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**Black Feminism Through the Lens of the Music of African-  
American Women Artists**

Diplomová práce

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### **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma "Black Feminism Through the Lens of the Music of African-American Women Artists" vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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# Introduction

The aim of this work is to show how black feminism demonstrates itself within the mainstream culture, specifically in popular music of the African-American female artists. The work contains an introduction to the black feminist philosophy based on the thoughts articulated by black feminist scholars as well as non-academic activists. The introduction is followed by an overview of evolution of African-American popular music to provide a further theoretical background for the second half of the work.

The second half then contains an analysis of chosen song lyrics from different decades of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. The purpose of the analysis is to provide an opportunity to compare different means of expression (mainly lyrical and visual) that the artists used in their work to address the issues relevant to black women. The choice of artists and songs does not aim to represent neither the “best” nor the “worst” examples of women advocating for the black feminist thoughts. Rather, it aims to provide a sample of women artists that played an important role in evolution of popular music and thanks to whom the basic thoughts of black feminism managed to spread and provide an empowering effect for women of color despite the limitations of the popular culture.

For the purpose of my work I have chosen six singers and performers who I would like to focus on in more detail: Aretha Franklin, Betty Davis, Janet Jackson, Queen Latifah, Beyoncé Knowles and Janelle Monáe. Each of them is a representative of a particular decade, in which black feminist thought evolved. My goal is to show how these women contributed, and in case of the contemporary performers still contribute, to the tradition of black feminism. The choice of artists is based on the trends popular in music in each decade as well as on the overall popularity the artists gained. All of them were working with various restrictions constructed by the patriarchal society in different time periods, yet they managed to resist the oppression and at the same time add to the black feminist consciousness.

The songs I have chosen as examples chart the changes in not only the attitude of the society towards the women of color, but of the individual artists towards themselves as well. By no means are the songs the only relevant examples of black feminist philosophy in popular music. The limits of this work, however, do not allow for more detailed treatment of its demonstration.

# 1. Black Feminism

In the first chapter of my work I will provide some fundamental points of black feminist thought. It contains a brief historical overview of the evolution of the movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as well as some definitions that I feel are necessary for better understanding of the theory, moreover, it also includes a short subchapter on stereotypical images of black women that are reinforced by the media.

Black feminist activism goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when black women began to formulate their concerns and issues relevant to their experiences (even though they did not call themselves feminists at that time). They laid the basis for slow but constant development of their thoughts that eventually led to a separate movement and establishment of a black feminist tradition. Black feminism addresses many kinds of oppressions that women were and still are subject to at once, which differentiates it from mainstream feminism. Since the mainstream feminism is often the focus of the works of scholars and there is a great number of works dealing with feminism in all of its thinkable forms I decided to turn my attention to the specificities of the feminist movement and thoughts that have been marginalized throughout the history.

It is important to note that compared to the number of articles and other sources dealing with mainstream feminism, black feminist thought remains a topic that is still largely uncovered by the scholars. This part of my work therefore draws mainly on writings by established black feminist writers, Patricia Hill Collins, Alice Walker, or Audre Lorde. I also decided to focus on black feminism as part of the popular culture, more precisely black feminism in popular music since I see music as a form of expression that is characteristic for African-Americans and that is available to people of all origins and backgrounds, therefore a useful tool to spread black feminist consciousness (or any other message).

## 1.1. The History of Black Feminism

The first formulation of black feminist thought can be traced back to the abolitionist movement that started to develop in 1830s. Among the first public women speakers who brought attention to the main concept of the later movement were Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth. The black feminist consciousness then continued to be built by groundbreaking works and/or political activism of African-American women such as Francis Ellen Harper, Ida B. Wells, or Mary Church Terrel. Thanks to these, and many more, in 1920 women gained their right to vote.

Separate black feminist movement, however, did not shape itself until late 1960s and 1970s when it broke away from the mainstream second wave feminist movement.<sup>1</sup> Before the Civil Rights movement fully took off, the USA was racially segregated by Jim Crow laws, African-Americans were struggling economically and faced oppression and discrimination in all spheres of their lives. First changes were signaled by the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education case in 1954, which is considered to be the beginning of the modern Civil Rights movement.<sup>2</sup> Another step towards desegregation of the society was the Rosa Parks case in 1955, which effectively started the bus boycott and later led to organization of sit-ins, use of “jail no bail” strategy and freedom rides.<sup>3</sup> Despite women being the trigger of the movement, they soon lost their central position in it and were overshadowed by black male leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. The fact, however, is that women were the driving force behind the movement.(footnote)

One of the reasons for the “invisibility” of women’s activism was the fact that while the movement was at its peak, leaders of the most prominent organizations fighting for equality were men and even though the actions and demonstrations that took place had a great number of women within its ranks, it was male leaders that spoke on behalf of these organizations and therefore were the ones in the spotlight of media. Among the most influential organizations was for instance the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) formed by King, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which was formed by Ella Baker. All of these organizations cooperated on number of projects.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “What’s in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond,” *Black Scholar* 26, no. 1 (1996): 9, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41068619>.

<sup>2</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 239, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2668091>.

<sup>3</sup> Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: HarperCollins e-books, 2008), 260–65.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey H Wallenfeldt, *The Black Experience in America: From Civil Rights to the Present* (New York: Britannica Educational Pub., in association with Rosen Educational Services, 2011), 34–35.

