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Introduction

Beyoncé Knowles Carter is one of the most powerful pop culture icons of our time. Throughout the course of her career, she has built a platform that allows her to create music with sociopolitical messages while sustaining the necessary financial backing to support her career and attract a broad audience. On April 23, 2016, Beyoncé released *Lemonade*, a musical album accompanied by a visual component, directed by Beyoncé and Kahlil Joseph, among others. The hour-long visual album *Lemonade* guides its audience through several chapters, each representing a distinct emotion that contains music from the album, poetry, as well as dynamic mise-en-scene. *Lemonade* captures the conflicts within Beyoncé’s marriage while simultaneously making a radical attempt to confront and redefine the representation of black women in pop culture.

Mise-en-scene in the visual album *Lemonade* includes the director’s creative control of the way in which we view the scene, including costumes, makeup, setting, lighting and staging within the film frame. In the opening sequence of the visual album, Beyoncé hides inside a black hoodie with her back to the camera, moving though a field of tall grass with a large withered brick castle in the distance. The shots in the opening sequence indicate that she will be navigating us through an intimate and personal time in her life. In *Lemonade*, Beyoncé pulls from her personal experiences as well as various creative contributions to bring attention to larger social experiences shared amongst the black community. Creative contributions to the visual album include but are not
limited to poems by a celebrated black female poet, Warsan Shire, song collaborations with songwriters such as Kendrick Lamar, and visual aesthetics drawn from the film, *Daughters of the Dust*, directed by Julie Dash. The visual album also has appearances from various black female actresses such as Quvenzhané Wallis, Zendaya, and Amandla Stenberg. Additionally, *Lemonade* features black mothers of victims of police brutality. *Lemonade* pulls much of its visual aesthetic from people and artwork that represent an aspect of the black experience in media culture. Most, if not all, of the contributors mentioned have publicly dealt with racial injustices and use their artwork as a platform to discuss those experiences. By capturing the essence of these individuals and their artwork, and incorporating it within her album, *Lemonade* attempts to portray a radical representation of the black experience, more specifically the experiences of black women.

Throughout United States history black women have been poorly represented in the media. Depicted as a matriarch, jezebel or a welfare queen, the common image of a black woman as hypersexual or overwhelmingly controlling has perpetuated false stereotypes of black womanhood. Furthermore, black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins have explained the harmful effects of these images as fostering the oppression of black women on an everyday basis. Black women may encounter micro-aggressions, a subtle or indirect form of discrimination, racism and sexism and so on because people act on these negative assumptions. The limited and inaccurate representations of black women deny them their humanity by forcing labels onto them. Being
stripped of their individuality, such harmful depictions have an enormous effect on the lived experiences of black women. For example, film scholar Norma Mantu highlights the way negative opinions are formed through metamessages, the submessages within given media, to shape the way that society views and interacts with black women.

Wrapped in alluring poetry and music, the mise-en-scene in the visual album *Lemonade* provides viewers with an alternative representation to the media’s negative portrayal of black women as submissive, insubordinate or aggressive. As Beyoncé shies away from the camera in the opening sequence, *Lemonade* demonstrates the visual album’s ability to portray the full complexity of black women as happy, sad, sexy, strong, loving and much more. The mise-en-scene establishes a particular narrative in which the audience both celebrates and stands in solidarity with the experiences of black women. The combination of Beyoncé’s grandiose platform as a powerful pop icon and the content of her visual album *Lemonade* play a monumental role in creating a space in pop culture for conversations about the experiences of black women. In *Lemonade*, the crafted mise-en-scene challenges negative representations of black women by redefining the way that black women are allowed to feel and exist in media culture. To support this argument, I will be using theories from black feminist scholars such as Bell Hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Norma Mantu and Audre Lorde.
*Intuition: Black Women Confronting the Elephant in the Room*

In *Intuition*, the first major chapter of the visual album, the blocking of the subjects and established setting call attention to the deceit and disrespect facing black womanhood perpetuated by the everyday influence of media culture. “I tried to make a home out of you, / but doors lead to trap doors, / a stairway leads to nothing,” Beyoncé states as she describes instinctively knowing that her partner has been unfaithful. In this chapter, Beyoncé attempts to encourage a discussion regarding the constraints limiting black women, such as negative stereotypes and misrepresentations in the media perpetuating negative stereotypes of black womanhood. Ultimately, Beyoncé’s concern with the secrets and lies within her marriage serve as a vantage point for her to discuss the influence of such mistreatment on the lived experiences of black women. *Intuition* is an attempt to remove the veil of deceit and disrespect covering black womanhood in America by asking, “What are you hiding?”

