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Delilah Pope

Beyonce's *Lemonade* and the Re-appropriation of Identity

Since the release of her first solo album in 2003, Beyoncé Knowles Carter has garnered both critical and commercial success due to an extensive and continually multiplying catalog of poppy, sexy hit singles. Ten years after the release of her first solo album, with no expense to mainstream acclaim, Knowles Carter released *Beyoncé*. The unadvertised, self-titled release was not only a testament to her ability to sell an album by her name alone but was also a work with a distinct artistic purpose and vision, as Knowles Carter focused on autobiographical features of her childhood, marriage, parenthood, and personal insecurities. For three years, *Beyoncé* stood alone as Knowles Carter's only record to include visuals as an essential part of its experience as well as the only work within her canon to give viewers a first-hand look into her personal life. However, with the 2016 release of *Lemonade*, her sixth studio album, Knowles Carter again artistically engaged with her personal life, as the work uses both narrative and visual elements of film to explore the real-life allegations of her husband's infidelity.

Through *Lemonade*, as Knowles Carter engages with deeply personal aspects of her often private life, she displays a matured artistic and sociopolitical consciousness, one which she uses to redefine her cultural image as a mere performer and sex symbol and construct an image and artistic persona fully engaged with issues of black womanhood and womanism, artistry, and the complexities of the personal and communal selves. Knowles Carter's assertion of artistic identity is strongly linked to the film's ability to braid differing genres and subject matter into one cohesive visual and sonic storyline. Through a blend of poetry, film, and music, Knowles Carter cre-

ates an homage to African roots, an exploration of personal trial, and an affirmation of the necessity of black resilience in the face of social injustice. The film is one which asserts a layered breadth and depth of vibrant subject matter which demands equally layered analysis.

Lemonade's formal qualities help to construct its unique tone, vivid imagery, and blend of personal and communal subject matter while connecting it to significant veins of scholarship and film traditions in addition to its place within music culture. Baruti N. Kopani provides an essential lens for understanding black creation in hip hop, arguing that white consumers have exploited, manipulated, and distributed the genre to both black and white consumers in a diluted form (2). He notes the experience of rapper Too Short as he attempted to release music discussing poverty, drug addiction, and police brutality, but was instead limited by his label and producers to discussions of sex (4). Kopani further argues that this sort of manipulation is common practice in hip hop, and that it allows the dominant white culture to take part in expressions of blackness while subverting and relegating blackness and black artistry to a role which "marginalize[s] blacks and other nonwhites to affirm white supremacy" (3).

Though officially categorized as a visual album, *Lemonade*'s long form narrative structure also lends it to discussion and theory particular to film analysis. From minstrelsy and blaxploitation to the modern film era, the presentation of the black image in performative spaces has been a site of debate in the critical sphere. While the broader black community has faced obstacles to fair and authentic representation in the white-dominated sphere, the obstacles faced by black women are particularly unique. Jane Gaines argues that black women's engagement with film is one which not only identifies them with racial inequality, but also with gender inequality,

placing black women viewers as resistant to previous dichotomies of male versus female and black versus white (295).

Ciara Barrett uses Knowles Carter and fellow hip hop artist FKA twigs to explore the unique role of the visual album in the assertion of identity for black women. Barrett argues that though female authors of visual albums face similar challenges to autonomy as female artists in music and film, the visual album is a space which allows black women greater authorial and creative agency within their works through the visual presentation of the self (42). However, Barrett also cites the historical climate of both the music and film industries as often subjugating black women to the gaze of the dominant consuming audience, stating that “hip hop music videos since the 1980s have tended to construct a white male ‘dreamworld’ by which Black female bodies – music video ‘models’ – have been used to harness visual awareness of musical performance” (42).