Even though women did not have many chances to come to the leading positions of these organizations, they were active members. One of the organizations that was most open to woman leadership was the SNCC, perhaps because Baker was among its founding members. However, the tension between white and black female members and constantly growing sexist attitude of black men within the organization eventually led to exclusion of all white members and later to formation of separate black women's movement.<sup>5</sup> The SNCC helped to desegregate schools and took part in a number of other protests and demonstrations, thus proving its crucial role in the movement. The activities of African-Americans in the civil rights movement culminated in 1963. This year also became the most violent year of the movement.<sup>6</sup>

1963 went down in history for the March on Washington where King gave his famous "I have a dream" speech, for which this day is remembered. The March was an event of great magnitude and large number of black women stood behind its organization. One of the main ones was Anna Arnold Hedgeman, who objected to the official list of speakers, because it did not include any black women despite their hard work. Her objections remained unheard. The only representatives of black women were singers (namely for instance gospel singer Mahalia Jackson or Maria Anderson.) The result of the March was a change promising passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned the discrimination in voting, public accommodations and employment.<sup>7</sup>

Several months after the March, the national attention was brought to Birmingham, Alabama where a bomb was thrown into a church, killing four African-American girls. This event shook not only the black communities but the rest of the American population as well. Moreover, registering of African-Americans for voting still met with a lot of difficulties. In 1965 King along with SNCC organized a march from Selma to Montgomery, which aimed to eliminate discriminatory qualifying tests for voters registrants. About 40,000 people attended the protest, but met with attacks from the police and thousands were arrested. The action, nevertheless, gained publicity and raised a new wave of national sympathy and support, which helped it to result in success for the demonstrators.<sup>8</sup>

At this time SNCC was going through an identity crisis, caused mainly by the growing racial tension within the organization, and black women realized more and more that their goals and needs are different from those of black men or white women.<sup>9</sup> Up to that point, the movement advocated mainly the non-violent policy since they held the view that violence begets violence. Perhaps the best-known advocate of this policy

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, "Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," 243.

<sup>6</sup> Wallenfeldt, *The Black Experience in America*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 285–86.

<sup>8</sup> Wallenfeldt, *The Black Experience in America*, 20–21.

<sup>9</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 299–300.



was Martin Luther King and his SCLC. The racial tension within the organizations brought more radical and more nationalistic attitude than ever before, nonetheless. This phase is known as the Black Power.<sup>10</sup> Male-dominated Black Power effectively put any women that openly identified as feminist into unenviable position as feminists were seen as a direct opposition to men. Nevertheless, in 1973 African-American women founded the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in New York, and Black Women Organized in Action (BWOA) in San Francisco and separated their movement from others. The NBFO's demands were social, political and economic equality for black women. The organization emerged from the gathering of black female lawyers, welfare rights workers, housewives etc. and amongst its members were for instance the writer Alice Walker or the politician Shirley Chisholm. The organization also held workshops focused on the issues of childcare, the church, welfare, education, lesbianism, work, domestic violence, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from these organizations, the early 1970s brought establishment of many black lesbian groups, which for the first time in history openly discussed homophobia in black communities and offered help to black women with different sexual orientation. Perhaps the best-known organization of this type was The Combahee River Collective.<sup>12</sup> The main significance of the Combahee River Collective however lays in articulation of the foundations and tenets of the black feminism in their manifesto. The document outlined the essential beliefs of the collective as well as the problems, issues and practices of black feminists. According to the authors the key to end their oppression is to center their feminism around their experiences as black women. Their intention to use their experiences as the central point is visible throughout the whole text. The authors note that "even our black women's style of talking/testifying in black language about what we have experienced has a resonance that is both cultural and political."<sup>13</sup> The own experience is thus at the roots of black feminism.

The collective also expresses their disappointment with the inability of white women to challenge racism not only in the country, but among themselves as well by stating that "we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black

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<sup>10</sup> Taylor, "Black Feminist Theory and Praxis," 243.

<sup>11</sup> Beverly Guy Sheftall, "Black Feminism in the United States," in *An African-American Reader: Essays on African-American History, Culture and Society*, ed. W.R. Scott and W.G. Shade (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2005), 304.

<sup>12</sup> Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 344.

<sup>13</sup> Zillah Eisenstein, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," 1978, <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html>.

history and culture.”<sup>14</sup> On account of the indifference of white feminists to the issues that women of color face on a daily basis, black women formed their own movement outside the mainstream. The document then acknowledges that this was not the only issue that motivated them to separate. The second main reason was the oppression, sexism and the negative reactions to feminism by their men. Both of these issues are present and further criticized even in the most recent form of feminism, which is hip-hop feminism.<sup>15</sup>

The statement of the collective was and still is influential and very important text in the history of black feminism as it acknowledges the complex nature of lives of women of color and provides the fundamental formulations of the concept of intersectionality.<sup>16</sup>

Alice Walker formulated closely related concept in her book from 1983, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, but instead of feminism she used the term “womanism.” The term was derived from the word womanish, which was often used by Afro-American mothers. To act womanish meant to act “in outrageous, courageous, and willful ways” that freed black women “from the conventions long limiting white women.”<sup>17</sup> For Walker womanism represents a way to strengthen and improve the relationship between African-American women and men while simultaneously fighting the number of oppressions they face. She further referred to the concept in an open letter “to her sisters” she published in 2008:

“It was to give us a tool to use, as feminist women of color, in times like these. These are the moments we can see clearly, and must honor devotedly, our singular path as women of color in the United States. We are not white women and this truth has been ground into us for centuries, often in brutal ways.”<sup>18</sup>

Walker again pointed out the difference between the experiences of black and white women, and thus further explained the motivation to break off from the mainstream feminism.