Amidst the voice over of the poem, we are met with sounds we usually hear in the night, although it is day. For instance, owls, crickets and a series of other animal sounds within the scene establish a somewhat mysterious and spooky atmosphere. Despite the fact that she has a limited understanding of her partner’s infidelity as indicated by the conflicting sounds, the blocking of the characters depict a rather clear indication of her perplexed state of mind as we are met with the blank stare of various black women. As the camera zooms into their faces or captures them hiding behind certain objects, it becomes apparent that their frustration is not only a shared experience among some but connected...
to being a black woman overall (see fig. 1). In other words, coming to terms with one’s intuition can translate to a state of deep thought or a trance where we take a moment to process the world around us. As the women stare into the camera, caught in a deep state of thought, it becomes clear that they are encouraging their audience to think about black womanhood and those that have lied to and deceived black women.

To understand why the media culture has an enormous effect on black women, we must understand the way that media affects its viewers. Despite the fact that media may have a more deliberate objective that isn’t intended to directly perpetuate stereotypes of black women, the metamessages of the given content continues to inform the viewer’s opinions. As film scholar Norma Mantu writes, “regardless of the surface content of a given message, the form of each message system creates its own messages which then shape the culture and the
individuals within the culture” (Norma, 32). It’s reasonable to assume that individuals that do not identify with the black community may already have negative, preconceived ideas about black women before ever having interacted with a single black woman. Due to the overwhelming persistence of these images, black women have been unable to escape the stereotypes and racist metamessages in media. Additionally, black women have been denied access to actively participate in the creation of their own images and representation. As a result, media aggression has led to day-to-day micro-aggressions.

This chapter of the visual album acknowledges the disrespect of black womanhood in America from the media culture that has influenced the relationships between men and black women. The song of this chapter, Pray you catch me, charmingly indicates that she is aware of her partner’s dishonesty and politely asks that she find a moment to confront him. She sings, “Pray to catch you whispering / I pray you catch me listening.” The song, Pray you catch me, is a clear indication that she wants to be caught listening or to catch her partner, to either have proof or to be forced to confront him about what she is feeling. Although confused and saddened by the idea of being lied to by her partner, she is ready to know the truth. Ultimately, Intuition is encouraging us to be critical of the representation and mistreatment of black women in media culture. The chapter continues with a close up to Beyoncé’s face, which is seemingly distressed. Off into the distance, there are city lights as we see her maneuver her feet to the edge of a roof. She takes a moment, and then with open arms falls off the edge of the roof (see fig. 2). Moments before hitting the
ground, the pavement becomes a large body of water. This moment evokes the feeling of what giving into your intuition might feel like. Black women are often the victims of harmful stereotypes, however, *Intuition* beckons us to shed light on the effects the misrepresentation of black women has on the everyday experiences of black women.

![Beyoncé jumps off the edge of a roof](image)

**Fig. 2.** Beyoncé jumps off the edge of a roof
Denial: The Denial of Forced Labels and Stereotypes Constricting Black Womanhood

“I tried to change,” Beyoncé recites as we move into the chapter of Denial. In an attempt to come to terms with her feelings, Beyoncé tries to change aspects of her identity for the appeasement of her husband. Fully submerged in water, a symbol of reflection and purity, Beyoncé moves and turns her body uncomfortably as she indicates her attempt to find herself and understand her feelings. Just as Beyoncé deals with her feelings of inadequacy in her marriage, so too Denial highlights black women’s questioning of their identity and forced assimilation to escape negative labels and stereotypes placed upon to them by the media.

Submerged underwater, Beyoncé removes the black sweaters she is wearing while air bubbles from the water surround her. “I tried to change. / Closed my mouth more, / tried to be softer, prettier, less awake. / Fasted for 60 days, / wore white, / abstained from mirrors, / abstained from sex, / slowly did not speak another word,” Beyoncé emphasizes. She swims and floats around in a beautiful bedroom, watching a mirror image of herself sleep while holding onto a bed frame (see fig. 3). Completely submerged, the water signifies her passivity and her attempt to cleanse herself of the situation and her haunted way of thinking. The poem suggests that she is struggling with trying to fix the troubled aspects of her marriage by cleansing aspects of herself and her identity. This section begs the question, why did she feel the need to change herself if it wasn’t her fault? In this chapter, Beyoncé highlights that she lost herself when she “tried to change” in these ways and understand why she has been hurt. In fact, Audre
Lorde poses the important question: “If this society ascribes roles to Black men which they are not allowed to fulfill, is it Black women who must bend and alter our lives to compensate, or is it society that needs changing?” (Lorde, 61). Black women have historically been expected to pay for the shortcomings of other people in their lives and in doing so, neglect themselves.

