

Beyoncé, Adele, and Intersectional Feminism

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Abstract

Beyoncé's ethos has changed in a way that reflects her culture, heritage, and roots. This article is about how Adele subliminally pointed out the role that Beyoncé has in speaking for the black female experience, and how the 2017 Grammy Awards showed a disregard for intersectionality.

She is one of the biggest stars in the world. She is wildly successful, adored, wealthy, and talented. Many people refer to her as “queen” or “Queen B” to be more specific. In recent years, this queen has changed her ethos from very shiny to awakening as a strong political force. Beyoncé’s previous tracks from the earlier stages of her career were empowering feminism but mostly vague. Her work did not feel as authentic and personal as the narrative and message she shares with us now. As she gets more personal, she gets more political (Bale). Beyoncé is now choosing to look back on her roots and specifically represent the pride of black female women. *Lemonade* takes feminism further by moving beyond the whiteness of post feminism and into much more current ideas of intersectional ‘fourth wave’ feminist discussion. She transcends the strict social boundaries established by historic

systems of patriarchy and racial hierarchy in the United States and puts black women at the center. Taking a closer look into *Lemonade* as a significant cultural reference is important if we are to understand its constructs of racial identity and gender (Williams), and why Beyoncé chose the proper moment she did (the peak of Black Lives Matter and a more progressive Obama America) to express her own black roots and feminist position so explicitly and honestly.

“*Lemonade*” is Beyoncé’s boldest artistic statement yet, with a mix of her raw talent and performance that made her a music superstar, but now given a new polished political edge unlike anything she’s done before.

While accepting the award for Album of The Year at the 2017 Grammy Awards, Adele did something to be commended for. As worthy as Adele is, she said that she couldn't accept the award

because she knew that Beyoncé and her album "Lemonade" were more worthy. She acted humbly, gratefully and heart fully in her speech. She spoke with great fervor and high praise of Beyoncé's impact and pouring of herself into this earth shaking work. In her speech, Adele said the following:

"... I can't possibly accept this award. And I'm very humbled and I'm very grateful and gracious. But my artist of my life is Beyoncé. And this album to me, the "Lemonade" album, is just so monumental.... And so well thought out, and so beautiful and soul baring and we all got to see another side to you that you don't always let us see. And we appreciate that. And all us artists here adore you. You are our light. And the way that you make me and my friends feel, the way you make my black friends feel, is empowering. And you make them stand up for themselves." (New York Times)

It was obvious from the tears in her eyes, that Beyoncé was touched. However, negative reactions immediately followed on social media in response to Adele's mention about how her "black friends" are particularly feeling empowered by "Lemonade." Her phraseology came off to some as Adele using her friends as evidence for her values (Cooper). On the other hand, numerous African Americans on social media felt the opposite and actually admired Adele's disposition and the way she voiced herself. As a woman who is white myself, I am not in a position to say that Adele's wording was not offensive. I will say that I think the controversy was a result of Adele's comments being taken out of context, and that all the hype and contention is a diversion from the real problem (Bowen). In fact, Adele's clarification was telling because it subliminally points to why Lemonade probably lost. By acknowledging

that Beyoncé's album means something specifically for Black people as opposed to other listeners, Adele successfully avoided the trap of colorblind feminism that disregards intersectionality. Lemonade was an album with a message for black people, especially black women. It would have been wrong to act like it wasn't, especially when it can be argued that the Recording Academy didn't acknowledge the project for that very reason: it was for black women. The real problem is that the worthier album did not win this award because it speaks from and for the black female relational experience. It is obvious that that the Grammy voters confined Lemonade as a success in black music but not all music. Some might argue that Beyoncé put in more work and heart and soul than any of the other nominated artists in that category. This is evident in the fact that Beyoncé made two albums (one audio and one visual). Not only was Beyoncé's newest album the most earth shaking album, but it was diverse in its genre of modern American music (rock, country, ballad and hip hop/R&B of course) (Bodenheimer). What Adele did was probably the most correct thing she could have done. Adele voiced the impact that "Lemonade" meant to her Black friends.

Though it might not sound quite right for a white person to refer to her black friends as evidence for something, she was not stereotyping or using them as a shield. She was spotlighting Beyoncé's motives for Lemonade as a way to empower black women. And what's more significant here is Adele's recognition that, as a white woman, her experience of "Lemonade" was different. This was very important because she acknowledged that she had a different experience of the music on "Lemonade" than her black companions. By doing this, she was discounting universalism in human experience and bringing light to its

falsehood. This does not mean that Beyoncé's only mission for this album is for black women to feel empowered, and that non-black women should not receive anything out of *Lemonade* (Bodenheimer). She wants all women to feel empowered, of course. Beyoncé is merely telling the story of what she sees as a black woman who shows pride in her heritage and culture. This is a story that black women can relate to more on an emotional and personal level.

Adele understood Beyoncé's motives that came out in her speech. Though Adele was profoundly impacted by Beyoncé and *Lemonade*, she knows the intersection this album was particularly calling to formation. Adele brought light to intersectional feminism. She brought light to the narrowness of white or classic feminism and how it encompasses the issues that only white women experience and does not conform the same way to women in the intersection. *Lemonade* could have been a universal feminist declaration, but no (Bodenheimer). Her main drive for the creation of this album was encouraging ordinary black women in finding their power.

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