

Childish Gambino's "This is America": Popular Media and The Black Experience

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Writer Joe Tolstoy (1899) beautifully defined art as “a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward the well-being of individuals and of humanity” (p.43). A true artist educates, advocates, and demonstrates leadership through his or her creative media of choice. Childish Gambino shows versatility and true artistry through his music and cinematic art. The majority of Gambino's work in the entertainment industry highlights Black struggle in America. He is the creator, star, and writer of the TV show *Atlanta*, which centers around struggling up and coming rappers in Atlanta, Georgia. Perhaps his most impactful piece is his music video for his single, “This is America”. Since it's YouTube release on May 5, 2018, it has accumulated over 426 million views (Youtube, 2018). “This is America” was prompted by the deadliest school shooting in Parkland, Florida in February of 2018 and further fueled by the fact that, according to the U.S Census Bureau and the Washington Post “Fatal Force” database for police shootings, the percentage of Black homicide victims reached three times the percentage of African-American citizens by the end of 2017. In his music video, Gambino makes a statement about the Black experience in America through the use of strong metaphors, symbolism, and the juxtaposition of both historical and present day issues faced by African-Americans. Through showcasing the harsh realities of the Black experience, he more specifically comments on the role popular media culture plays in the manipulation of African-Americans, including the normalization of Black cultural appropriation. He points out that as a result of White colonialism and privilege, popular media acts as a means to mask over and alter the actuality of the Black experience in America. By releasing the globally viral video on Youtube, a highly popular social media sharing site

primarily used by teens and adults, Gambino showed the power of social media platforms to cause meaningful conversations about the underlying contrasts between popular media's perception of Black culture and the realities of the systematic violence and discrimination faced by African-Americans in modern society.

Gambino's video offers a social commentary about the modern Black experience in America by relating it to critical events in African American history. Although a multitude of events in African-American history aggregates the full Black experience, the three eras presented in the video that I will explore are slavery, Jim Crow, and Hip Hop. In order to gain a better understanding of the symbolism used throughout the video, I will first discuss Gambino's themes of dehumanization and appropriation in each of the three eras he presents. Finally, I investigate social media as it relates to both the execution and the argument of Gambino's piece. With a concentration on these key elements, I suggest that Gambino's intent behind the juxtaposition of the modern Black experience and the historical Black experience in America can be better understood.

Through the eras of slavery, Jim Crow, and Hip Hop, Blacks in America have been and continue to be dehumanized. An article titled "Dehumanization of Blacks" by scholar Hariston (2009) defines dehumanization as "depriving a person of human qualities, attributes, and rights" (p. 188). Hariston (2009) discusses the process of the slave trade and how it "treated [Blacks] as property that could be bought for about \$27" (Hariston, 2009, p. 188). Selling another human being insinuates that there is a limit to their value as if they were an object in a store. Slaves were forcefully abused for the advancement of the White colonizers. Not to mention, after the transaction, slaves were hung from trees, beaten, and raped by White slave owners as a form of

punishment to reinforce dominance and control. The physical violence and disregard of Black life during slavery represent the way Whites dehumanized African-Americans.

The abolishment of slavery was enacted by the passage of the 13th Amendment in 1865. Although Blacks were emancipated, they were not constitutionally legitimate American citizens until 1868 when the 14th Amendment was passed, granting citizenship to freed slaves. The integration of Black Americans into society took a step backward during the 19th century when a series of racial segregation laws were enacted by U.S states. The series of laws passed during the 19th century is commonly known as “The Jim Crow Era”. As Ficker (1999) pointed out, according to the governments these laws were supposedly passed in an attempt to alleviate racial tensions in America by separating the two races. He examined that through Supreme Court cases such as Plessy v. Ferguson and Brown v. Board of Education, it becomes evident that these laws were not only a method of constructing the idea of Black inferiority but also acted as a means to regain control over Blacks after their recent liberation (p. 303).