While Barrett’s discussion of the “white male dreamworld” is an important consideration in discussing female representation in media, the definition of the space is perhaps too narrow to fully encompass the range of forces which influence the mainstream black female image. When considering Barrett’s “dreamworld” alongside Kopani’s discussion of the challenges facing black hip hop artists, it is reasonable to assert that the “white male dreamworld” is but a product, an overlapping plain within the male and white dreamworlds within which black female artists are forced to create, and which Knowles Carter openly rejects in the creation of *Lemonade*.

Just as Knowles Carter must rebel against the often confining context of mainstream music and film, so also must she rebel against the expectations of her past performative image. For Knowles Carter, a figure situated firmly within the social sphere and whose livelihood involves a

level of personal image commodification, every action, reaction, or inaction invites a critical eye evaluating its authenticity. It is this creative climate which prompts Ellis Cashmore to argue that Knowles Carter sells an image of more than just sex appeal and excess. Honing in on the ways in which Knowles Carter has been silent regarding race and racial issues, he argues that her business savvy and skill for commodification also sells the idea of a post racial American society, stating, “In the Beyoncé narrative, racism is merely a vestige of a bygone age when black and other ethnic minorities were outside the consumerist economy” (138). In addition to these criticisms, Knowles Carter’s self proclamation as a feminist at the 2014 Video Music Awards sparked debate due to her overt displays of both physical and lyrical sexuality, notably from outspoken feminists Annie Lennox and bell hooks (Weidhase 128).

hooks has been a powerful voice in cultural criticism for many years, notably lending her critical eye to the ways in which black women respond to their representations in media. In her essay “The Oppositional Gaze,” hooks discusses the ways in which black feminine audiences consume film, describing “the oppositional gaze” as one which defiantly, and often outright rebelliously, views that which it has been forbidden to see (308), and describes how this gaze functions in the contemporary realm as a similar action of both resistance and evaluation which has the power to shape reality (308). This discourse on viewership is particularly important as *Lemonade* focuses on the ways in which Knowles Carter’s intended audience interacts with the work in ways which have not always been afforded to black female audiences. According to hooks, black women’s interactions with film and representation often necessitate a suspension of critical analysis and an abandonment of the acknowledgement of racism within film (312).

Lemonade, however, allows viewers to fully engage with themes of race and gender by immers-

ing spectators in diverse representations of black women, thus removing—or at least reducing the need for—an oppositional interaction. Instead, the work is framed as one which opposes irresponsibly-dominating norms and allows Knowles Carter to function, for her community, as opposition personified.

It is in the discussion of Knowles Carter's artistic assertions that both Cashmore's and hooks' critiques of self commodification become most pertinent, as they call into the question the authenticity of Knowles Carter's motives in creating a work which so heavily depends upon the narrative and trauma of her personal life. Knowles Carter's status as one half of a business savvy mogul power couple and a celebrity icon invites and perhaps even demands these evaluations, but Knowles Carter's interest in drawing from her personal life in the production of her work must be understood, not only in the context of pop culture reality TV, but in the context of both historical and contemporary artists as well. While Knowles Carter's image is a series of complex interworking ideas and cultural expectations based on race, gender, and her own personal history, she uses this context to form the foundation of *Lemonade*'s narrative of identity reassertion. This contrary backdrop to *Lemonade*'s diegesis only enhances the film's assertions of blackness and black womanhood.

According to Jane Gaines, just as black women have often struggled in identifying themselves in film, the cinema has often struggled in representing black women as they are, both fully feminine and fully black (296). In her discussion of the 1975 film *Mahogany*, starring Diana Ross, Gaines states, "*Mahogany* has the same trouble with representing black femaleness that the wider culture has had historically; a black female is either all woman and tinted black, or mostly

black and hardly female” (296), but Knowles Carter, through *Lemonade*’s subject matter and the representation of her life, blackness, and femininity, insists on being acknowledged as both.