Womanism evolved along the black feminism and refers to more of less similar concepts. Women in general identify as womanists as well as black feminist and even

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<sup>14</sup> Eisenstein.

<sup>15</sup> Kimberly Springer, “Third Wave Black Feminism?,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27, no. 4 (June 2002): 1068, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/339636>.

<sup>16</sup> The term was coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in her essay from 1989 “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” where she used it to describe the ways in which different types of oppression are interconnected.

<sup>17</sup> Collins, “What’s in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond,” 10.

<sup>18</sup> Alice Walker, “Lest We Forget: An Open Letter to My Sisters Who Are Brave.,” *The Root*, accessed September 12, 2017, <http://www.theroot.com/lest-we-forget-an-open-letter-to-my-sisters-who-are-br-1790899692>.

scholars often use the terms interchangeably. Nevertheless, some women seem to identify more with womanism, because it is not only a term created by black woman for black women, but it is also flexible enough to include all the possible realities and experiences relevant to black women. For instance, definition of black feminism does not include in itself lesbianism, but Walker's womanism allows space for love between two women, whether it is sexual or not.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ula Y. Taylor, "Making Waves: The Theory and Practice of Black Feminism," *The Black Scholar* 28, no. 2 (June 1998): 26–27, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00064246.1998.11430912>.

## 1.2. Defining Black Feminism

In her article “What’s In A Name?” Patricia Hill Collins mentions feminist theorist and activist Pearl Cleage who defines feminism as “the belief that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities - intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual, and economic.”<sup>20</sup> Collins then continues to note that in broader sense, feminism is both ideology and political movement challenging the sexism and social relationships, in which women are subordinate to men.<sup>21</sup>

As was already mentioned, as a separate movement, black feminism came into existence in the 1970s and one of the major reasons for the separation from the second wave feminism was the fact that women of color were marginalized, their issues were not properly addressed and sometimes even deliberately silenced. According to Audre Lorde, mainstream feminism rarely took into account aspects such as race, sexual preference, class or age and the homogeneity implied by the word *sisterhood* actually does not exist.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, separation became an option offering a change.

Black feminisms differs from the standard academic theory, “it can take the form of poetry, music, essays, and the like.”<sup>23</sup> The fact that black feminist thought can project itself in so many different forms outside the academia (for instance in music and performing art) makes it a theory that is accessible to everyone regardless of origin, class, education level and/or age. From all of these forms Lorde points out poetry. In her view, poetry is the most economical and requires the least material or physical labor. She continues to say that “poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women.”<sup>24</sup> While she is certainly right when it comes to accessibility of poetry across classes, my personal opinion is that music is even better way to deal with any type of oppression. It is a form of expression deeply rooted in African-American culture and it was music and singing, which helped the black people to address their issues since the time of slavery.

Fundamental part of definition of the black feminism lays in a belief that oppressions cannot be treated in isolation. In other words - oppression, as well as power or privilege, always goes hand in hand with other factors and, more often than not, with a combinations of various factors such as race, gender, class or sexuality and cannot be

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<sup>20</sup> Collins, “What’s in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism, and Beyond,” 12.

<sup>21</sup> Collins, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1984), 116.

<sup>23</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference,” 16.

examined separately from one another. Thus, an individual with advantage in one section of social identity (such as race – being white) may experience a disadvantage in other (such as gender – being a woman). Black women and white women, therefore, do not share the same experience despite the fact that they are all women.<sup>25</sup> The base strategy of black feminism is then to resist the oppressions and fight all of them at the same time, since it is impossible to fight sexism that one experiences without addressing the racism that accompanies it and perhaps even reinforces it.<sup>26</sup>

In her book *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins points out that key component of the black feminist thought is the fact that in order to contribute to the theory one does not need to be an academic. Black feminism “involves searching for expression in alternative institutional locations and among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals.”<sup>27</sup> According to Collins, black feminist intellectual is defined by contribution to the theory rather than educational level. Therefore, it offers space for women of color of various backgrounds and professions, such as musicians and performers, to contribute to the empowerment of black women.

Empowerment is then another fundamental component of the theory. Collins states that self-definition and self-knowledge is the center of personal empowerment. “Teaching people to be self-reliant fosters more empowerment than teaching them how to follow.”<sup>28</sup> Empowerment, and by extension freedom, is a result of being able to define oneself rather than submit to a definition placed upon us by power structure. Creating and accepting the self-definition is according to Collins a step towards personal, and potentially group, liberation. Ability to define themselves can then contribute to the common goal of black feminists.