“In that time, my hair, I grew past my ankles. / I slept on a mat on the floor. / I swallowed a sword. / I levitated. / Went to the basement, confessed my sins, and was baptized in a river. / I got on my knees and said ‘amen’ and said ‘I mean.’ ” In the water she moves demonically, and in single shots there are flashes of her body turning and moving in unspeakable ways, as if she were possessed. Highlighted by the poem, this beautiful imagery suggests that her mind is troubled and confused, pushing her to extremes in order to salvage and heal the parts of her soul that blames herself for this situation. Black women have
resorted to changing aspects of their identity, such as their hair or the way they
dress, to compensate for the negative stereotypes placed on them. For example,
it has become a practice for black women to chemically alter their hair, making it
permanently straight. This process of altering their hair type is for their hair to be
considered “better” or “good hair.” The demonizing of black hair is just one
example of the many aspects of their identity black women have been asked to
alter for the satisfaction of the media, the images they create, and the people
who consume them. This expectation is a visible but unspoken tension that black
women have with their identity. Despite this self-demonization she highlights the
unfulfilling end result of her actions by reciting: “Still inside me, / coiled deep, / was the need to know / ... Are you cheating on me?”

This chapter of the visual album highlights the experience of black women
changing themselves to fit in with society and deflect ridicule by the media. In this
particular sequence, Beyoncé’s goes to extreme measures to cleanse her life
and her mental state as a method of saving her relationship. When Black women,
especially those in their adolescence, see false representations of themselves
they begin to think that they are the problem, resulting in extreme decisions and
alterations to fit into society. Such images force Black women to redefine
themselves in order to be accepted by the media, and in doing so; they lose parts
of their identity to rid themselves of the stereotypes marginalizing them.
Anger: Redefining the Trope of the Angry Black Woman

In *Anger*, we are met with performance smiles, fire and the eeriness of an empty parking lot, while Beyoncé screams into the camera and struts in her mink coat. At face value, this chapter expresses Beyoncé’s anger and frustration with her husband for his infidelity. However, based on the imagery in the sequence, particular lines from the song, *Don’t Hurt Yourself*, and an excerpt from a speech by Malcolm X, she expresses her anger as a result of the stripping of black women’s power in our society and attempts to reclaim the power of black women.

In the parking lot, black women in long white robes connected by the sleeves move and stretch their bodies in unison (see fig. 4). Turning and turning, gravity causes the water to flow upward and Beyoncé says. “If it is what you truly want / I can wear her skin over mines / her hair over mine / her

Fig. 4. Black women in robes connected by the sleeves move and rotate their arms
hands as gloves / her teeth as confetti.” Tied to the experience of being a black woman and unable to escape the robes of stereotypes weighing them down, Beyoncé angrily and bitterly mocks a black woman’s inability to recreate herself as a woman who not only her partner but also society validates. To understand the lack of agency black women have in our country, we must look to Bell Hooks’ breakdown of hierarchy in our society where she writes: “One has only to look at American television twenty-four hours a day for an entire week to learn the way in which black women are perceived in American society - the predominant image is that of the “fallen” woman, the whore, the slut, the prostitute” (Hooks, 52). To this day, black women are devalued and stripped of their agency as a result of the disrespectful images of black womanhood in the media.

The intense images and lines are only heightened as we maneuver through the stairwell and the parking lot where Beyoncé waits by her big black car. It is the emptiness and uneasiness of this setting that recreate the dark, angry undertone of her current state of mind. Beyoncé, with perfect cornrows and a large mink coat, begins to furiously sing the song, Don’t Hurt Yourself. Black women are lying on the car and remain still, wearing all black with a face that expresses no regrets and no remorse (see fig. 5). Their similar outfits and placement around Beyoncé in this scene present black womanhood as fierce and unbreakable because they reinforce her power. As Beyoncé spews words of venom at her husband, highlighting that he is replaceable and she is “a dragon breathing fire,” she emphasizes the strength of black women despite being affected by infidelity.
While singing *Don’t Hurt Yourself*, we hear a voiceover of Malcolm X’s influential speech, *Who Taught You to Hate Yourself?* The speech interjects with a claim: “The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.” In this speech, Malcolm X asks the black community to think about the way that they perceive themselves and to question why they do such harmful things to themselves to please white culture. Additionally, he takes the time to discuss the disbursement of power in our society, highlighting that black women have the least opportunity in our country. As mentioned earlier, black women have historically tried to change aspects of their identity that marginalize them in an attempt to access some sort of power. However, as highlighted throughout this chapter, it is impossible to break free of the very aspects of their identity that make them black women.
Apathy: The Act of Expressing Self-Love Amongst Black Women

