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Pop culture experts deep dive into Beyoncé and Jay-Z's "APESH*T" music video to wrap up Black History Month

MAR 7 WRITTEN BY GUEST USER



Beyoncé/VEVO



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consisted of Edinboro faculty members Dr. Rhonda Matthews, Dr. Charlotte Wellman, and Professor Lisa Austin and Dr. Ginger Jacobson, associate director of behavioral research at the Northwestern University Kellogg School of Management.

Dr. Jacobson began by introducing herself briefly as a “card carrying Bey Hive member.” ‘Bey Hive’ is a play on words Beyoncé fans crafted, relating to the star’s nickname – Queen Bey. She co-hosted a Beyoncé centered podcast titled Squeezing Lemons. Aside from being a fan, Jacobson also taught, studied, and held focus groups with students on Beyoncé’s “Lemonade” album, released in 2016.

Professor Matthews teaches political science and sociology courses at EU. According to Matthews, she analyzes culture, race and politics from a sociological perspective. Matthews focused on four themes during Wednesday’s discussion: gender, politics, race and economic capital. Wellman is a professor in the art department. She teaches modern and contemporary art, with a focus on gender studies. She focused heavily on art history. The discussion was moderated by Austin.

Following introductions, the panelists screened the seven-minute-long music video. Jacobson began the discussion by providing some background information on the power couple.

“The evolution of both Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s work independently has become more political, visual and narrative over time.” She noted that Beyoncé’s work specifically has become increasingly rooted in female empowerment, self-love, community and Black unity.

After discussing the artists’ separate talents, Jacobson explained that much of their collaborative work, including “Endless Love,” the album to which the song “APESH*T” belongs, has noticeable vocal and visual representations of “romantic love.” “Endless Love” was released under the name the Carters representing the duo as one, rather than as individuals.

“They really sell us on their personal love story,” she said. There are many shots in the music video where the couple appears in unison, holding hands or embracing. This varies from more recent music, such as “Lemonade,” which details Beyoncé’s response to the heartbreak of Jay-Z cheating on her, along with Jay-Z’s “4:44” album, circa 2017, which doubles as his apology and response.



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“One of the things that ‘APESH*T’ does, is it very purposefully makes sure that we understand that Jay-Z is supporting her,” she said. “We get this shift in patriarchal notions.”

Jacobson also recognized the images that represent protest and the Black community mobilizing. Jacobson also said that she “couldn’t help but notice” the similarities in the music video to critical race theory. “I noticed that ‘APESH*T’ is of course a critique of white space and whites as arbiters, or gatekeepers of art and beauty.”

Beyoncé/VEVO

Matthews also acknowledged the similarities between “APES*HIT” and critical race theory. She described the music video as “overtly political.” We see political and protest messages in several scenes. One example features a line of young Black men standing in a diagonal formation with their fists pointing up to the sky, and another in which the same men kneel. The music video was released in 2018, two years after Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the national anthem before an NFL game, sparking controversy.

Wellman’s comments concerned the endless references to art history within the “APESH*T” video. Art institutions often lack representation of people of color. According to Wellman,



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Carrie Mae Weems, Museums

“The street is utterly vacant, [she is] standing on a crosswalk that is supposed to facilitate her movement across the street, up the stairs, and into this temple of culture. She realized, along with many other African Americans, that when she enters through the portal, she will see virtually no images of herself reflected there.”

She relayed Weems’ piece to the opening scene of the music video for Beyoncé’s hit song “Hold Up,” which begins with the artist standing atop a staircase leading into a museum.

“Beyoncé stands in this starting, brilliant yellow dress at the doorway of this temple. She’s violated the boundary thrown up by mainstream colonial white culture, her arms outspread, taking up space.”

Wellman further noted that most, if not all, images of the artwork shown in the music video feature a Black figure, such as the famous Portrait of Madelein by Marie-Guillemine Benoist.



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Beyoncé/VEVO

One clear example is Beyoncé standing in the center of a line of dancers in front of the enormous Coronation painting by Jacques Louis David. The 1807-era work of art exhibits the crowning of the powerful Napoleon. Wellman notes this piece is a “huge tableau, enormous – one of the masterpieces of Western art history” and Beyoncé simply uses it as a backdrop.

Last, Matthews discussed economic capital.

“They focus a lot on money and gaining money. They focus on it to attain institutional power,” she explained. “I’m torn on this because I don’t want it to be true, but I also know it is true.”

According to Matthews, the way to safety and freedom in the United States lies in access to capital and money, especially for minorities.

The fact that the Carters cleared out the Louvre for their video, just that alone, is a flex of capital and power. Fans have estimated that the total cost to use the Louvre would have been around \$18,000. While they could have chosen any other art institute, they made the powerful choice to rent out the Louvre, one of the most respected and renowned art museums in the world.



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while she has never visited the Louvre, her daughter has. She expressed that the building was swarmed with hundreds of people and crowded – so much so that she could not get a clear look at the famous Mona Lisa.

“These people had the capital – the power, to put all these Black images in the mainstream media and still have us talking about them years later.”

The panel concluded the powerful conversation with one question – what is next for the Carters?

“I do wonder if there is anything coming next. There is a lot of ownership, recreating what they already own,” Jacobson said. “How else do you exist in a capitalist system, but still subvert it?”

Julia Carden, Music Editor and Social Media Director | @EdinboroNow

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