Additionally, she notes that “white-male-controlled social institutions led African American women to use music, literature, daily conversations, and everyday behavior as important locations for constructing a Black feminist consciousness.”<sup>29</sup> I.e. black women were pushed to the margins by the dominant white culture and in order to produce and share knowledge, as well as their self-definitions, they had to find a space outside the major institutions. Thus, their own experience and various forms of expressions, such as music, became their main source of black feminist consciousness.

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<sup>25</sup> Justin D. García, “Black Feminism,” *Salem Press Encyclopedia Research Starters*, 2016, EBSCOhost.

<sup>26</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Collins, 14.

<sup>28</sup> Collins, 219.

<sup>29</sup> Collins, 251–52.

### 1.3. Hip Hop Feminism vs. Third Wave Feminism

Third wave feminism is a term referring to a new generation of feminists that did not take active part in the struggles of 1960s and 1970s, but are now able to benefit from the wins of previous generations. It is therefore a name for new direction, in which feminism is heading since 1990s. It came to be known and used in 1992 when Rebecca Walker founded the Third Wave Foundation, activist foundation whose purpose is to support and strengthen young activists and their allies who work for gender, racial, social, and economic justice.<sup>30</sup> One of its main goals is to redefine the current implications of the term feminism and the inclusion of marginalized groups of women. Therefore, it can be seen as a reaction to the failures of the second wave feminists.

Simultaneously, hip-hop turned out to be a great instrument to promote change within gender and racial intersections. Thus, a new domain of black feminist tradition came to existence – hip-hop feminism. In “The Stage Hip-Hop Feminism Built” by Durham, Cooper, and Morris they define hi-hop feminism as:

“Generationally specific articulation of feminist consciousness, epistemology, and politics rooted in the pioneering work of multiple generations of black feminists based in the United States and elsewhere in the diaspora but focused on questions and issues that grow out of the aesthetic and political prerogatives of hip hop culture.”<sup>31</sup>

Hip-hop feminism is the most recent wave of the black feminist theory. It carries the name of the music genre since hip-hop as an art form marks a new cultural generation. Hip-hop feminism can be distinguished from the third wave feminism in that hip-hop feminism advocates for living with contradictions. That means that it accepts the fact that some contemporary artists and their music can be both empowering and focused on breaking the common stereotypes surrounding women and at the same time reinforce the patriarchal objectives.<sup>32</sup> In general, hip-hop feminists acknowledge that there are problematic elements in popular culture that artists work with while spreading the empowering message or fighting the patriarchal structure of the society. Accepting life with contradictions is the root of hip-hop feminism since it provides a way to deal with

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<sup>30</sup> Springer, “Third Wave Black Feminism?,” 1063.

<sup>31</sup> Aisha Durham, Brittney C. Cooper, and Susana M. Morris, “The Stage Hip-Hop Feminism Built: A New Directions Essay,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 3 (Spring 2013): 722, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/668843>.

<sup>32</sup> Durham, Cooper, and Morris, 723.

the problematic aspects of not only hip-hop culture, but popular culture in all of its forms, such as music, TV and even politics.

One of the biggest issues hip-hop feminism has to work with is the way women performers and artists express their sexuality. On one hand, many feminists welcome the idea of women being able to freely work with their sexuality and express it in any way they feel comfortable with, on the other, the concept of what is considered to be sexy was created by the patriarchal society and is still consumed by it. Therefore, embracing one's sexuality as a way of feminist empowerment is not possible without catering to the patriarchy at the same time. This is an aspect present in the works of many contemporary artists in the music industry and accepting it is still a big problem for many. It also creates debates whether artists such as Beyoncé or Nicky Minaj really are feminists.

As opposed to the third wave-feminists, Hip-hop feminists do not see themselves as a new wave of black feminists. Rather, they want to continue and add to the legacy of black feminism and to the work done by previous generations of women and scholars. Moreover, by continuing the tradition that had to find its own space for its evolution, hip-hop feminists are making the feminist thought accessible to not only scholarly environment. Kimberly Springer for instance rejects the metaphor of wave altogether.

When talking about feminism, the term “wave” is often used to refer to the two main periods in evolution of feminist thought. It is, however, a bit questionable whether the metaphor of “wave” is appropriate, especially in reference to black feminist thought. The ongoing debate among scholars regarding the appropriateness of the metaphor only proves the problematic nature of the term. Linda Nicholson, for instance, argues that the metaphor of “wave” has outlived its usefulness. In her view, in late 1960s, “it was very useful for feminists to describe their movement as the “second wave” of feminism, since it implied that women's movements of the period have their own past and are not just “historical aberrations.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, describing these periods as “waves” also suggests, “the idea that gender activism in the history of the United States has been for the most part unified around one set of ideas, and that set of ideas can be called

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<sup>33</sup> Linda Nicholson, “Feminism in ‘Waves’: Useful Metaphor or Not?,” *New Politics* XII-4, no. 48 (Winter 2010), <http://newpol.org/content/feminismwavesusefulmetaphorornot>.

feminism.”<sup>34</sup> Kimberly Springer also rejects the term and notes that “the wave model perpetuates the exclusion of women of color from women’s movement history and feminist theorizing.”<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the model is so deeply embedded in the historical examination of women’s movement that it remains useful for internal critique. Women of color, however, should not be excluded from the term.<sup>36</sup>

The inability of mainstream feminism to show solidarity with marginalized groups of women caused the historical separation of the movements. For black women one of the major problems, which added to their marginalization, lays in the stereotypical images that surround them and that are still reinforced by the media.