Some of *Lemonade*’s earliest scenes serve to orient the viewer to the film’s purpose as a visual piece which centers black women as both subject and audience, and the film as a whole leaves viewers immersed in representations of black women from different walks of life. One of the film’s earliest scenes is that of many black women posed in black and white in a plantation setting. The scene highlights the diversity of age and skin tone of each of the neatly dressed women. On its own, the scene is able to stunningly captivate its audience due to its setting and emphasis on its subjects, but the film also presents a clear homage to Julie Dash’s 1991 *Daughters of the Dust*, a film which has been praised for its centering of black women and its engagement with past trauma. Though Dash and Knowles Carter differently engage with these issues through time-period and setting, *Lemonade* noticeably mimics these features as it discusses black heritage and black trauma.

In the section entitled “Forward,” Knowles Carter places her audience face-to-face with the realities of contemporary and historical black trauma as the film displays portraits of black men whose lives were taken by police violence, each portrait situated in the hands of the subject’s mother. The scene is an emotionally powerful yet unforced statement, one which gains significant power from its lack of self-explication, but which is no less situated within the discussion of cultural history. In its engagement with these communal elements, the film again asserts the work’s consciousness of group identity, emphasizing the ways in which black feminine community has historically risen from tragedy.

Knowles Carter's sociopolitical consciousness likewise draws power from its relationship to the present, as *Lemonade* includes numerous contemporary figures who help her to acknowledge the past while engaging with the present. From Amandla Stenberg of *The Hunger Games* to Quvenzhané Wallis of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, the work includes black women and girls who have been prominent subjects in discussions of blackness and femininity, often outside of their own agency. Perhaps no figure is featured more prominently in this way than tennis star Serena Williams, who has been at the center of discussions of the black feminine physique.

Williams, like Knowles Carter, operates within a predominantly white space, under the gaze of the predominantly white audience of her white-dominated sport. It is this context which has contributed to the criticisms of Williams's body as too muscular, too masculine, and, sometimes, too black. Janell Hobson asserts that critiques of Williams's body are reminiscent of those leveled at the image of the "Hottentot Venus," a depiction of the black female form which for several years emphasized the hips and buttocks of black women as "freakish" and "ugly" (90).

Williams's brief cameo in the film comes during "Sorry," one of the album's most prominent singles. As Knowles Carter stretches nonchalantly in a chair, Williams takes ownership of the visual space, emphasizing her physicality as she unapologetically squats and leans. In the context of another film, Williams's performance could be construed as pandering to white and male gazes, but within *Lemonade*'s privileging of the black feminine perspective, the scene is instead a subversion of white and male expectation and a celebration and reclamation of the black feminine form.

As Knowles Carter asserts black feminine identity, she draws from past and present cultural surroundings, curating the visuals of the film to display images of contemporary southern

culture, the black past, and recreate scenes of a shared African history. Just as Knowles Carter uses these diverse images throughout the work, she also curates her own image to pay homage to her diverse cultural context. Knowles Carter manipulates her image through hair, makeup, and wardrobe, but also through subtle historical allusions and a skilled engagement with the present. These artistic representations of self and surroundings place the work in greater conversation with black womanhood as it spans cultures.

One of the most prominent figures whose image is featured in this way that of the Yoruba goddess Oshun, who is known for her transcendence of cultures and her manifestation in both African and Afro-Caribbean cultures. Knowles Carter's wardrobe and makeup pay homage to Oshun throughout the film, and while these visual aspects are significant, the film's act of paralleling the story and experience of Knowles Carter with the story and character of the deity is the aspect most deserving of analysis. Montré Aza Missouri discusses black women and film using the archetype of the "black magic woman," an archetype which she argues uses its basis in Afro-religiosity to connect contemporary Western black women to their African past. Missouri uses this archetype to analyze the cultural "inbetweenness" (5) of several black female protagonists featured within black films of the 1990s. According to Missouri, the black magic woman is a reversal of the tragic mulatto trope which uses her African history and New World contemporary identity to represent cultural authenticity rather than inauthenticity and cultural confusion.