The first official legal doctrine that justified the segregation of Blacks and Whites was ratified through the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson case, which stated that racial segregation in public facilities is tolerated if the quality of both facilities is equal; thus, creating the infamous “separate but equal” clause. In reality, this doctrine did not adhere to its intention and instead subjected Blacks. One example of the many unequal opportunities for Blacks during this time is the segregation of public schools. There was an obvious disparity between Black and White schools during segregation. The schools’ conditions, resources, and quality of learning in Black schools were nowhere near that of the White schools. Due to this obvious inequality, the advocates for the Brown v. Board of Education supreme court case intended to end segregation in schools. It

was in this court case where the true intentions of school segregation were revealed. The Committee stated in their report “here is a race, not only distinct in respect to color, hair, and general physiognomy, but possessing physical, mental, and moral peculiarities, which render a promiscuous intermingling in public schools disadvantageous” (Ficker, 1999). This reveals that the segregation of schools was not for the purpose of relieving racial tensions, but because they believed that Blacks were inherently inferior. They believe that White people are normal and intelligent while Blacks are odd and fatuous. Jim Crow laws sought to make Blacks both feel and appear inferior to Whites. During this era, Blacks were stripped of their dignity and constitutional rights that had just recently been granted to them after being freed from enslavement.

By the early 1980s, Hip Hop began to become a mainstream musical genre. It is important to note that Hip Hop emerged as a culture and lifestyle during the post-civil rights era. As author Nelson George (1998) noted in his book, Hip Hop’s “most popular vehicle for expression has been music, through dance, painting, fashion, video, crime, and commerce are also its playing fields” (p. 5). It was a vehicle and tool of liberation for the marginalized and an expression of culture. Although Hip Hop acted as a powerful statement of inequality and hardship, George (1998) points out that it is not a traditional political movement as it is not necessarily led by trained activists. Due to this, the messages behind Hip Hop became skewed and misinterpreted. Its “spirit of rebellion, identification with street culture, materialism, and aggression” (George, 1998, p.155) caused a stereotypical representation of all African Americans as “thugs” or “ghetto” causing an animalist representation of Black Americans, especially Black men. In addition, Hip Hop music videos portrayed women as “porn stars, strippers, prostitutes,

and other types of sex workers” (Hunter, M., & Soto, K., 2009, p.171). The misogynistic representation of Black women as overly sexual and uncontrollable beings humiliated and objectified them, causing these women to be viewed as superficial and ignorant.

According to scholars Kopano and Brown (2014), “appropriation denotes taking possession of something that one has no right to, thus leading to misrepresentation referring to the deliberate, typically negative, depiction of a false ideal... turning something of inherent value into an instrument for monetary gain” (p. viii). Slavery is a prime example of appropriation. As Hariston (2009) stated, “the primary existence of slavery in America began in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. In 1638 an African male had been taken from his homeland in Africa and forced into slavery in America” (p. 2). The White colonizers took this Black man as a possession and used him for their own advancement. America’s practice of slave trade disregarded Black life and removed Africans from their roots. Every human being has a right to their own body and the process of slavery was a complete violation of this basic human right.

During the era of Jim Crow, Black minstrel shows served as a way to make a mockery of Black Americans. African-American media and linguistics studies scholar, Bloomquist (2015), examines the inaccuracy of the Black image in entertainment media, specifically focusing on dialect as an imitation of African-American English, through an exploration of minstrel shows. The scholar points out that “the language of minstrel shows and the comedic dialogues crafted for the ‘Black’ actors in them was constructed in such a way as to depict Blacks as shiftless, lazy, ignorant buffoons, at turns docile, then emotive, and always sexually preoccupied” (2015, p. 413). These Black characters were often played by White actors, who practiced Blackface, portraying a false representation of Blackness through their language and overall demeanor.

Bloomquist points out political scientist Michael Rogin's discovery that the three most important films in early cinematic history are *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Birth of A Nation*, and *The Jazz Singer* (p. 420). In each of these movies, false representations of Blackness are featured as comedy. Bloomquist adds that "The Mammies, Uncle Toms, and Coons were one-dimensional, inaccurate, and humiliating representations of Black life" (p. 421). During this era, the representation of Blackness was used for White entertainment and twisted into their own image that depicts African-Americans in a negative and false light; treating the culture as something to be taken, bought and sold. Slavery was an outright physical dehumanization of the Black body while the Blackface character of Jim Crow manipulated the reality of Black life and perception of African-American people.