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<sup>34</sup> Nicholson.

<sup>35</sup> Springer, “Third Wave Black Feminism?,” 1063.

<sup>36</sup> Springer, 1064.



## 1.4. Stereotypes Surrounding Black Womanhood

Stereotypical images of black women were always a major issue for black women whether they identified as feminist or not. Thus, continuators of black feminist tradition are attempting to challenge the representation of black women and their bodies in popular culture. The task is, however, a difficult one since there is a stereotypical image for almost every aspect of black womanhood. Collins in her *Black Feminist Thought* identified few that are more common than others. Among these are: the Jezebel, the Mammy, the Sapphire (or the angry black woman), and the Matriarch (or the Superwoman.)

The Jezebel image of black women embodies a woman that is animalistic, wild and hypersexual.<sup>37</sup> This image is often used to legitimize rape and sexual assaults, since it presents black women as if they always want and are always ready for sex. “Ironically, Jezebel’s excessive sexual appetite masculinizes her because she desires sex just as a man does.”<sup>38</sup> This stereotype, or some of its contemporary variations such as hoochie mama or the freak, is the one that appears the most often. This label makes the black woman sexuality seem as deviant and generally contravenes the white ideal. To fight the stereotype and defy this label black women adopted the so-called respectability policy. The notion of respectability originated in the Black women’s club movement and its main goal is to portray black women with proper respect. In today’s hip-hop culture, this includes freedom to express their sexuality without being bound by the expectations of the society. The result is the production of the un-lady-like diva – woman demanding to be respected as a lady and at the same time asserting sexual autonomy.<sup>39</sup> Black women’s sexuality and its presentation in various forms of popular culture is a complex issue full of contradictions and hip-hop feminists seek the way to address these issues and fight for institutional change.

The Mammy on the other hand refers to an asexual, obedient, safe, and subordinate black woman, who puts the needs of others before her own. In this image women are not seen as attractive or feminine in any way, in fact they are barely recognized as women.<sup>40</sup>

The Sapphire stereotype represents a black woman that is unintelligent, dominating, loud and behaving in an offensive way. Nowadays, Sapphire is often

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<sup>37</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 27–30.

<sup>38</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 83.

<sup>39</sup> Aisha Durham, “‘Check On It’: Beyoncé, Southern Booty, and Black Femininities in Music Video,” *Feminist Media Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 2012): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2011.558346>.

<sup>40</sup> Collins, *Black Sexual Politics*, 57.

referred to simply as angry black woman. This image limits black women for instance in an academic environment, where voicing their opinions can get them the label of troublemakers and thus can lead to self-silencing.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the Matriarch (or the Superwoman) represents image similar to the Mammy. But while Mammies were the good black mothers, the Matriarchs were the bad ones. “The matriarch represented a failed mammy, a negative stigma to be applied to African-American women who dared reject the image of the submissive, hardworking servant.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the Matriarch is seen as some sort of superwoman that is capable of enduring any type of abuse (mainly physical and emotional). This image is rooted in slavery, and assumes that African-American women cannot be hurt in any way, and if they are attacked they can “handle it” without any help, because of their super-human strength.<sup>43</sup>

These stereotypical images are historically rooted in the society, in some cases they get a new name, but they do not disappear. However, feminism today has to acknowledge the changes of that society and the complexities of the digital age, the new generation of millennials and the environment they grow up in. Hip-hop seems to be a great tool to do so since it became and continues to be a voice of this new generation. “Hip hop culture reaches far more women than the relatively small number of women of color who manage to find women’s studies classrooms within colleges and universities.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, hip-hop has a potential to reach women and men who would not otherwise get a chance to encounter the black feminist thought and it also provides a way to help and promote change on a larger scale.

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<sup>41</sup> Rasul A. Mowatt, Bryana H. French, and Dominique A. Malebranche, “Black/Female/Body Hypervisibility and Invisibility A Black Feminist Augmentation of Feminist Leisure Research,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 45, no. 5 (2013): 652, [http://www.academia.edu/10346088/Black\\_Female\\_Body\\_Hypervisibility\\_and\\_Invisibility\\_A\\_Black\\_Feminist\\_Augmentation\\_of\\_Feminist\\_Leisure\\_Research](http://www.academia.edu/10346088/Black_Female_Body_Hypervisibility_and_Invisibility_A_Black_Feminist_Augmentation_of_Feminist_Leisure_Research).

<sup>42</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 75.

<sup>43</sup> Taylor, “Making Waves,” 26.

<sup>44</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 191.

## **2. Evolution of African-American Popular Music and Women Artists**

The history of African-American music is very rich and could be described on hundreds of pages and it still would not be enough. It provides soundtrack to the major themes of the black past and without its rhythms and innovations today's music would not sound the way it does. The aim of this chapter is to provide a general context for the next parts of my work and summarize the evolution of popular music of African-Americans. My goal is to offer at least a short overview of the genres that black music gave the world, and introduce the most important people who helped to shape the popular music and gave it the form and sound we know today.

First part of this chapter will sum up the earliest stages of African-American music starting with spirituals, through ragtime and blues, up to the worldwide infatuation by jazz whose heyday got to an end with the beginning of the WWII. Second part will pay closer attention to the period of the Civil Rights movement and the music that provided the soundtrack for this revolutionary era. Third, and the last part, of this chapter will talk about the music of the current generation of African-Americans that is rap and hip-hop.

