). His vocal talents were equally rewarding. He became one of the highest esteemed singers of the 20th century and often landed roles in films primarily casted by Whites. Once Robeson began to use his star power to highlight racial injustices, he was ousted out of fame. Given his popularity,

Robeson became a target of political attack for his stance on civil rights and American racism. Robeson was singled out as a threat to American sovereignty and governance and as a result underwent major ridicule (Duberman, 2014; Robeson, 1988). National attempts to delegitimize Robeson's political views resulted in his passport being revoked, which inhibited him from traveling abroad (Duberman, 2014). Although his passport was later restored 8 years later, Robeson did not have the popularity and connections he previously bolstered. He later became ill and confined to his home. His legacy and voice has largely been written out of America's history. His intellect nor talents excused him from a marginalized entertainment career. Instead, his blackness regulated him to a damned stardom, which prohibited him from exercising the dual privileges of stardom and activism.

As Black women entered into the public domain, entertainment in particular, they were confined to the same stereotypes of the 19th century (Gammage, 2015). Lena Horne was a pop and jazz artist of 20th century. She was a television and film star who was highly noted for her multitalented entertainment. According to Lena Horne Website, Horne became one of the highest paid actresses when she signed a 7-year contract with MGM Studios in 1942. By the next year, she had three movies released and appeared on several magazine covers. Horne's career began to afford her privileges not yet experienced by other Black entertainers (Gavin, 2009). In October of 1944, Lena Horne was featured on the cover of Motion Picture Magazine, which no other Black person had previously appeared (Lena Horne, n.d.). However, by the end of the 1940s, Lena Horne's civil rights activism almost completely ended her career. Listed as possibly having ties to communist persons and organizations, Horne landed on the Blacklist in Hollywood and she struggled to secure work as an entertainer. Horne found herself attacked for her friendships with blacklisted entertainers such as Paul Robeson and organizations supporting communist political agendas. Although largely denying ties to the communist party, Horne openly embraced the fight for civil rights and the fight to end racism. With the help of a friend, she had her name removed from the blacklist at the age of 40 and once again returned to television and film. By the 1960s, Horne reignited her support for the Civil Rights Movement and was awarded for her tenacity in serving as both a rights advocate and entertainer (Gavin, 2009). Such awards and national support came at a time when the Civil Rights Movement had reached its height and could no longer be hidden from the American public.

Vocalist Billie Holiday also suffered from a similar reality given her harsh experiences in America, although she was not classified as pro-Black or anti-American. In 1939, Billie Holiday was burdened with the task of singing

Black Americans' sorrows and blues without threatening or offending the White American public (Davis, 1999). Her song "Strange Fruit" was riddled with a hidden meaning as to not alarm record companies, radio stations, or the public. "Strange Fruit" spoke of the inhumanity of America and its savage treatment of Black lives (Davis, 1999). More specifically, the song detailed the horrifying experience of traveling down the dark streets of the Jim Crow South and witnessing the lifeless body of a Black man hanging from a tree. Strange indeed is such an experience and yet such an accomplished American vocalist could not and would not dare speak openly or freely about these kinds of injustices. Yet this coded song protested the injustice of lynching and the larger issues of racism in American society. Codifying one's reality laced with fear can lead to increased psychological trauma for anyone, but in particular, Black popular artists face a multidimensional reality that limits them based on their race, gender, and class. These crippled and confined realities may push Black popular artists to the limits and test their strength. Although Holiday's experience departs from the previous examples of Black popular artists, who have openly spoke out on issues of racism and social justice, her life provides an illustration of the crippling effect placed on Black popular artists even when they do not publicly address issues of racism. Black popular artists in general are confined to a marginalized stardom, which prohibits them from expressing their Blackness. This, in turn, is in and of itself damning and if internalized can be destructive.