As Hip Hop music and aesthetic became increasingly popular, White America began to see a profit. George (1998) acknowledges the fact that White America has had a large impact on the prominence of the culture as the "audience, creators, and financiers" (p. 8). White people as Hip Hop's financiers helps make sense of the trivial identity of African-Americans that have been sculpted. Rose (1994) determines that there are "a number of strategies for securing the obedience of the colonized through a manipulation of popular culture including the control of political media, the development of popular stereotypes, and the use of the natural tendency to be creative as a semiotic weapon against a population" (p. 3). This suggests that cultural appropriation of Hip Hop by Whites is being used as a way to assert their power and control over Black people. By removing Hip Hop from its significant background, Whites are able to create their own version of Blackness, popularize it, and even claim it as their own. Thus, using Black popular culture, White people find a way to reaffirm their supremacy and disregard the

marginalized persons. White record labels' utilization of the Hip Hop musical genre could be used not only as an opportunity for capital but an opportunity to control the societal view of Black culture and Blacks themselves. Controlling the production and distribution of Hip Hop gave White America the chance to push the stereotype of African-Americans, especially men, as wild, dangerous and juvenile.

Contrary to George's opinion, Rodriguez (2006), suggests cultural appropriation in today's society happens as a result of a so-called "colorblind ideology" after studying and interviewing white male youth who avidly engage in the Hip Hop scene at shows in the East Coast. He defines "color-blind ideology [as] the assertion of essential sameness between racial and ethnic groups despite unequal social locations and distinctive histories" as a way to "to deny the reality of inequality" (Rodriguez, p.645). Rodriguez points out that "Whites who pick up on African American styles and music do not necessarily want to be black; they seek to acquire the characteristics of blackness associated with being cool" (as cited by Perry, 2002, 109). Whites pick and choose elements of Black culture that they find to be cool and use those aspects in their own lives, thus appropriating the culture without its significance or credit. In his study, Rodriguez (2015) finds that in conversation about race in relation to Hip Hop, the white youth "acknowledged the salience of race for others while denying it in themselves" (Rodriguez, p. 655). Many of the White youth studied understood that race plays an important role in the lives of Black people, but do not find race to be important in their own lives. Due to white privilege in America, it is easy for White people to view the world as colorless. Their race is not a reason for their suffering because it automatically sits them at the head of the table. Therefore, when White

youth engage in the Hip Hop scene, their justification is that race does not matter to them, they just like the music.

Furthermore, social media platforms, such as Youtube and Twitter, act as outlets used by African-Americans to express their feelings towards systematic discrimination and spread awareness about matters often not reported on traditional news. On the other hand, the viral culture of social media suggests that user interaction with news media is present, but not prioritized.

Vincent and Straub (2016) suggest in their study of various social media campaigns, movements, and marginalized groups present on such platforms, that social networking is a type of “resistance journalism [which is] a type of citizen journalism that can be used to create a platform for marginalized voices to expose and dissent structures of oppression, disseminate experiential knowledges of poverty, and mobilize activism as a way to invert the ‘hierarchy of access’”(p. 2). This type of journalism is unique because it provides a platform for unfiltered conversations of race coming directly from the marginalized.

Socio-political movements such as Black Lives Matter, not only started on social media but used it as a tool to constantly remind users of the mistreatment of African-Americans throughout the years. In their study, Vincent and Straub (2016) found that “many organizations used social media to update followers on statuses concerning outreach efforts that simultaneously worked to promote their cause, organization, and or programs” (p.11). The popularity of social media allows for stories that once were silenced by the news, to come into light. Not only does it allow for conversation, it also has acted as a political movement. For example, The Black Lives Matter Movement began in 2013 after a Black teenager named Trayvon Martin was shot and

killed by a police officer. This sparked many conversations about White privilege and racial discrimination as the police officer that shot the innocent teen left court free of charges. This social media movement greatly impacted the knowledge of others about issues facing our society and allows people to band together to fight injustices. Social media is a “variegated interactive network that connects the movement with itself, connects social actors with society at large, and acts on the entire realm of cultural manifestations” (Vincent & Straub, 2016, p. 13). A lack of understanding, voice, and connection has been at the forefront of socio-political issues of today, especially regarding racial discrimination. Social media networks have developed to serve as an aid for the marginalized in getting their voices heard by the masses.