Since my work is focused on black women and their feminist movement, in my overview I will pay closer attention to black women artists and their place in the history of black music rather than men. That, of course, does not mean contributions of male musicians will not be accounted for. The chapter will, however, give more space to the most talented and influential black, female artists and summarize their contributions to the evolution of music. The music industry was, like majority of other aspects of everyday life, male-dominated. Nevertheless, women again played an important part in its development. Many of these women were not only great performers, but were also social and political activists helping black feminists to fight for their cause.

## 2.1. From Spirituals to Jazz

African-Americans and their music are undoubtedly important part of the history of the USA. Music was and still is the root of African-American culture and identity. Since 1600s, when the first slave ship arrived to the new continent, black musicians combined their African heritage and rhythms with the musical sources they met in America and gradually created a number of genres that fascinated American and European people of all ages and backgrounds. Constant mixing and exchange of different musical influences and styles created a distinctively American musical culture that eventually weakened racial barriers and managed to survive even though it developed in an environment hostile towards African-Americans.<sup>45</sup>

Slaves transported to the North America brought with them a rich musical heritage, which they maintained even despite the physical and emotional torment. In fact, music was the only way of expression and communication they could use, as well as a way to relieve the despair of everyday reality. Typical African patterns such as call-and-response or ring shouts gave base to the work songs and spirituals, which became the root of African-American popular music, since they gained popularity even among white people (mainly slave owners). Many slave owners also saw these songs as a proof of general satisfaction of slaves – as long as they sang they were not plotting a revolt. However, the songs were rather a desperate call for freedom and an attempt to escape the horrid reality of their lives. African melodies were of religious character, but since colonizers saw African religions as pagan they started the process of Christianization, also called The Awakening, which led to African-Americans meeting and slowly adopting the ballads and hymns of European origin to their culture. This became even more the case since the establishment of the first African-American churches. Their spirituals thus changed the musical character, but retained the desperate message. As slaves in general lacked privacy, the lyrics of work songs and spirituals often conveyed coded mockery of white people (especially their masters), complaints or anxieties. One of the common topics was for instance the biblical character Moses.<sup>46</sup>

Since, slaves in the South were not allowed to use many instruments they revived one of distinctively African musical traits. They began to use their bodies as instruments to keep and enhance the rhythm of their songs. The use and importance of body while making music became an essential part of black musical tradition and

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<sup>45</sup> Michael H. Burchett, “History of African American Music,” *Salem Press EncyclopediaResearch Starters*, 2017, EBSCOhost.

<sup>46</sup> Burton W. Peretti, *Lift Every Voice: The History of African American Music*, The African American History Series (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 7–26.

played an important role during religious ceremonies such as weddings or funerals. The lack of instruments also led to development of tradition of a capella vocal music.<sup>47</sup>

Spirituals were the first songs that entered mainstream awareness thanks to traveling choirs such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the choir made up of nine former slaves that managed to raise \$150,000 to found Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.<sup>48</sup> Another way to enter the commercial music sphere was the minstrels. These originated as a parody and exaggeration of behavior of black people and were performed by whites who were blackening their faces with burnt cork. The minstrel shows were popular mostly before the Civil War, especially in Northern cities, but they soon spread to the South as well. The Southern shows gradually became the domain of black performers who in this way exposed white audiences to African-American music. Since the performance was based on ridicule of African-Americans, black performers of minstrelsy had to mock their own culture. Nevertheless, for many it was a way of improving their economic situation and gaining popularity. Perhaps the best-known minstrel group of black performers was Callender's Georgia Minstrels. Later the shows acquired their own venues called concert saloons, which the minstrel groups toured. These shows then started to be called vaudevilles. The popularity of these declined in the years following the Civil War when the religious nature of spirituals took over as part of the celebration of newly acquired freedom.<sup>49</sup>

Minstrelsy and vaudeville played a significant role in further evolution of popular music. Apart from helping to spread the African-American sound among the white majority, as secular music these genres helped African-Americans to stop associating music only with religion and church. Even though that by the turn of the century minstrelsy and vaudeville lost some of its popularity, they did not disappear. Rather they transformed to more lively, energetic and less formal instrumental music, which came to be known as ragtime.<sup>50</sup>

Ragtime is a mixture of different ethnic folk styles and is characterized by multi-metric patterns over a straight base, melodies based on gapped scales and the use of syncopation. The early ragtime combined modified Latin rhythms with European march cadence. The greatest impact on public that started the "worldwide ragtime craze" had Scott Joplin when he published his "Maple Leaf Rag" in 1899.<sup>51</sup> White publishers and composers however quickly started to exploit African-American musicians for

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<sup>47</sup> Burchett, "History of African American Music."

<sup>48</sup> Burchett.

<sup>49</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 33–47.