Another noted Black woman entertainer who underwent public ridicule was Eartha Kitt. Kitt was a multitalented entertainer in film, theater, television, dance, and music. She received both Emmy and Grammy nominations. Just 1 year after Eartha Kitt was famed for her role as Catwoman in the television series "Batman," she was ostracized for voicing her views on the racialized impact of the war in Vietnam (earthakitt.com). In January 1968 after Eartha Kitt attended a luncheon at the White House with First Lady Johnson, the media condemned and attacked Kitt for speaking out about her view on the impact of the Vietnam War on the inner city and American youth (Mezzack, 1990). Previously silent on political issues, Kitt's first public address on politics in America landed her on the radar of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Kitt states,

> For years I went along with the idea that entertainers should not get involved with politics. Today, I realize that because of our contact with the public, we have to speak out, to make those who are responsible more aware of what is happening where they perhaps cannot see. Particularly someone like myself, who has lived the life of poverty. ("Tuesday's Child Speaks Out," 1975)

The CIA began a formal investigation into Eartha Kitt's political and social affairs to assess whether or not she was a threat to American sovereignty. Recognizing that this criminal targeting was a direct result of her race, Kitt responded by stating,

> Scores of Hollywood, television, and music personalities, both American and foreign-born, have been far more critical of America's foreign and domestic policies than I have. The difference, of course, is that I am not Barbara Howard or Jane Fonda or Candice Bergen. I am a black woman.
>
> I have always known that racism was widespread in America; after all, I spent most of my childhood in South Carolina on a cotton plantation and in the streets of Harlem. But it took the aftermath of the 1968 incident to prove to me just how deeply racial prejudice is rooted in the American national character.
>
> Because I am black, I had to be taught a lesson, and put back into my place as a singing, dancing, mindless automaton who saw no evil, did no evil, and most important, publicly spoke no evil. (Miller, 2008)

Countless numbers of nightclubs and entertainment venues canceled Kitt's scheduled performances, and she left to perform in Europe. Kitt's attempt to challenge American media into recognizing its racially biased treatment of popular artists landed her on the damned list of Black entertainers who were ostracized and forcibly removed from the public domain. Although Kitt rejected this treatment and garnered some support, the massive public ridicule she underwent ultimately derailed her career.

Historically, we have witnessed media used to generate public opinions about Blacks and promote racist ideologies that socialize society into adopting anti-African ideologies. According to Herman Gray (1995),

> In order for television to produce cultural effects and meet its economic imperatives (that is, to produce identification and pleasures necessary to maintain profitability), it has to operate on the basis of a popular awareness and general common sense about the currents adrift in the society. (p. 58)

Thus, when Black artists use media, a medium designed to socialize the public away from Africanness, for social justice advocacy, they experience heavy ridicule and subjugation. Consequently, when Black popular artists try to transform the media into a venue capable of highlighting social justice issues and celebrating Black culture, they are isolated because they are attempting to use a medium previously beholden to anti-African entertainment. Such practices are still highly accepted and promoted across media entities.

Contemporary Treatment of Black Popular Artists

The marginalized existence of Black popular artists is long standing and has not wavered in the 21st century. Beyoncé, the number one ranked popular artist in America and awarded over 50 million dollars in one endorsement deal alone, was reminded on Super Bowl Sunday 2016 that she was still a Black woman in America. In addition, the release of Beyoncé's single "Formation" in February 2016 resulted in much controversy as she attempted to celebrate her unique African American heritage. The song details her African and creole lineage and spotlights her New Orleans family history, in which she seeks to embrace. Over 10 years after hurricane Katina flooded New Orleans, Beyoncé's "Formation" video displays scenes with a semisubmerged police car that fully submerges with her on top. Several scenes highlight traditional New Orleans style homes. Toward the end of the video, a young Black boy is dressed in a Black hoodie facing police with his hands up in the air. Seconds later, the walls of a building highlight the phrase "Stop Shooting Us" which appears in the wake of the Black Lives Matter Movement. This video displays Beyoncé's acknowledgment of her cultural heritage and yet she has been highly ridiculed and labeled as a politically controversial artist. During Super Bowl 2016 halftime show, Beyoncé performed "Formation" and with typical Beyoncé dances and leotard attire. Yet, the public deemed her performance as anti-police and anti-American. Protest ensued by both police unions and the general American public. In fact, widespread protest erupted on social media in an anti-Beyoncé campaign entitled #BoycottBeyoncé. Post encouraged the American public to stop supporting Beyoncé and boycott her performances. Yet, if we look more in-depth at Beyoncé's performance, we note similar attributes to other performances and videos that were not labeled social justice oriented or pro-Black. For example, she wore a similar black leotard during her "Single Ladies" video and performances; the only difference was the shape of an X across her Super Bowl performance leotard. In addition, it is not unusual to find Beyoncé's dancers with afro-styled hair; the only difference was this time they wore black berets. Third, Beyoncé and her dancers perform contemporary hip-hop dances that are typical for Beyoncé videos and stage performances. Meanwhile, during the same halftime show, Bruno Mars and his crew wore Black leather jackets and pants, and this was not considered pro-Black. This illustrates the narrow margin in which Black popular artists can operate. Thus, Beyoncé can wear a Black leotard, but not during Black history month, and not with the shape of an X across the front. During an Elle Magazine interview, Beyoncé response by stating,