While social media platforms start important conversations, the viral phenomena of social media showcase that users are generally not concerned with discussing hard-hitting topics. For example, the study of viral videos by scholars Lu Jiang, Yajie Miao, Yi Yang, Zhenzhong Lan, and Alexander G. Hauptmann, found that “during the 2012 US Presidential Election, Obama Style and Mitt Romney Style, the parodies of Gangnam Style, both peaked on Election Day and received approximately 30 million views within one month before Election Day” (Lu Jiang, Yajie Miao, Yi Yang, Zhenzhong Lan, and Alexander G. Hauptman, 2014, p.1). Although the videos are related to the topic of the presidential election, the videos themselves are parodies. The purpose of parody videos is to mock something in order to create comedic content. These two parody videos went viral during the presidential election rather than videos spreading awareness of each candidate and the seriousness of the election. The social media users during this time were more concerned with being entertained and not about being informed about important topics. Although it is important to keep in mind that social media is generally used

among teens and young adults, which questions the ability of social media to hit young audiences when concerning socio-political topics.

In Childish Gambino's music video, he places symbols of African-American history up against the modern-day Black experience to comment on issues that continue to resurrect throughout the course of history. As we currently live in a world run by entertainment media, he shows how the Black experience becomes altered and misinterpreted. Through an exploration of the media's effect on the modern African-American experience, it is evident that social media both brings to light important issues and masks over them. To portray this message, Gambino uses imagery of Black historical context to point out that although it may not be as blatant today as it was in the past, racism still manifests in a similar way today.

Moving forward, I will discuss Gambino's use of the historical symbols from slavery and Jim Crow, and their present day correlation to the dehumanization of Blacks through cultural appropriation and physical assault. In addition to an analysis of the messages conveyed through the content of the video, I will use social media responses to further investigate the audience's understanding of Gambino's intended purpose with the video.

In the first scene, Gambino presents the symbol of slavery. Once Gambino enters the frame, the Black man joyfully playing his guitar changes from appearing lively to sitting inexpressive with his head covered with a sack and a rope tied around his neck. Gambino proceeds to shoot the Black man in the head. Then, his gun is carefully carried off to safety by a child as the Black man is discarded by two other children. As Green and Gabbidon (2009) would agree, Gambino dehumanized the Black man in this scene by removing his identity both physically and soulfully. This image of the man's covered head symbolizes lynching in the

United States, which began during slavery and continued during the Reconstruction era. To slave owners, lynching was not murdering a human being, it was simply discarding a tool. Gambino's lack of emotion while disposing of the Black man, highlights Whites complete disregard and lack of value for Black human life during slavery in the United States. In terms of internal dehumanization, Smith (1984) identified that Black musical expression stemmed from the slave culture as a form of achieving spiritual inner peace during indescribable hardship. The Black man's guitar is removed when Gambino enters the shot, showing a removal of one's soul and expression. By doing so, Gambino silences and controls the Black man, causing him to appear dead inside before he is even shot. Not only was the Black man's form of emotional expression taken away when the guitar was removed, but so was his life. It is often said that the eyes are the window to the soul as they show truth and pure emotion; one's mouth is the door to the soul as it is our communication, expression and consumption; and lastly the brain is the center of wisdom, reason, and the mind. The most essential qualities of a human being were ignored, covered up, and destroyed. In addition, Gambino contrasts the maltreatment of the Black man with the precious care of the gun to show that guns are regarded as more important than Black people. The red cloth that the gun is carried off in represents the exponential amount of African-American bloodshed perpetrated by guns. Gambino points out that despite the apparent destruction that the weapon causes, African-Americans are still viewed as a threat to society and treated with the utmost disrespect in relation to guns.

While presenting the symbol of slavery, Gambino simultaneously presents the symbol of Jim Crow in the opening scene. When Gambino prepares to shoot the Black man, the way he is standing is a direct reference to the most popular poster image of the character Jim Crow. The

popular image of Jim Crow is of a man bending his left leg with his left hand on his hip. His right leg is extended in front of him with a slight bend and his right hand is also bent and raised in the air. In the video, Gambino replicates this image and uses his right hand to hold the gun and pull the trigger. As Bloomquist (2015) would agree, in addition to the 'Jim Crow stance', Gambino's over exaggerated, goofy facial expressions and wide open eyes as he dances toward the camera is related to the way that Blackface performers would portray the personality of African-Americans as foolish, sporadic, and deranged.