<sup>50</sup> Peretti, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 71.

commercial gain.<sup>52</sup> The rise of ragtime was also accompanied by the change in the society that was gradually moving away from the relatively rigid behavior and morals of Victorian age towards more relaxed attitude. Moreover, ragtime helped African-Americans to gain more respect of some white people.<sup>53</sup>

Many other musical styles and genres, such as boogie-woogie, barbershop or early version of hillbilly music, developed alongside ragtime. However, the genre that enjoyed the biggest popularity, especially around 1920s, was blues. Blues was to a certain extent a secular counterpart of spirituals. It started to develop around the turn of the century and for African-Americans it provided one way of dealing with the Jim Crow laws, discrimination and other types of oppression. Blues songs had typically AAB form, which was a result of influence of European ballads and dance melodies. Its lyrics were almost exclusively subjective and expressed emotional states or feelings of the performer, or they described a complicated relationship between man and woman, and happy or sad moments and events of one's life. Even though church music was closely connected to secular music, since these two often influenced one another, church looked at blues with displeasure and labeled it "the devil's music." Nevertheless, thanks to organizations such as Theatre Owners Booking Agency (TOBA), which sent black musicians on tours, the genre quickly gained commercial success.<sup>54</sup>

The main attractions on these tours were black women singers who soon overshadowed their male counterpart. One of the singers that were touring with TOBA performers was Gertrude "Ma" Rainey. Her extraordinary talent made her one of the best-known blues singers in the 1920s. Moreover, "Ma" Rainey was advocating for equal pay and improvement of the treatment of the performers and was known for her political activism. Along with her protégé Bessie Smith, they developed a unique style of blues that differed from the blues performed by men and changed the course of the genre. Male performers often focused on themes of sexual relationships, work troubles and general dissatisfaction. Women's blues put much stronger emphasis on love and sexuality. Thanks to Rainey, Smith, and others blues evolved into expression of black women's concerns such as battles between men and women, violence, or other physical and emotional torment. They also preached about sexual love, and challenged the notion that woman's "place" is in the domestic sphere. The often sexual character of the lyrics, however, caused that white listeners considered it morally degraded music.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Burchett, "History of African American Music."

<sup>53</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 58.

<sup>54</sup> Peretti, 67–73.

<sup>55</sup> Angela Davis, "I Used To Be Your Sweet Mama," in *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Random House, 1999), 9–11, [http://kristiner.com/assets/classes/B27/readings/davis\\_usedtobe.pdf](http://kristiner.com/assets/classes/B27/readings/davis_usedtobe.pdf); Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 73–77.

Another genre that evolved from constantly more complex and virtuosic ragtime was jazz. The rise of jazz is connected to the period of Harlem Renaissance and the years leading to the WWII. The greatest concentration of jazz musicians was in New Orleans, which is also considered to be the cradle of the genre, and despite the fact that African-Americans and other minorities kept being discriminated against the streets of the city went through a musical revolution.<sup>56</sup> The rapid tempo, instrumental virtuosity and the element of “swing” became symbols of new and modern American culture. Jazz recordings and touring black musicians contributed to the growing white fascination with African-American culture, but to some, the fame of these jazzmen also represented danger to the racial hierarchy. Thus, for instance hotels were refusing to accommodate black musicians and performers (no matter how famous), restaurants were refusing to serve them food, and they had to enter the venues where they performed through the back door. One of the most famous jazz musicians, Louis Armstrong, often publicly commented on social situation of African-Americans, terrible living conditions, and other injustices. Moreover, Armstrong’s music managed to build a bridge between cultures. He caught attention of middle-class white people and thus made jazz more respectable. Among others who criticized the institutionalized racism and supported civil rights was also for example Duke Ellington who played a major part in the development of the orchestral jazz that came to be known as big band music and became extremely popular in the 1930s.<sup>57</sup> In general, though, jazz musicians were not notably involved in political activism in spite of being concerned about the racial conditions. The situation made a great number of African-Americans turn to the thoughts of communism and socialism. Rather than the ideology, they were drawn by the party’s willingness to give African-Americans leadership space.<sup>58</sup>

The celebrated African-American vocalist, Billie Holiday, recorded song called “Strange Fruit” in 1939, which deeply touched not only the black musicians. The song was written by Abel Meeropol originally as a poem describing a picture depicting double lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith from 1930. However, it did not receive wider attention until Holiday gave it her voice. It was first performed in Café Society in New York. This left-wing nightclub provided place where people of different classes and even races could meet and socialize. “Strange Fruit” came to be a ritual performance and one of the best-known songs by Holiday. It was an emotional testimony and complaint about the cruelty of lynching in the South. In three verses, she sings about the trees in the South from which bodies hang like “strange fruit”. Holiday’s

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<sup>56</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 79–84.

<sup>57</sup> Colin Larkin, *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music*. (London: Music Sales, 2011), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4886696>.

<sup>58</sup> Burchett, “History of African American Music”; Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 84–99.

extraordinary and strong voice, her diction and the tone of desperation make the song a valuable reminder of the violence done to black men and women.<sup>59</sup>

Majority of Holiday's songs however dealt with love, sex, relationships between men and women, and the patriarchal society. One of such songs is for instance "You Let me Down". The song describes a relationship dominated by a man and the theme of betrayal and distrust. Holiday sings about supposedly her man and implies male's materialistic view of women – issue falling under female stereotypes.

You told me that I was like an angel  
Told me I was fit to wear a crown  
...  
You told me that I'd be wearing diamonds  
I would have the smartest car in town<sup>60</sup>

She continues to express women's naivety as well as anger, tension and resentment both to her and the man.