Missouri's archetype does more than assert a framework through which to understand traditional film, as it also provides tools for interpreting the African imagery and identity assertions which are emphasized within *Lemonade*'s visual narrative, as Knowles Carter uses several scenes and images to recreate figures and scenes from the African past. Knowles Carter's allu-

sions to African culture can be seen in her costume designs, the face and body paint of both herself and her background performers, and through the settings and imagery of the film, drawing parallels to traditional Yoruba face paint and to the Igbo Landing Massacre.

Knowles Carter's identification with this archetype goes deeper than the visual elements of the film, as the film's consciousness of black social justice issues and of gender politics draw significant parallels to the consciousness and character of the black magic woman. As Missouri notes, "this character uses both the spiritual and the sexual to question and at times corrode the status quo of racism, sexism, classism and homophobia" (3). She also asserts that the black magic woman receives her powerful interest in social justice from the female deities of Yoruba religion (3).

Knowles Carter's recreation of scenes cemented in both African and African-American history asserts *Lemonade*'s consciousness as a film as well as Knowles Carter's own consciousness as a creator and as a member of the black community. Knowles Carter's insertion of herself into scenes depicting historical events and into those set on the plantation can be read as a visual representation of her own physical and emotional investment in history and the ways in which it affects her present day community. Lauren Jackson asserts that *Lemonade*'s recreation of these scenes with Knowles Carter at the forefront also allows *Lemonade* to be interpreted using an Afro-Futuristic framework, one which uses engagement with the past to rewrite past trauma and project into the future.

By nature of *Lemonade*'s subject matter, it seems impossible to avoid interpretations of the work which focus on the idea of a woman scorned. This trope is particularly powerful as it is the most autobiographically significant, despite the performative backdrop of the film. Knowles

Carter's emotional expression and processing forms the structure of the film through a Kubler-Ross style sequence. From sadness and anger to reconciliation, viewers experience the journey with her, a journey which carried significant emotional and artistic power even before the confirmation of her husband's infidelity.

bell hooks's voice again becomes relevant in the discussion of emotional expression, particularly as she discusses *Lemonade* as a film which glorifies violent retribution and which does not carry black women beyond a state of victimhood. May 9th of 2016, mere weeks after *Lemonade*'s release as an album and its visual premier on HBO, hooks released a highly critical review of the work, critiquing everything from Knowles Carter's use of the black female image to her engagement with pain and betrayal. Although brief, hooks's critique of the work is broad and cannot be altogether invalidated. Her most prominent critique comes as she discusses the efficacy of the work in achieving its ambitious goal of representing black feminine experiences. As she discusses the work, she gives particular attention to the second section of the film, "Anger." The album's second track, "Hold Up," provides the soundtrack to the film's stylized representation of resentment and revenge as Knowles Carter struts through a neighborhood, indiscriminately vandalizing the objects in her environment. The scene is one of spectacle: as Knowles Carter brandishes "Hot Sauce," her baseball bat and weapon of choice, the community in which she walks watches, cheering her on, even creating amusement by dancing in the spray of a busted fire hydrant she leaves in her wake. Knowles Carter herself grins as she progresses, whim-by-whim, to the next object of her destruction. It is this sense of revelry which hooks most prominently critiques within the scene, referring to its content as a "celebration of rage," which

she posits does nothing but create a contradictory narrative to the underlying theme of reconciliation.

hooks's critique of this scene presents powerful and essential considerations for interpreting any work which addresses the emotions of black women. Particularly in the context of the stereotyping of black women as angry and unreasonable, these considerations are necessary, and the criticism understandable, but within the larger context of the work, it is perhaps an unbalanced analysis of the film which concludes that the work is a glorification of anger and violence. Although equal screen time is not given to each section of the film, all are not given equal emphasis, and each section of the film carries the viewer through a sequence of emotions as they are processed by Knowles Carter. Rather than representing an assertion that violence is the key to female liberation, as hooks suggests, this scene is perhaps better read as one which allows Knowles Carter the full, human range of emotion.