In the chapter *Apathy*, Beyoncé moves towards the camera singing, “I ain’t sorry / I don’t care about you.” Her lack of makeup and carefree body language further highlight the statements in her lyrics as the successful female tennis player, Serena Williams, dances around her. Serena Williams, one of the world’s best athletes, has publically come face to face with a series of racist situations that have shaped her career in the world of tennis. However, women such as Beyoncé and Serena Williams have always confidently represented themselves as black women in media, despite facing an overwhelming amount of ridicule for their representation as black women. Their successful careers are an ode to their ability to overcome hardships by publicly displaying their own self-love and confidence. In *Apathy*, the song *Sorry* and the presence of Serena Williams encourages black women to be defiant of oppressive societal commentary by confidently expressing their self-love.

At the beginning of this chapter, several young black women sitting in a line against the window of a bus move and sway their bodies left then right, in sync. On the women’s faces and bodies are unique designs painted with white body paint. This particular body art, created by Nigerian born artist Laolu Senbanjo, is called the "Sacred Art of the Ori." As highlighted in his artist statement, “The foundation of the Sacred Art of the Ori ritual is the Yoruba religious practice of becoming one with yourself or awakening the God in you,” (Senbanjo, “Artist Statement”). As they move together, we sense the deep soulful
connection amongst black women aspiring toward self-love and acceptance, which Apathy asks its audience to experience.

From the bus, we transition to the stairs of a large white house surrounded by fruit trees. In the house, women are seated in chairs with their backs against the wall as Serena Williams elegantly descends a long set of stairs. Seducing the audience with her sensual body movements and fierce glare, Serena’s body language makes a clear statement that she is strong and confident, (see Fig. 6). In light of Serena’s career, she has dealt with various umpires making false calls during her matches in the United States tennis championships. In 2004, and then again in 2009, the audience watched in awe as they penalized her for false or petty calls. In the heat of the moment, Serena lashed out at the umpire, being deemed by many news sources as ‘crazy’ or ‘churlish’. While on the court, Serena’s talent was being measured by
her blackness and not by her skill in the game of tennis. In Citizen, Claudia Rankine asserts: “Perhaps this is how racism feels no matter the context - randomly the rules everyone else gets to play by no longer apply to you” (Rankine, 30). It’s clear that the presence of a black woman in the tennis world was often challenged and disrespected. Despite being one of the most talented and deserving individuals of this space Rankin claims that no one, “could shield her ultimately from people who felt like her black body didn’t belong on their court in their world” (Rankine, 26). This was particularly evident when Dane Caroline Wozniacki, “a former number-one player, imitates Serena by stuffing towels in her top and shorts, all in good fun, at an exhibition match. Racist?” (Rankine, 36). Although it is blatantly racist and disrespectful to mock the physique of black women, Dane Caroline Wozniacki received little to no punishment for this racist act. Serena herself decided to move past this situation where she stated in a USA Today interview, “At the end of the day I spend my time focused on things to become better and not bring me down;” her presence in Apathy encourages black women to be strong and confident about themselves.

For the remainder of this chapter, Beyoncé sits in a large chair with her feet kicked up, slouching and singing the song Sorry while Serena dances around her. Although the song lyrics in Sorry emphasize Beyoncé’s lack of concern for her partner, by specifically stating “I ain’t sorry / I don’t care about you,” Serena Williams uses her body to show society that she doesn’t care about the expectations perpetuated in the media attempting to constrict her or black women. Despite various racist encounters throughout her career, she continues
to excel and this sequence encourages black women to do the same.

Throughout this section, Serena dances seductively to the song, raising a middle finger and a peace sign at the camera. In the chapter *Apathy*, black women are encouraged to dismiss toxic social oppressions while fully owning and celebrating black womanhood.