> But anyone who perceives my message as anti-police is completely mistaken. I have so much admiration and respect for officers and the families of the officers who sacrifice themselves to keep us safe. But let's be clear: I am against police brutality and injustice. Those are two separate things. (Gottesman, 2016)

Beyoncé goes on to state,

> If celebrating my roots and culture during Black History Month made anyone uncomfortable, those feelings were there long before a video and long before me. I'm proud of what we created and I'm proud to be part of a conversation that is pushing things forward in a positive way. (Gottesman, 2016)

Despite her stature in popular culture, the industry confines Beyoncé to a unidimensional existence, such that any appearance of Black advocacy renders public backlash.

In the same way that previous Black popular artists were marginalized in the 19th and 20th centuries, Beyoncé can only exist as a pop artist and not a member of the African race or the Black community. All celebrations, acknowledgments, and recognition of her blackness must cease to exist if she is to maintain her throne. Consequently, Beyoncé and all Black popular artists can only be "pop" but cannot display their culture. For Beyoncé, even though she has displayed some cultural orientation, she has not made the same choice to operate as a social justice advocate as her predecessors Lena Horne, Eartha Kitt, and Paul Robeson. Beyoncé herself recognize that she has been placed into a confined reality, stating, "I'm just exhausted by labels and tired of being boxed in" (Gottesman, 2016). Ironically, however, although labeled a feminist, Beyoncé has never been publicly ridiculed and condemned for her pro-girl power songs and videos. This has resulted in her being the most nominated woman in Grammy history. She has almost exclusively remained silent on issues of racism and Black culture throughout her career. Now that she has openly embraced her heritage and displayed some level of support for the Black Lives Matter Movement, the media and public classified Beyoncé as a racially subjugated pop artist. The previous fan support for Beyoncé may have fooled the public into believing that Beyoncé somehow escaped the racialized treatment of Black popular artists, but the rendering of Beyoncé as anti-American once again shows the ugly face of American media and entertainment. That is to say, the original purpose of media has not altered in the 21st century and media is still largely used to promote an anti-African agenda, which regulates Black popular artists and celebrities to a confined stardom. Therefore, Black pop artists must remain race-neutral in

order to gain and maintain stardom. Beyoncé and all other Black popular artists must still fit into the normative cultural assumptions of who can be successful popular artists. Thus, the closer you look like and perform the White American cultural norms, the greater success you can gain. According to Entman and Rojecki (2000), racial images on television imitate and may directly impact White Americans' attitudes about racial issues. They argue,

> Along with other media, it is both a barometer of race relations and a potential accelerator either to racial cohesion or to cultural separation and political conflict. Because Whites control mass media organizations, and because Whites' majority status makes their taste the most influential in audience-maximizing calculations, media productions offer a revealing indicator of the new forms of racial differentiation. Beyond providing a diagnostic tool, a measuring device for the state of race relations, the media also act as a causal agent: they help to shape and reshape the culture. (Entman & Rojecki, 2000, p. 2-3)

Therefore, Black popular artists and entertainers are forced to shed off their cultural identities in order to achieve and maintain mainstream/pop culture success. Essentially, this means that Black popular artists, including Beyoncé, image must be race-neutral, that is, non-Black and nonthreatening to the White American culture, if they are to achieve and maintain pop status. This is precisely what Langston Hughes described in 1926 in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Here, Hughes explains the racial dilemma faced by Black artists as the choice between assimilating into White American entertainment and being one's true self. This dilemma is still present in the 21st century and Black artists seeking to become popular culture artists are forced to operate within a standardized artistry, which prohibits them from being their Black selves (Du Bois, 1926; Gayle, 1971; Hughes, 1926).