Using a combination of the symbols of slavery and Jim Crow, Gambino points out the development of Hip Hop into the African American culture. Gambino conveys this through the change in the genre of music playing in the background. The song opens with a beat inspired by traditional South African cultural music. Gambino's dancing in the first scene is also inspired by strong African tribal dance. As soon as the first gunshot goes off, killing the Black man, the genre of Black art changed from African cultural to Hip Hop. The entire mood of the video and Gambino's voice in the song shifted from uplifting to angry. As Rose (1994) pointed out, Hip Hop was developed out of rage during a racial discriminatory time period as well as serving as a reclaiming of false images depicted by the media of Black life. After the culture and life is stripped away from the Black man, the change to Hip Hop music symbolizes the significant development of musical spoken word as a result of a society that did not value Black lives.

Adding on to this point, he metaphorically shows the skewed societal view that Black art is more valuable than Black people. Throughout the video, there are young children who dance gleefully alongside Gambino while the background is full of chaos. There are people jumping off of buildings, physically fighting, protesting and so much more. The background is slightly

blurred while the children and Gambino are in focus, front, and center. Most of the dance moves performed were popularized by social media, but originated from African-American Hip Hop songs, such as the “shoot”, “the shmoney”, and “the dab” as well as a moves from African dances such as the “gwara gwara” and the “shoki”. By contrasting real life African-American struggle with the enjoyment of Black art as pure entertainment, Gambino intended to point out that popular media values Black culture over the well-being of Blacks, thus masking over the chaos and violence faced by African-Americans behind the scenes. Gambino wants his viewers to be aware that although Black art is currently popular, it is important to notice that Black people are not receiving this same love from society. This juxtaposition potentially causes the viewer to feel strong emotions of sadness and disgust and can make it impossible for the viewer to look away. Gambino essentially removed the mask by showcasing its presence.

Childish Gambino’s music video has opened up various different conversations. In this feedback loop analysis, I will study the reactions of teens and adults to the viral video and how it ties into the videos message. I gathered my feedback loop data from Youtube comments, Youtube parody videos, Twitter, and Reddit. From the Youtube comment section, I looked at the 50 most recent top comments and picked out four reoccurring themes of these comments in order to examine the audiences’ initial takeaway from the video. Then, I looked at the most popular parody videos through the lens of the gathered themes. Next, I gathered 32 different Twitter comments from the Billboard website’s article “The Good, The Bad and the Kanye Bashing”, to examine the audiences’ engagement in conversation about Gambinos message. I gathered the Twitter comments through the Billboard website due to the fact that “This is America” is a very common hashtag on Twitter as it is also often used when discussing politics. As a result, it made

it difficult to narrow down and differentiate the comments solely pertaining to the video without the use of a third party source. Lastly, to address other interpretations of the video by examining a Reddit conversation about others views of the music video.

The majority of the comments on the Youtube video of “This is America” show that Gambino’s message and purpose for the video successfully came across to the viewers, while other negative comments support and act as concrete evidence for Gambinos point about popular media. The four themes that I found in the comment section were: first, that the audience’s understanding of the video is that the social media dance craze is a distraction to real world issues; second, others fixated on acknowledging and analyzing the complexities of the video; third, commentators viewed the video as a “meme”; and forth, some were focused on his cool dance moves. [According to Urban Dictionary, in popular culture a meme is a “a hilarious image, video, piece of text, etc., that is copied and spread rapidly by internet users” (JackOfAllDefinitions, 2018)]. For the sake of the analysis, the comment section is split in terms of the take away from the video, but nonetheless, it is important to note that the amount of positive comments, by large, ultimately outweigh the negative.

The comment that encompasses the first theme reflected that “the dancers are there to distract you from the violence that’s going on in the background which represents people being blind by trends” (F, 2018). The commenter recognizes the fact that trends, specifically popular social media dances, are causing America to lose focus on the realities of our world. Although, most commenters caught on to this same idea, not everyone explicitly acknowledged the link between the popularity of Hip Hop trends and the dehumanization of African-Americans.

Viewers like F did not get the references to African American history, thus causing them to not

acknowledge the Black experience in America and rather interpret the video as commenting on general violence in America. Despite this disconnect, Gambino successfully caused most viewers and others commenting about the same idea to contemplate the use of popular media to mask over the cruelties of America.

