

The Black Artiste: Politicization as Racialization

0 Key definitions

1. *Politic* - the expression of a singular socio-political ideology usually exhibited through individual actions.
2. *Political potency*- the extent to which an act, regardless of intent, may further a socio-political agenda/politic.

1 Introduction

The idea that the personal doubles as the political is a modern analysis of socio-political regimes, popularized by second-wave feminism in the 1960s. However, this understanding has become increasingly relevant for a number of ideologies due to the ways in which modern political frameworks (ie. campaigns, policies, legislation, etc.) continue to target marginalized groups while the global social consciousness demands that political leaders rectify social issues in political arenas. Terms like 'identity politics' describe this phenomenon well, not only merging the personal/social and the political in name alone, but also theoretically insinuating that today the two arenas are no longer separate.

2 Objective

In this research project, I challenge the relationship between the personal and the political for Black artists in order to examine the extent to which Black art is inherently political. I aim to do this by landscaping the current socio-political climate and reframing the definitions of terms such as politics and civic duty to more appropriate understandings before venturing into an analysis of popularly political Black artist.

3 Methodology

To investigate the relationship between modern Black art and politics, I've chosen five (5) specific artists whose renowned works and takes on politics, I utilize as case studies. These artists are:

- Beyoncé
- Kanye West
- Lorna Goodison
- Jordan Peele
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche

4 The Superpublic

This research heavily leans into Richard Iton's theory on Black art and politics in *In Search of the Black Fantastic*. Iton argues that for much of their history, African Americans created Black art as a separate public sphere where they practiced their own form of civic engagement outside of the political spaces that excluded them. This sowed the seeds for the 'superpublic' which we live in today, a ubiquitous post-civil rights video-age technology that multiplies Black media representations in American society. This new site of Black production consists of live speeches and mass campaigns, but also music videos and pro-Black radio stations and television. Iton's Black fantastic is crucial for comprehending how history, politic, and racialization intersect to re-frame and motivate Black civic engagement.

5 Beyoncé

More recently in her career, Beyoncé has certified herself as a politically charged artist who consistently addresses those systemic issues which affect her and the women like her in her artform and performance. However, many activists have pointed out Beyoncé's convenient political shapeshifting to discuss whichever discourse is the most prominent in the media and social consciousness of Americans. Intentions aside, the effects are noteworthy, consistently stirring conversation and platforming marginalized voices to educate, upset, and engage. Perhaps we can understand Beyoncé's political evolution as inevitable. Her race has shaped her reality and as she matures, so do her artistic concerns.

6 Kanye West

Since the inception of his career, Kanye West has never shied away from political discourse. He has openly supported Donald Trump, said George W. Bush doesn't care about Black people, and even tried running for President of the United States in the 2020 elections. Although West's politics are prone to dangerously shift and change, he opens up a conversation about how Black people navigate the world at constant odds with who political power rests with and what they are capable and willing to do with that power. More accurately he sheds light on how artists can also be politicians today and fans may double as party people.



Courtesy of Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/randalllane/2020/07/08/kanye-west-says-hes-done-with-trump-opens-up-about-white-house-bid-damaging-biden-and-everything-in-between/?sh=952d9b247aab>



Courtesy of The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/nov/14/chimamanda-ngozi-adiche-america-under-trump-felt-like-a-personal-loss>



Courtesy of NYTimes, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/22/sunday-review/2016-year-in-pictures.html?_r=0&mtref=www.pinterest.ca&gwh=4FFE1745B139BFE2CD19F8C6FB17B427&gwt=pay&asstType=PAYWALL

7 Lorna Goodison

Lorna Goodison does not fight political battles in the arenas set up by her oppressors. Rather, she discredits traditional forms of politics by suggesting that justice for people like her and her ancestors may never be found in those systems. To Goodison, the importance of involving her politics with her art is not necessarily to merge the two or draw attention to herself as a political player, but rather she criticizes – uses her art as a means by which readers can be led to interrogate traditional political powers and means of hegemony for themselves.

8 Jordan Peele

In "Get Out", Jordan Peele recalls America's history with eugenics and slavery as both integral historical contexts to the film's discussion of race. For Peele, the horror of the movie is not wholly paranormal. The film takes real-life horrific instances of Black bodies' significance but that verisimilitude of Black bodies being at the disposal of white exploitation which is critical in understanding the film's discourse, often went over the heads of white audiences. Peele's "Nope" also discusses at length Iton's superpublic. Firstly, Peele demonstrates the superpublic is filtered through modern digital technologies which increasingly distorts reality for money, entertainment, and personal agendas. Secondly, even if authentic, in today's digital age it is nigh impossible for concerns displayed on screens to be critically and seriously viewed.

9 Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche

Adiche identifies current digital storytelling as a display of how the open access internet permits a degree of agency for Black immigrants and the Black diaspora through unique community building and knowledge sharing, a contrasting view to Peele. Adiche's novel, *Americanah*, centers on racial and diasporic politics representing Black immigrant communities revising public discourse on intersections of race, culture, and nationality, effectively expanding conceptions of Blackness in America (Duce 250). Whereas more popular and mainstream media platforms have become saturated with businesses, companies, and fast trends, the way Adiche presents blogging as dialogic digital literature enables her protagonist to reclaim her digital footprint and speak to complex social issues. Moreover, Adiche herself has used her platform as a novelist to consistent argue for/against politics including feminism and racism.

10 Conclusion

Despite geography, concern, and genre, Black artmaking sees politics consistently. The Black artistic tradition is to be entangled with politics of resistance. In today's heavily charged political age with an emphasis on superpublic participation and production, the Black artist is granted the opportunity to engage with discourse on one's own terms, in one's own language to the exclusion or inclusion of traditional courses of civic engagement and political institutions.