**Accountability: Black Men Meeting Black Women at the Table**

"Teach me how to make him Beg / let me make up for the years he made you wait," Beyoncé declares in the next section, *Accountability*. Little black girls with large afros run throughout the house while casually looking at themselves in the mirror. The little girls dress in older outfits, juxtaposed with shots of older women highlights the cycle of marginalization black women face, specifically by black men. Despite the fact that black men may understand the common struggle of race relations facing the black community as a whole, black men fail to recognize the sexism rooted in American culture. As a result, black women are often mistreated and marginalized by the black men in their lives. *Accountability* highlights that black men’s inability to sympathize with and uplift black women has left their community disconnected and their relationships with one another broken. More specifically, it is the curious and playful nature of the little black girls in this chapter that highlight the common narrative of them inevitably growing into women that fall into their mother's shoes of a broken relationship with another black man.
As the girls run up the stairs, the camera cuts to a shot of a mirror, then to a reflection of two girls sitting next to each other, talking on a bed, (see fig.7). In this chapter, mirrors symbolize a bridge connecting a black woman in her adolescence to her adulthood, where Beyoncé recites, “You desperately want to look like her / you look nothing like your mother / you look everything like your mother.” Sequentially, another little girl watches Beyoncé, who is blurred, as she fixes her hair. Despite many of the issues that face black women, little girls look up to older black women to understand the world around them. Black girls in their adolescence watch older black women as a mirror to their older selves, to what they are capable of being and achieving. However, young black girls also see the mistreatment older black women face, and although they will pave their own way in life, it is clear that much of their experience is informed by the way black men treat black women.
“You must wear it like she wears disappointment on her face,” Beyoncé recites in her *Accountability* poem as Quvenzhane Wallis, a young and celebrated actress, looks over her shoulder at herself in the mirror, (see fig.8). She resembles an older woman with her hair beautifully done, wearing a long formal dress and big necklace. Although Wallis was one of the youngest and most successful stars in Hollywood, nominated for an Academy Award for best actress in 2013 at nine years old for her performance in *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, she was also widely ridiculed by the media. The media picked on her outfit, her role as *Annie* in a new movie, and the little dog purse she wore to the Oscars, as being unprofessional, silly or ‘too black.’ Sequentially after the shot with Quvenzhane, there is a sound of a ticking clock, growing loud as the other little girls sit next each other on the bed, playing with their dolls’ hair. One of the little girls stares into the camera and the scene cuts to an older woman glaring
into the camera. This section proposes the narrative of young black girls becoming older black women that will unfortunately be confronted by many of the same issues that burden black women today. *Accountability* reveals the harmful nature of society’s expectation of young black girls to mature earlier.

Mid-way through the poem, Beyoncé is interrupted by a voice over of a young man driving his car and discussing a time he met President Barack Obama while in office:

I didn't see myself going nowhere. I mean, really. I ain't...you know...I ain't really cared if I lived or died. Now I feel like I gotta live, man, for my kids and stuff, you know? He...he from the hood just like me. He from Chi-Raq, you know. I'm from New Orleans. You know, that give me inspiration on I can be whatever I wanna be, like, you know, whatever I wanna be.

As he talks about the feelings of inspiration that came from meeting President Obama, we see images of the man driving followed by images with his family, as he plays with little kids, smiling. As he realized the power available to former President Obama, he was encouraged to take control of his life and find a purpose. While this unique moment is special, it isn't as common for black women to see other black women in positions of power such as Obama. This voiceover captures the fact that black men are advancing to more positions of power, and while this is great, it isn't enough for little black girls who need role models as well.

As the sequence continues, there is a thunderstorm gathering off in the distance, as lightning strikes and small hands turn a figurine of a black woman in a wedding gown in a circle. Beyoncé asks, “Did he bend your reflection? / Did he make you forget your own name? / Did he convince you he was a god? / Did you
get on your knees daily? / Do his eyes close like doors? / Are you a slave to the back of his head?” This sequence addresses the complex of many black women falling into the same troubled relationships with men as their mothers. Young black women are expected to mature faster by accepting the harsh reality of the lack of responsible black men in the U.S. Audre Lorde highlights the current relationships between black men and women when she writes: “But the black male consciousness must be raised to the realization that sexism and women hating are critically dysfunctional to his liberation as a black man because they arise out of the same consolation that engenders racism and homophobia” (Lorde, 64). For black women in this country, it is hard to ignore the way that male privilege infringes on their relationships with black men. Due to the fact that black men fail to acknowledge the intersectionality of both race and gender affecting black women in our society, black women will continue to be marginalized within their own community as well as the larger society. Ultimately, without addressing black male oppression of black women, we cannot expect to break free of gender nor racial oppression as a black community.