This next comment with 3.7k likes sums up the second theme. The commenter notes that “when you watch this for the first time, you go ‘wtf is this LOL’ then you watch it again and again, it starts to scare you with all these shits that’s actually happening behind that you didn’t notice on your first time watching” (공파리파, 2018). This user acknowledged that they initially fell into the trap of a surface level understanding, but after rewatching it, the viewer saw past the odd facial expressions, the cool dancing, and guns and was shocked and scared by the underlying messages. By juxtapositioning the happiness of the dancing and the violence in the background, Gambino was able to not only cause viewers to curiously watch the video more than once, but to actually provoke strong emotions of anger and fear from the audience. These emotions are what can potentially cause the viewer to take action and join the conversation.

Unfortunately there are also those who failed to grasp the importance of the video and its deeper meaning. Many of the comments tended to focus on Gambino's dance moves rather than the meaning behind them. For example, a comment stated that “Gambino’s dance moves are on point” (Death Grips fans are biased, 2018), supporting Gambino's assertion that people in society value Black art over Black individuals, as they failed to even notice or comment about the deeper meanings behind the video. The viewer did not notice the chaos and only focused on or cared about the popular dance moves Gambino and the children were doing.

In addition to these comments, there were also many that wrote about the memes created from the video. One viewer by the name of Becky Jackson said that to find “this meme”, she searched for “black shirtless guy dancing” (Jackson, 2018). To this audience member and others, the video is a joke. Those who create memes shows a complete lack of understanding of the message and seriousness of the video. In addition, those who engage in the meme show a similar disregard for the seriousness of the video. This is shown through Jackson’s internet search as it not at all related to the real content of the video. Many viewers choose to make fun of the video rather than dive into its complex meanings.

With the same mindset of the viewers who failed to understand the meaning of the video, a Youtube creator produced “This is America 2”, gaining 10M views. The meme video completely changed the meaning of the Gambino’s music video and its overall concept. In the video, the creator used the original video with added photoshopped images and the instrumental version of “This is America” with new lyrics (FlyingKitty, 2018). In the parody, right after Gambino shoots the Black man as he did in the original video, the first lyric sung in the parody video is “this is a meme”. The producer acknowledges that he is creating content intended to be solely comedic and has no shame in announcing it. In addition to the lyrics of the song being changed, the added images on the screen also adjust the video’s meaning. For example, while in the original video Gambino has a sack tied around the Black mans head to symbolize lynching, the creator of this video put a cartoon money bag image over his head. Continuing to do similar alterations throughout the video, he completely removed the symbolic meaning behind Gambino’s original video. The creation of this video shows how the real Black experience is often not only seen as invalid, but also serves as evidence that popular media repetitively alters

the reality of the Black experience, causing people to have an incorrect perception of Black struggle and people. Moreover, the creation of this popular meme shows that Gambino may have not effectively reached all audiences with the messages in the video. Although his overexaggerated dance moves and facial expressions are a reference to Jim Crow minstrel shows, some viewers did not make this connection and viewed it as Gambino trying to be comedic.

Twitter is the social media platform where a wide variety of active conversations about the video take place. Out of the 32 tweets analyzed, 18 comments were of a positive nature, similar to the thoughtful comments via Youtube, where users attempted to analyze the video, showed their appreciation of the video's message and artistry, and engaged in conversation about how popular media culture and Black violence are related. For example, a viral Twitter thread entitled "Childish Gambino is a genius. A thread of all the imagery in "This Is America" was created by a user named Crowdfiller, and showed a complete understanding of the video's symbolism and imagery as she explained each metaphor in the video. In one of the sections of her thread she stated that "the dancing begins as a distraction to the rioting in the background. The world is so eager to adopt black culture (Blocboy JB's dance) whilst ignoring the racial injustices they face"(Crowdfiller, 2018). This accurate interpretation of the video, like many, showed Gambino's success in conveying his message. As the video has 28k retweets, 64k likes, and 410 comments, the conversation was not only spread to a large audience, but expanded on in the comment section below her thread. This shows both the ability of Gambino's video start conversations to spread awareness about racial issues in America and the strength of social media to spread these messages and encourage socio political engagement.