Lemonade is a film which leaves viewers awash in complex sounds and images which invite diverse lenses and analyses, but one of the film's major strengths is in its ability to also be understood as an artistic work on an emotional. In this way, the work is both one grounded in culture and history and in academic discussions of race, class, and gender. Whether or not it is based in a redefinition of past trauma, Knowles Carter's work is one which clearly projects beyond past and present, as *Lemonade*'s own diegesis addresses the need for reconciliation, not merely as a means of coping with the present, but also as a means of creating future progress and healing.

Lemonade's projection of the future takes place in the final minutes of the film, as Knowles Carter engages with her personal hurt and betrayal. Knowles Carter draws the narrative

of marital turmoil to a close using intimate shots of herself and her husband overlaid with Shire's poetry, using lines which describe reconciliation and healing as a communal process between both husband and wife. Throughout this emphasis on healing and familial redemption, Knowles Carter keeps viewers focused, not only on herself, her husband, and their collaborative effort to rebuild, but on their entire family, as the film also employs scenes of Jay-Z's grandmother, Miss Hattie White, as she describes her life's philosophy using the metaphor of converting lemons to *Lemonade*. "I was served lemons, but I made lemonade," Miss White states (*Lemonade*). The message is simple, perhaps even cliché, but its inclusion within the film is emotionally weighty both for viewers and for the Carter family, as Knowles Carter's choice to identify herself with Miss White asserts the deep familial connection of marriage, referring to Miss White as "grandmother" with no interest in specifying their relationship through her husband. Knowles Carter not only uses the wisdom of her elders to project future healing, but she also uses home videos of her family, complete with scenes of her young daughter, to remind viewers of the weight of her subject matter.

While Knowles Carter's personal storyline ends with an emotionally powerful interest in healing in the interest of a familial community, she parallels this emphasis with a discussion of healing, forward motion, and progress for the rest of the film's narrative threads as well. Toward the end of the film, viewers are returned to the plantation images which were present throughout much of the film, and many of the faces of the young black women are emphasized as they all stand together outdoors, preparing for a photograph. The scene is overlaid with the audio of an older woman discussing the future, faith, and the importance of carrying younger generations onward toward progress. As she does this, the women arrange themselves in front of a vintage

camera. The scene pays obvious homage to similar scenes from *Daughters of the Dust*, those which center around the Peazant family prepares to depart their sea island life for what they hope will be prosperity on the main land.

Just as Knowles Carter includes Serena Williams within the film for an artistic purpose, so she includes various mainstream black women figures in order to strengthen the film's engagement with sociological, racial, and artistic issues. From young women performers to activists, the film's cast is one which was curated to provoke thought and discussion in both mainstream culture and the academic sphere. Within *Lemonade*'s narrative, the recreation of this scene likewise focuses on community, but the focus is firmly placed on the young women and their collective future. The women featured within this scene, and throughout the film as a whole, are predominantly performers, many of them in their twenties, with several much younger. Like Serena Williams, these figures have been both praised and criticized, often on racial grounds, for their existence in white dominated mainstream spaces, and it is perhaps for this reason that they were chosen and are so heavily featured within the visuals of the film. Knowles Carter includes young women such as Zendaya Coleman, whose mixed race identity has often left her as a seeming outsider in both black and white communities; Quevenzhane Wallis, the young star of *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, who was at the center of a controversy regarding the sexualization of young black girls; and Amandla Stenberg, whose casting in *The Hunger Games* film raised criticism due to her race. *Lemonade* features these young women and many more who have both claimed and battled spotlight, whether they have wanted to or not.