The song *Daddy Lessons* sung in this chapter serves as a metaphor of Beyoncé’s father warning her about “men like him,” when she sings, “My daddy warned me about men like you / he said baby girl he’s playing you.” Beyoncé specifically references the fact that her father cheated on her mother and fathered another child. Further, *Lemonade* portrays Jay Z as also having cheated on Beyoncé. Beyoncé uses the chapter *Accountability* to send a message that she is trapped in a series of relationships with black men that have lied and
deceived her. “Am I talking about your husband? / or your father?” she asks, before beautifully singing *Daddy Lessons*. Lorde states: “History and pop culture as well as our personal lives are full tales of black women who have had compassion for misguided black men” (Lorde, 62). The soulful poem and song lyrics in conjunction with imagery, of the little girls and multiple black families, capture the perpetuation of harmful relationships within the black community. *Accountability* highlights the way that black men fail to acknowledge the intersections of race and gender and therefore contribute to the marginalization of black women.

**Resurrection: Black Motherhood as a Symbol for the Beauty and Value of Black Lives**

In *Resurrection*, a group of women gather around the camera to take a photo. Dressed beautifully and smiling, the image of so many happy black women, both young and old, in a comfortable state is a rare sight to see on screen. In a voice over a woman asks “So how we supposed to lead our children to the future? / What do we do? / How do we lead them?” Despite all the historical efforts by the black community to fight for equal rights, black people still find themselves fighting for the same rights and demanding the same respect as white Americans. *Resurrection* engages the killing of various young black people by police, as the most obvious example of discrimination. *Resurrection* is addressing the battle for equality within the black community that has become a principal aspect of the black experience. It is also an attempt to acknowledge the
efforts of mothers who have fought to protect their children against racial injustices as well as highlighting the significance of black lives.

From an old chest, Beyoncé picks up some photos, glances over them, then puts them down again, dusting off her hands as James Blake, the co-writer of the song in this chapter sings: “Forward / Best foot first just in case / When we made our way ’til now / It's time to listen, it's time to fight / Forward.” During this musical score, black mothers hold photos of their deceased sons, victims of police brutality. Sybrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin, Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner, and Lezley McSpadden mother of Michael Brown, clench photos of their late sons while gazing into the camera (see fig.9).

These intimate portraits are triggering not only to an audience that identifies with the loss of their sons but also more general audience that can sympathize with the mothers. The mothers in this scene have become widely recognized
throughout mainstream media as the face of the movement in advocating against police brutality. Their faces, as well as that of their sons, are highly identifiable, emphasizing black motherhood and paying homage to the mothers that have lost their children due to injustices against the black community. Despite all the valiant efforts from various mothers like Fulton, Martin, Carr or McSpadden, and the Black Lives Matter movement, there have been countless victims to police brutality within the past few years. Although this issue has been gaining more attention, it seems the brutalization of the black community has worsened. As one of the most powerful sequences in Lemonade, the presence of these mothers serves as a symbol to remind the black community of their battle to protect black lives.

In an interview with SirusXM Entertainment, Lezley McSpadden talked about her emotional experience during her portrait shot in Resurrection. McSpadden states: “When I got there, they wanted me to look regal. That’s what she called it.” In her portrait shot she shed a tear, unable to hold it together. She adds, “any time I’m talking about my son or looking at a picture, I just think about all that’s gone and how he had so much ahead of him.” Despite motherhood being labeled as a rewarding experience, Collins claims that “the range of black women’s reactions to motherhood and the ambivalence that many black women feel about mothering reflect motherhood’s contradictory nature” (Collins, 133). The power in this sequence stems from acknowledging the issues of race painfully marginalizing the black people, and being unable to protect those close to you within the black community.
Intercut between the portrait shots of the mothers holding frames of their late sons, other women hold photos of other black men. While the faces of the mothers and their sons are immediately identifiable, the women holding photos of the black men is confusing as the audience tries to figure out who these other men are (see fig.10). Although little to no information is available regarding the identity of the men in the portraits the women in this sequence hold, these images function to pull us out of the triggering aspects of the mothers’ portraits in order to make a broader statement about the value of black lives. So often the black victims of police brutality have been stereotyped as delinquents violating the law as means to justify their murder. However, this section

Fig. 10. Model Winne Harlow holding a photo of a black man

emphasizes that the victims of police brutality, or the mistreatment of black individuals, could happen to anyone in the black community. The unique choice for only women to hold portraits of only men highlight Beyoncé’s ode to
motherhood and those that are the bearer of children, emphasizing that although women are victims of police brutality as well, she allows black women to navigate this space in a way that black men cannot. This sequence in its entirety, with both the mothers and the women holding photos of black people, highlight the value of black life.