Ironically, other non-Blacks frequently adopt aspects of Black culture, without respect or recognition for Black cultural values, and are applauded (Hess, 2005; Rodriquez, 2006). The presence of Black cultural appropriation in popular culture is not anything new. Black culture tunes, vocal styling, clothing, and hairstyles are frequently adopted by non-Blacks and are transformed into "Pop" culture style, clothing, and hairstyles without any acknowledgment of Black culture (Harrison, 2008; Rodriquez, 2006). When Kim Kardashian or Iggy Iglesias wear braids, they are called "boxer braids" and become the new pop culture hair trend. Interestingly enough, their braids are the same African braid hairstyle called "cornrolls" by African Americans that have been in existence for centuries. Yet, Black popular artists are forced to

tone down their blackness and modify their appearance and artistry to fit into the mainstream American music industry (Gandy, 1998; Gayle, 1971; Gray, 1995). Beyoncé is a perfect example; at the beginning of her career, Beyoncé wore African-styled braids and Hip-Hop attire. As her popularity increased, Beyoncé's clothing began to reflect more European attire and she began to wear long blonde straight extensions in her hair. Beyoncé now, almost exclusively, only wears White cultural hairstyles, straight blonde hair in particular. It should also be noted that she primarily performs in leotards, which is of French origins. Furthermore, when Black popular artists, uphold the African cultural responsibility acknowledge their blackness, or speak out on issues affecting Blacks they are attacked and suffer major setbacks in their careers, if such instances do not completely end their careers.

Another prime example occurred in 2005 when Kanye West spoke out about the inactivity of former President George Bush during the crisis of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. The American public once again denounced a Black popular artist's right to acknowledge his Blackness and his responsibility to the Black community. In less than 10 words, Kanye West proclaimed the federal government's failed response in New Orleans as a racist act. On NBC during a concert for hurricane relief, Kanye West's closing remarks were "George Bush doesn't care about Black people!" The White American public, in particular, immediately condemned his statement and rejected him as a valid voice of the Black community and American public. The fury that ensued after his statement resulted in major attacks on his career as a popular artist. Given the public pressure for Kanye West to issue an apology, he eventually stated that he did not have the right to call George Bush a racist. His career and public image was hampered for years as he attempted to recover from his socially charged statement. However, in 2009, Kanye West once again found himself at odds with the American public when he took the stage during the MTV Video Music Awards to question the legitimacy of Taylor Swift as the awardee of the Best Female Video award. West interrupted Taylor Swift's acceptance speech to declare that Beyoncé was the rightful winner of the award. The audience booed West, and his public ostracism continued on social media and news outlets around the world. Once again, Kanye West was reminded that he was a Black man in America, with limited to no right to speak on Black issues, since he had been adopted as a popular artist. Straying away from Black cultural controversy, Kanye West is one of the highest selling artist ever; however, one must question does this stardom come at the expense of one's support for Black people, culture, and their civil liberties.

The Damning of Black Athletes

Similar damned realities have historically and contemporarily exist for Black athletes and celebrities. In 1968, Tommie Smith and John Carlos Olympic medals were removed for raising their fist in solidarity of the demand for equal civil rights for Black Americans (Ratchford, 2012). Fast-forwarding to 2009, Lebron James was ridiculed for exercising his right to switch professional basketball teams (Ratchford, 2012). He was treated as a human commodity with no rights. Although Lebron rejected this treatment and moved to another team, the owner of the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team, Dan Gilbert, echoed the sentiments of the general American public in stating that James ultimately belonged to the Cavaliers. In 2016, Olympic gymnasts Gabriel (Gabby) Douglas was highly ridiculed on social media for her African textured hair, dark lipstick, and not putting her hand over her heart during the medal ceremony playing of the pledge of allegiance. Douglas was called unpatriotic and considered unworthy of representing the United States. This was a similar faith she experienced 4 years prior in the 2012 Olympics when wear she won both team and individual all-around gold. Ironically, during this same time, White male Olympians, Ryan Lochte, Jack Conger, Jimmy Feigen, and Gunnar Bentz, have caused international disgrace for America yet they have not been classified as unpatriotic nor have their medals been removed.