As Knowles Carter draws from the contemporary world of pop culture to present black female identity, she also draws from the realm of contemporary black art, particularly in her em-

phasis on the poetry of Warsan Shire. Shire's work within the film functions as the driving narrative force, but her body of work outside of the film presents a powerful supplement to the context of the film. In her collection titled *Teaching My Mother How To Give Birth*, Shire weaves stories from her personal life into a complex narrative of womanhood, family, and survival. Shire's collection discusses a family's departure from Somalia as refugees (32), a struggle in connecting to memories of an absent father (7) and a new home in Western culture. Outside of their explicitly feminine subjects, Shire's poems are presented without much explanation of context or specificity, allowing the stories within them to mesh and blend and defy individualization. Shire's skill for masterfully telling stories which are not always her own is perhaps why her work is featured as Knowles Carter's own voice throughout the film's narrative. Shire's inclusion allows the work to display a concrete consciousness of the global community of black womanhood, black pain, and black artistry.

Knowles Carter's ability to converse with contemporary artists through her work also allows artists to converse with her themes, image, and persona. Poet Morgan Parker addresses this idea in her collection *There are More Beautiful Things than Beyoncé*. Parker writes at length about her own life, focusing on relationships and dating, blackness, and mental health. Though Parker's focus within her poems is often personal, it also bears deeply communal themes as well, as Parker navigates her readers through the intersections of pop culture and personal life. In the midst of poems discussing the pitfalls of a twenty-something's dating life and the weight and complexity of the Obama legacy is a sharp interest in and understanding of cultural history and the sociological present.

In many of her poems, Parker employs her artistic skill to personify her subjects, notably choosing to give voice to many female figures, such as Michelle Obama, Sara Bartmaan as the Hottentot Venus, and Knowles Carter herself. In these poems, Parker hones in on features of performance and personal authenticity, drawing together the experiences of these black women figures using communal themes linked to being both black and female in the public eye.

In “Hottentot Venus” Parker personifies Bartmaan using lines such as “Business is booming/and I am not loved/the way I want to be” (6), and “No one worries about me/because I am getting paid.” Through these lines, Parker emphasizes the objectification of Bartmaan’s life as a figure thrust into the public eye. Parker’s treatment of Bartmaan’s public life differs vastly from the way in which she evaluates the public life of former president Barack Obama in one of the collection’s earlier poems. In “The President Has Never Said the Word Black,” Parker also emphasizes the limitations and objectification inherent in being a figure in the public sphere, but she chooses a third person point of view to discuss the former president’s public persona. The final line, “When he opens his mouth/a chameleon is inside, starving,” speaks to some of the same aspects of performative life as discussed in “Hottentot Venus,” but Parker’s distinct choice not to personify the former president is one which makes the rest of her biographical poems—those which notably focus on female subjects—stand out within the collection.

Though Parker uses personification in many poems, her most notable use of the device is perhaps in the poems in which she embodies Knowles Carter, not only due to Knowles Carter’s connection to the work’s title, but also due to the number of poems dedicated to her image and persona. In “Beyoncé Is Sorry for What She Won’t Feel,” Parker emphasizes the tension between the performative and authentic selves by using her projected persona of Knowles Carter and re-

ferring to herself as “first lady of desire” (17). Amidst references to fame and affluence, Parker highlights the idea of being so heavily acknowledged by the public eye that one is not truly seen by it. “I mouth *Free* and *Home* into a crowd/but they only hear gold extensions.”

Parker similarly addresses this idea in “What Beyoncé Won’t Say on a Shrink’s Couch,” in which she writes: “What if I said I’m tired/and they heard wrong/said *sing it*” (49). The three-line poem expresses the limitations to being understood as a figure in the public eye as well as the ways in which these limitations are tethered to performative expectation.

Though the Knowles Carter of Parker’s poems is a projection of Parker’s own imagination and observations of celebrity culture, her desire for mutual engagement with her audience is one which parallels Knowles Carter’s own artistic consciousness.

