

Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education

Volume 16 | Issue 2

Article 3

September 2017

Editorial Introduction

Venus Evans-Winters

Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois, vevansw@ilstu.edu

Jennifer Esposito

Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, Jesposito@gsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/taboo>

Recommended Citation

Evans-Winters, V., & Esposito, J. (2018). Editorial Introduction. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 16 (2). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.16.2.03>

Introduction to *Lemonade* Black Womanhood, Identity, & Sexuality

Venus Evans-Winters & Jennifer Esposito

Due to the growth of social media, images and sounds of Black women and girls are more widely circulated, interpreted, and critiqued by cultural critics, laypersons, and academicians alike. With the call to give more attention to the need for critical media literacy (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Kellner & Share, 2006), there is an urgent need to include discussions of Black women's everyday lived realities and messages into these conversations. Collectively, critical race and feminist scholars are reimagining and theorizing the role of popular culture in co-constructing girls' and women's lives within the popular imagination.

When we invited contributions that interrogated Beyoncé's visual album, *Lemonade*, to this special issue of *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, we knew we would receive an interdisciplinary collection of cultural critique. We were not prepared for just how many scholars would be eager to discuss the visual album, the cultural icon known as Beyoncé, and popular culture in general. To be clear, the special issue is not about a cultural icon, but how music, sounds, images, and words help to construct identities, relationships, perceptions, and the world around us. We put out a call for manuscripts on theoretical, conceptual, research, and/or practical issues specifically related to the social construction of Black womanhood, identity, and sexuality in media. Specifically, we were interested in manuscripts where scholars engaged with the *Lemonade* text as well as discussions centered on Beyoncé, race, and feminism.

The following six articles grapple with a collection of interesting and compelling topics regarding the *Lemonade* album.

Venus Evans-Winters is a professor in the Department of Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois. Jennifer Esposito is a professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. Contact e-mail address: vevansw@ilstu.edu & Jesposito@gsu.edu

Cienna Davis, in “From Colorism to Conjurations: Tracing the Dust in Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*” takes up the issue of colorism in relation to *Lemonade* and the 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust*. Davis argues that both texts are important Black feminist projects. Davis recognizes many connections between the visual album and the film including “shared setting, narrative content, hair, and styling along with the purposeful demonstrations of the continuation of African spiritual tradition and cultural forces in the diaspora and its intense focus on the particularity of the Black female experience.” She compares Beyoncé to one of the film’s most contentious characters, Yellow Mary Peazant, and examines the ways skin color shapes Black female performances. Davis ends by (re)affirming Beyoncé’s work as both political and critical as well as important in Afrodiasporic genealogies of Black womanhood.

Jeanine Staples, in “How #BlackGirlMagic Cultivates Supreme Love to Heal and Save Souls that Can Heal and Save the World: An Introduction to Endarkened, Feminist Epistemological, and Ontological Evolutions of Self Through a Critique of Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*,” discusses *Lemonade* as “a delectable new literacies artifact—one that can be understood as portraiture for not only the lived experiences of many Black girls and women, but also as portraiture for the effects of complex patriarchal ideologies that pervade the lives of those girls and women.” While Staples recognizes the importance of many of the cultural references Beyoncé alludes to or includes in, she does not let Beyoncé off the hook for centering male figures as “elusive, powerful ghosts and ubiquitous, necessary gods, things to be feared and worshiped.” Staples argues that Beyoncé, in her exploration of partner based aggressions and microaggressions centers Black girls’ and women’s lives on men though, all the while, Staples recognizes that the creation of the Supreme Love(r) that Beyoncé embodies is an exemplar of #Blackgirlmagic.

Robin J Phelps-Ward, Courtney Allen, and Jimmy L. Howard, in “A Rhetorical Analysis of Beyoncé’s ‘Freedom’: An Examination of Black College Women’s Experiences at Predominantly White Institutions,” focuses on a piece of Beyoncé’s work, *Freedom*. This song was performed at the 2016 BET Music Awards and Phelps-Ward relates it to a metaphorical and symbolic representation of the experiences of Black women attending Predominately White institutions of higher education. Specifically, the author argues that “Beyoncé’s *Freedom* performance helps frame Black women’s call for freedom, after the promise of education has not been as liberatory as was promised.”

Crystal LaVoullé and Tisha Lewis Ellison, in “*Bad Bitch Barbie* Craze and Beyoncé: African American Women Bodies as a Commodity in Hip-Hop Culture, Images, and Media.” utilize the conceptual framework of *Bad Bitch Barbie* to interrogate the complexities of Black women’s bodies as sites of empowerment while simultaneously being used as commodities. After an exploration of the historical representations of Black women’s bodies, the authors examine how *Lemonade* embraces the concept of the *Bad Bitch Barbie*—a woman who accepts her objectification and aims to participate in it for economic gain.

Erica B Edwards, Jennifer Esposito, and Venus Evans-Winters, in “Does Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* Really Teach Us How to Turn Lemons into Lemonade? Exploring the Limits and Possibilities Through Black Feminism,” explores the ways *Lemonade* “makes a compelling intellectual statement” despite some significant shortcomings investigated by the authors. Black feminism and postmodern theory frame the argument as the authors ponder in what ways Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* can be called, as it has been in the media, a feminist performance. The authors also argue that given Beyoncé’s popularity, she must be continually critiqued through media literacy given that so much of Black girlhood has been shaped by popular culture representations.

Zeffie Gaines, in “A Black Girl’s Song: Misogynoir, Love, and Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*,” explores the ways the trope of infidelity (as represented in *Lemonade*) is connected to Black feminist art, literature, and activism and symbolizes an ontological crisis of Black womanhood. Gaines continually shows us how Beyoncé’s text embraces both the personal and the political and tackles the complex issues of race and love. In the end, Gaines argues, *Lemonade* is a compelling Black feminist text which celebrates love and self-love of Black women.

As cultural theorists, the writers in this volume take seriously the ways in which Black women have been represented in *Lemonade* as well as how a Black woman (Beyoncé) chose to represent herself and other Black women. So many representations of Black women are hegemonic ones, representations that are shaped by a history of racism, colonialism, and sexism. We know that, as Stuart Hall (1981) argued,

. . . popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged . . . it is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises and where it is secured. (p. 239)

Popular culture matters and it is an institution where power can be up for grabs.

We invite readers to delve into this issue with the understanding that these articles represent an interdisciplinary group of scholars problematizing a popular culture icon who has become a symbol of womanhood, and arguably, feminism as a “performance.” The conversations presented are messy but they are crucial to our public grappling with racism and sexism as well as traditional feminism. The reading of this special issue should be considered an integrated but alternative approach to critical pedagogy; it is a pedagogy situated within critical race, gender, and sexuality discourse embedded in popular culture. It is up to readers of these academic texts and consumers of popular culture (as texts) to decide how cultural icons, music, and sound empower us to seek alternative representations of love, struggle, and power.

References

Alvermann, D. E., & Hagood, M. C. (2000). Critical media literacy: Research, theory, and

- practice in “New Times.” *The Journal of Educational Research*, 93(3), 193-205.
- Hall, S. (1998). Notes on deconstructing ‘the popular.’ In J. Storey (Ed.), *Cultural theory and popular culture: A reader* (pp. 442-453). Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.
- Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2006). Critical media literacy is not an option. *Learning Inquiry*, 1(1), 59-69.