Moreover, in American society, there exists a confined stardom for Black artists, entertainers, athletes, and celebrities. When Blacks in the popular public domain attempt to exercise their human right of freedom of speech, in particular when they embrace and support Black culture, they are ostracized and ridiculed to the point of damnation. In this case of racist and sexist imagery, as bell hooks (1993) discusses in Sisters of the Yam, "obviously, the dearth of affirming images of Black femaleness in art, magazines, movies, and television reflects not only the racist white world's way of seeing us, but the way we see ourselves" (p. 84). This marginalized treatment of Black entertainers has resulted in the destruction on many careers and may force many Black artists to avoid all acknowledgment of their cultural heritage and support for Black rights, unless of course their artistry highlights a "ghetto" upbringing. Yet, even when Black artists project a "hood" persona, meaning that their artistry largely focuses on urban living, impoverishment, and violence, which does not contradict or challenge the status quo, they are classified as "Black" and never reach the heights of race-neutral Black popular artists. According to Gaston (1986), popular culture has had a negative and destructive impact on the Black community, and Black men in particular. Yet, the "hood"-approved artists often escape the ridicule and judgment

from white America; instead, their form of entertainment is highly commercialized because it reinforced stereotypes of dysfunctional Black men and women.

The Damnation of Black Popular Artists and Celebrities

The damnation of Black popular artists and celebrities occurs when they publicly embrace Black culture or support some form of Black human rights. Damnation, according to Gammage (2015), operates as an institutional structure that restricts positive valuing of Black culture and Black cultural expressions. Such damnation is ushered out by the general public backlashing against the artist, the media ostracizing the artist and limiting their appearances or playtime, and can be met with governmental review and restrictions. The media directly participates in the damnation of Black entertainers by promoting a unidimensional representation of Blackness and by advancing white cultural superiority. The promotion of White culture through Black artists delegitimizes the uniqueness and strength of Black cultural expresses and aids in the advancement of cultural racism (Gayle, 1971; Kambon, 2003). The practice of cultural racism can be seen in the mainstreaming, that is, white washing, of Black celebrities in order to make them appear more "American" and acceptable to the larger White American public. According to Gray (1995), "Black representation in commercial network television are situated within the existing material and institutional hierarchies of privilege and power based on class (middle-class), race (whiteness), gender (patriarchal), and sexual (heterosexual) differences" (p. 10). Thus, it should come as no surprise that extremely talented Black artists are encouraged to tone down their "ethnic" appear, in terms of facial features, hair texture and color, clothing, speech, and so on. This race-neutralization is a part of a larger attempt to rid Black popular artists of Black cultural affiliations and therefore no longer represents a threat to White cultural superiority. This, if successful, in turn justifies the celebration of the artist as a "Popular Artists." Here in lies the problem, when Black popular artists step outside of this box, they are damned by the public, but are often celebrated and supported by Black Americans for their acknowledgment of Black culture and life. This, however, can intensify their damnation, and historically, such artists have been forced to apologize and disassociate with Black political agendas or cultural celebrations. For those who refuse, many have been embraced my Black entertainment arenas, yet unfortunately their popular artist status is revoked.

Anti-African media and entertainment reinforces century-old standards for Black artists that prohibit them from speaking about and practicing African culture in the public domain (Gayle, 1971; Riggs, 1986). Thus, pro-African stimuli advanced through the media are often met with distain and conflict. Instead, media is primarily used to socialize the public into accepting a non-Black, race-neutral Black artist as a pop artist. Consequently, when Black artists seek to use a medium designed to socialize the public away from Africanness, they are heavily ridiculed and subjugated. Such marginalized treatment can result in the ultimate damnation of Black artists and entertainers if they dare to challenge the status quo by celebrating their Black culture or by advocating for the human rights of African people. Media systems will not alter their appearance if the artists and public do not challenge them to do so. It is up to Black popular artists and entertainers along with the Black community to force a change in the treatment of Black celebrities.

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