While Parker uses personification and references to pop culture as a framework for cultural critique, her emphasis on Knowles Carter and her work uniquely blends the personal with the pop cultural. In “Beyoncé in Third Person,” Parker diverges from her use of personification and instead returns to her own voice in order to blend her own personal life with that of her subject. “I am very/complicated and so is Beyoncé,” Parker writes. “Dogs in their gait of privilege/circle her. Snow falls for her/Shellacks windows for her/Beyoncé are you sure you’re okay?” While the poem clearly contrasts the glamour of fame with the ordinary tasks of everyday life, Parker’s parallels of human struggle are maintained from her earlier poems.

The poem “White Beyoncé” likewise adopts a third person narration, as Parker creates the image of Knowles Carter’s superstardom without Knowles Carter’s black identity. The poem represents a break from the former elevation of Knowles Carter’s celebrity and instead highlights the limitations of black life, even for those with the most privilege. Parker’s commentary on this

idea creates an interesting counter to Cashmore's assertion that Knowles Carter's attainment of superpower celebrity status places black creators in the "inside" regarding fame and privilege (138). The poem places Knowles Carter further in conversation with contemporary black womanhood by highlighting Knowles Carter's blackness through its absence.

Though Parker weaves the image and persona of Knowles Carter into many of her poems, using them to explore her own blackness and womanhood, her title poem, "Please Wait (Or, There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé)," deals with Parker separating herself from Knowles Carter's image in the interest of exploring other meaningful facets of her life: "There are more beautiful things than Beyoncé: self-awareness,/leftover mascara in clumps, recognizing a pattern/." Parker's interest in divorcing herself from the collection's thematic figure represents not an unraveling of the significance Knowles Carter poses within the work, popular culture, or Parker's own life, but rather a turn from pop culture to focus on personal growth and social justice, a shift which seems to parallel Knowles Carter's own artistic orientation toward the end of the film.

Lemonade's storyline comes to a close with a similar emphasis on the personal, drawing the two narratives—those of personal and communal trial—together under the overarching theme of reconciliation on behalf of younger generations.

As she brings the work to its close, viewers are presented with images of Knowles Carter and her husband's wedding day, her pregnancy, and moments of the two of them raising their young daughter. The images of the Carter family are interspersed with footage of couples of all ages embracing each other, but the focus of the scene remains firmly fixed on the celebrity couple's personal catalog of home videos. These images, though powerful on their own, are artisti-

cally heightened by the scene's soundtrack. The song "All Night" represents a reclamation and redefinition similar to those present earlier in the film:

So many people that I know, they're just tryna touch ya

Kiss up and rub up and feel up

Kiss up and rub up and feel up on you

Give you some time to prove that I can trust you again

I'm gonna kiss up and rub up and feel up

Kiss up and rub up and feel up on you. (*Lemonade*)

The song employs a reclamation of language and action which would normally exist outside of the context of a loving relationship and instead redefines it to function as a sign of forgiveness, resilience, and beauty, allowing Knowles Carter to reclaim her marriage from its trial as well as from public voices which may seek to weaken her union. The segment ends with the line "The audience applauds, but we cannot hear them" (*Lemonade*), a nod to Knowles Carter's artistic intent in the creation of the film, and an affirmation that the work was designed to exist independently of fanfare.

Through her engagement with the sociopolitical, Knowles Carter displays an awareness of the present cultural moment for black women, but the narrative of social justice is one which is masterfully blended with her own personal trial. This medley, rather than thematically dividing the work, instead serves to heighten the impact of Knowles Carter's representation of her personal life and her assertion of artistic agency and purpose.

Though situated within the pop culture sphere, *Lemonade's* presentation of mature, personal, and communal subject matter regarding race, class, gender, and love also situates it as a

fascinating addition to the world of socio-literary study, one which draws power from its rejection of Knowles Carter's previous creative and performative backdrop, and which powerfully asserts the need to unify in the face of what threatens to divide, and to create in the face of that which threatens to destroy.

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