In the final shot of this chapter, the audience sees a monochrome image of a moving blanket on a bed. As we get closer, it becomes apparent that a black baby is wrapped in this blanket, the ultimate symbol of life. In *Resurrection*, Black life through black women and motherhood ensures the existence of the black community. Black motherhood in *Resurrection* is captured as a symbol carrying black life as well as the valiant ability of black mothers to continue to move forward despite the loss of their children.

**Redemption: A Reflection of Daughters of the Dust to Establish a Safe Space in Lemonade**

Throughout *Lemonade*, there are a series of connections to the film *Daughters of the Dust*, directed by Julie Dash such as setting, costumes, props and character movement. These parallels are most evident in the final chapter of *Redemption*. Set in the early 1900s, *Daughters of the Dust*, captures the Peazant family of the Gullah people traveling north to New England, from their home island off the coast of South Carolina during the great migration. *Daughters of the Dust* depicts a matriarchal society in which black women are safe, comfortable and the leaders of their families. Despite grappling with troubling aspects of black womanhood in America, the black women we see on screen in *Lemonade* exist
in a space that is reproducing the strong, unbroken space for black womanhood captured in *Daughters of the Dust.* As black women navigate the space established in *Lemonade,* Beyoncé recites, “You then passed these instructions down to your daughter / who then passed it down to her daughters.” Like *Daughters of the Dust,* the visual album establishes a space to cultivate the strength and perseverance of black women as a trait passed down from one black woman to another. Ultimately, *Lemonade* exists in a space that mirrors *Daughters of the Dust* to articulate a specific reality in which black women can access their full subjective power.

As little girls run out into the field at the start of the chapter *Redemption,* their movement mirrors that of the unborn child Eula Peazant in *Daughters of the Dust,* representing the future of black womanhood. In *Daughters of the Dust* the unborn child of Eula Peazant is captured running throughout the island, interacting with and sharing the stories of her ancestors as they prepare to head to the mainland. Although unborn, the child serves as the narrator, capturing the story of her ancestors with great feeling and sharing her understanding of the way in which the past has informed her present. She represents the future of her culture by serving as a connection to her ancestors and the land. Similarly, at the start of *Redemption,* three little girls run through a door onto a field. The young girls are all wearing long, white dresses with their natural hair flowing in the wind. As they run, mirroring the movement of the unborn child in *Daughters of the Dust,* they are depicted as those that will be the future of black women. The little girls in *Redemption* will continue to shape the meaning of black womanhood
through their experiences. Additionally, the little girls in *Lemonade* and the unborn daughter of Eula pay homage to those that have struggled to provide for them. By acknowledging the experiences of those before them, these little girls are given the tools to continue to establish a space for their communities, particularly black women, to thrive.

Furthermore, the visual album depicts Beyoncé as a matriarch, comparable to Nana Peazant the head matriarch in *Daughters of the Dust*, in order to establish Beyoncé’s personal history and perspective. In *Daughters of the Dust*, Nana Peazant is often seen sitting comfortably in her straw chair, looking off into the distance. The Peazant family admires Nana, for her wisdom, experiences and stories of their ancestors. In *Redemption*, Beyoncé sits comfortably in her rocking chair, echoing the image of Nana Peazant as a strong, wise, matriarch while gazing on the world around her. It is due to her success as a pop icon and her ambitious idea to achieve *Lemonade* that she intentionally frames herself as a matriarch for her visual album. Despite this depiction, one shot in this sequence captures Beyoncé in her chair with her feet barely touching the ground indicating that she still has big shoes to fill (see fig.11).