On the other hand, some Twitter users also showed their hatred towards the video's content. Out of the tweets gathered from the site, only 9 were negative comments. Many of these tweets included "#MAGA", showing their support for Donald Trump—the 45th President of the U.S who is anti-gun control and has a history of racial discrimination. A Twitter user by the name of 1776MAGA1 argued that "it's no wonder these kids are losing it in our country when all they see is negative crap & these are the sell-out idiots they have to look up to" (1776MAGA, 2018). Due to the fact that both YouTube and Hip Hop music is heavily incorporated in popular culture, most generally consumed by young adults, the Twitter user argues that there is not enough positivity in the video to really make a change as it only makes people upset. While the consumption of sensitive images in the video can trigger feelings of anger and sadness, it is important to educate others about the important things going on and the Black lives being targeted. As Rodriguez (2006) stated, approaching the topic of targeted violence against African-Americans in current society from a colorblind ideology is dangerous to Black Americans and the mission of national peace. It is incorrect to assume that we live in a racially equal world when systematic violence remains present in our nation. It is highly important to be aware that America is continuously taking a step back rather than moving forwards. Gambino used both his platform as a popular Hip Hop soul artist and social media to show teens and adults that present day is not that far off from historical traumas.

In addition to the idea that the violence in the video hinders social positivity, many negative views on Twitter consisted of the idea that the video is Democratic propaganda against the second amendment. For example, one tweet noted that Gambino's music video was pushing propaganda not only against guns, but a false idea that Blacks are oppressed (Lee, 2018).

Viewers like Lee felt that showcasing gun use against Black people was Gambino's way to advocate for gun control in the United States. And they were right. Although, it is not propaganda. Propaganda insinuates that the information in the music video is of a misleading nature when in reality, it is the truth. As I mentioned previously, there is an exponential amount of deaths by guns in America and it is statistically shown that Black Americans are more likely to be shot and killed by the police. These viewers overlooked the amount of gun violence in America and its devastating lasting effects on the African American community. Because of this inaccurate understanding, these viewers watching Gambino's video became aware of and opened up their minds to contemplating their own views on society, regardless of whether or not they decide to redirect their moral compass. Therefore, Gambino's message was received differently than he intended, causing many different interpretations of the video.

Through examining Reddit reactions, I found that many commenters focused mostly on analysing the video rather than commenting on whether or not they liked it. These interpretations were different than how Gambino had intended the video to be received. The first interpretation of the video I will discuss is that the message of the video surrounds Black on Black violence and popular media culture rather than racism in White America and its relation to popular media. The viewer stated that "it is talking about how black America is lying to itself about reality. Highlights gun violence, black on black crime, drug use, church, rioting, police and the degenerate rap culture that doesn't talk about the state of black America" (people-e, 2018). This viewer interpreted the video's message as a critique of current rap culture as it has lost the foundations of rap music. Through the use of popular media dance moves throughout the video and mumble rap sounds in the song, Gambino mocks modern day Hip Hop music in order to

make social commentary about the Black experience in America. However, this viewer feels that he is commenting on Black on Black violence such as gang violence, rather than racism as a cause of Black homicide victims. He supports his claim through his observation that “[Gambino] is a black guy, and he is the one that shoots the church people and the unarmed guy. He is the one smoking the joint. He is the one dancing and pretending like everything is fine. There is rioting around, cars on fire, people jumping off roofs, but he is dancing, pretending like everything is fine” (people-e, 2018). There is some validity in this user's point. Due to the fact that Gambino is a African-American man, the fact that he is the one perpetrating the violence on the all Black cast takes away from the message of racism against Blacks in America. Gang violence in America has been an issue for years, however the timing of the videos release does not line up with that message. The video was released during a time where guns violence is a large issue and during a time where police brutality was widely talked about on social and news media. A key visual that the viewer missed was that in the beginning of the video after Gambino shoots the Black man, the first lyric he sings is “this is America”. By saying this Gambino not only expresses that America devalues Black people, but that he is portraying the role of America. His use of Black historical imagery shows that like the past, White America dehumanizes and appropriates Blacks. This message was received by many other viewers, showing a fault in the execution of his message. It possibly was not an appropriate idea to cast only African-Americans in the video, or to use himself as a metaphor for America. This debate about the video’s message shows a that not everyone received the same message. A discussion about Black on Black violence and the failure of Black rappers to address these issues is very different from that of

racism in America and popular media's adoration for Black art. Nevertheless, this shows that much needed conversations are taking place.

Through the juxtaposition of historical metaphors and present day symbolism of the dehumanization of Blacks in America, Gambino created a viral masterpiece, spreading around the world and informing others of the true Black experience in America. The feedback loop evidence not only strengthens Gambino's point that popular culture masks over the Black experience, but shows the power of social media to start crucial conversations and educate people about corrupt aspects of American society.

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