When Beyoncé recites, “Grandmother, / the alchemist, / you spun gold out of this hard life, / conjured beauty from the things left behind,” she acknowledges those that have broken boundaries to allow her to achieve her success. Ultimately Beyoncé is framed as the matriarch in *Lemonade* while simultaneously acknowledging those that have paved the way for her just as Nana Peazant is situated in *Daughters of the Dust*. 
In *Redemption*, the use of costumes and setting closely resemble those used in *Daughters of the Dust* to establish the safe space depicted in *Lemonade* in which black women exist confidently and comfortably. In *Daughters of the Dust*, the black women progress the narrative of the story by actively expressing their opinions on traveling north, making important decisions for their families, and enjoying moments together. Throughout the film they wear long, white Victorian dresses, not generally worn by black women in this period. This mode of dress, usually worn by women in high social and economic class in the late 1800s, depicts the women as wealthy, elegant and strong. This costuming choice attributes power to the black women in the film, and thus respect. Similarly, in *Redemption*, two black women in extravagant white outfits and bulky jewelry open a curtain to reveal a space where other black women wear long, white, beautiful dresses. Based on their clothing, the women are also perceived as
wealthy, elegant and strong. Beyoncé constructs the space as comfortable and familiar for black women based on their costumes as well as their confidence of their natural hairstyles.

Throughout Daughters of the Dust the setting depicts a tranquil and safe island. Audiences see the waves of the ocean crashing against the shore, the rustling of tall grass in the water and on the land, and the wind blowing through the weeping willow trees. A particular scene in the Daughters of the Dust depicts the characters lying down on the boughs of the weeping willow tree, laughing and talking to one another. Although Lemonade was filmed in Louisiana to represent the land that Beyoncé’s grandparents are from, the visual album depicts a similar setting to the foliage, ocean and wooden homes present in Daughters of the Dust. In Redemption, black women sit at the bottom of the weeping willow tree looking off into the distance (see fig.12). These trees are a reoccurring visual

Fig. 12. Several Black women rest under a willow tree near a cottage in Lemonade
motif throughout *Lemonade*, with women standing at the bottom of the tree or sitting on its bough. The visual album also depicts the wooden cottages surrounding the women as they sit on the porches or walk to them in the distance. These evoke the wooden family homes in *Daughters of the Dust*. The film *Daughters of the Dust* was particularly enchanting because of the beautiful scenery depicting the character’s connection to the land. By mirroring the clothing and setting of *Daughters of the Dust* in *Lemonade*, black women are given a space where the respect for their womanhood is validated.

The use of setting, costumes, character movement and props, in both the film and the visual album provide the audience with an alternate reality in which black women are safe and comfortable. Specific references to the film *Daughters of the Dust* in *Lemonade* highlight the beauty and strength of black womanhood. Drawing from the beautiful imagery in *Daughters of the Dust*, the specific references to Nana, Eula’s unborn child and other characters recreate the desire of the narrative to stay connected to spaces that cultivate black culture and history. Furthermore, Beyoncé emphasizes the passing down of this culture and history though the lineages of black women. In *Redemption, Lemonade* reproduces the space established in *Daughters of the Dust* as a tool to provide an environment where black women have accessed full subjective power. Although this exact safe space for black women does not exist in reality, Beyoncé uses *Redemption* to create new, and profound alternative reality in pop culture. Due to the immersive nature of *Lemonade*, it becomes a safe space in which black women experience validation and acceptance lacking in society.
Conclusion

The visual album *Lemonade* revolutionizes the representation of black women by providing pop culture and mainstream media with an alternate representation of black womanhood. The power and influence, which Beyoncé has in our culture is one of the defining characteristics of its success. Beyoncé, a singer, songwriter and actress with a career dating back to the 1990s, is one of the most important artists in pop music. With a net worth of nearly $450 million, she has used her career to create inspirational music for women. Although *Lemonade* owes its success to Beyoncé for her goal in creating this visual album, the impact of *Lemonade*’s messages and ideas are the result of various creative inspirations from other artists and black women whose real life experiences bring impact and emotion to the album. It is through the lens of Beyoncé’s marriage that *Lemonade* critiques the representation and treatment of black women in our society. Beyoncé’s confession of love for black womanhood and the black family in *Lemonade* brings awareness to the issues facing the black community. Additionally, she uses her power and her status to argue that despite her success and stardom, she, as a black woman, still fails to escape the racist and gendered marginalization of black womanhood. *Lemonade* validates black women’s ability to have complex emotions and ideas while displacing the limiting stereotypes perpetuating negative representations of black womanhood. *Lemonade* seek to validate and accept black women, contrary to the alienating representations of black women that have historically dominated and continue to circulate in media today.
Bibliography