I was even looking for a cottage  
I was measured for a wedding gown  
That's how I got cynical  
You put me on a pinnacle  
And then you let me down, let me down  
How you let me down<sup>61</sup>

Even though it may seem there is not a feminist message behind the song, listening to the recording and hearing the amount of emotion and the tone of Holiday's voice in combination with a moderately slow paced tempo and somehow upbeat character of the music moves it to a different level and proves her discontent with the social construct that surrounds women's role in the society.

Improvisational character of jazz led to emergence of bebop in 1940s. The combination of jazz and blues then effectively created music that today we accept as rock.<sup>62</sup> Both genres played an important role in the development of church music as well.

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<sup>59</sup> John M. Carvalho, "Strange Fruit': Music between Violence and Death," *Journal Of Aesthetics & Art Criticism* 71, no. 1 (2013): 111–13, EBSCOhost; Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 94.

<sup>60</sup> Billie Holiday, *You Let Me Down* (New York: Brunswick Records, 1935), <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/billieholiday/youletmedown.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Holiday.

<sup>62</sup> Larkin, *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music*.



## 2.2. Music of the Civil Rights Era

African-Americans built a strong base of popular music, it was, however, church music that first started to be associated with the time after the WWII and that helped to bring black people together to fight for their rights and further eliminated the racial discrimination. In the atmosphere of bus boycotts, sit-ins, social and political negotiations and other organized actions led by SCLC, SNCC and other organizations church music became effective protest music that embodied concern, fellowship and righteousness.

African-American churches initially built their tradition on slave songs in the form of spirituals. During the time of the Great Depression when jazz and blues thrived, not even churches could resist their enormous popularity and influence. Thus, they started to be incorporated into music of church ceremonies with the lyrics from Methodist hymns. As a result of this mixing, gospel appeared as a new genre of church music. Main contribution in the development of gospel belongs to Thomas A. Dorsey. As a young man he started his career by learning to play blues and later left to Chicago to pursue his career. There he performed in taverns and cabarets and met with number of famous performers, among whom were for instance Gertrude “Ma” Rainey or Bessie Smith. Nevertheless, he soon started to feel unfulfilled. For Dorsey, blues was missing the ability to cure broken heart in a way church music can. On that account he returned to the South and devoted the rest of his career to church music. Dorsey’s return was a turning point in the development of gospel. Hymns he wrote were largely influenced by his blues upbringing and soon began to spread through the South. He worked as a choir director and managed to build a circle of gospel stars around him.<sup>63</sup>

The majority of the leading gospel singers were women, who dominated church music since the reconstruction era. Dorsey and his singers started to tour the country and helped gospel to not only spread further, but to enter the popular music scene as well. Thanks to the tours he managed to keep a number of female singers that would otherwise probably move to jazz or blues in the commercial sphere. Dorsey, however, produced a few commercial stars as well.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe was one of them. She sang with a jazz band and developed her own style based on Dorsey’s music. She effectively managed to create a cross over between jazz and gospel and became one of the first ones to produce a mix of church and popular music with commercial success. Apart from her singing she also riveted her audiences with her exceptional guitar skills. One of the greatest names in gospel, Mahalia Jackson, also started with Dorsey’s gospel group. Jackson was born in 1912 in

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<sup>63</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 127–32; Jennifer C. Lena, *Banding Together: How Communities Create Genres in Popular Music* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2012), 104–5.

New Orleans in the same neighborhood as Louis Armstrong and her musical education came from local Baptist and Pentecostal churches. Her idol was Bessie Smith, but unlike Smith Jackson never left church music. She sang with Dorsey in Chicago and later in New York. She too mixed elements of gospel and blues and thus enjoyed popularity even with the non-church goers. By the 1950s Mahalia was one of the best selling recording artists and performers, often appeared on TV and had her own radio program. Her popularity, however, soon started to irritate the black community who blamed her of forgetting her poor and black roots. To prove them wrong she started to be politically active and took part in Civil Rights activism (at the March on Washington of 1963 she sang “How I Got Over” and “I’ve Been Abused and I’ve Been Scorned”) and lobbied for anti-lynching legislation. In 1968, she sang, “Take My Hand, Precious Lord” at King’s funeral.

Male gospel singers were very different from the female ones. Men styled themselves to look like preachers or deacons – formal suits and carefully groomed hair – and their performances had greater spiritual character than that of their women counterparts. Both men and women in gospel music had enormous influence on black communities as it promoted the hope and believe for better future and most importantly for freedom. Gospel is now the root of black identity and its influence was soon visible in the secular and popular music as well.<sup>64</sup>

A secular genre emerged within the gospel tradition in the 1950s. Up until that time recordings by black artists were sold and marketed as “race” music. A *Billboard* magazine journalist, Jerry Wexler, introduced the term “Rhythm & Blues” in 1949 and it soon turned from a new marketing label for black recordings to a genre of it’s own. R&B, as it came to be known, denoted “an ensemble music, consisting of a vocal unit (solo or group), a rhythm unit (electric guitar and/or string bass, piano, drums), and a supplementary unit (generally the saxophone and sometimes other winds” and it did not include jazz or blues.<sup>65</sup> Electrification of the guitar was perhaps the most important change in the new music that was being produced in the 1950s since it allowed musicians to not only be heard by much larger audiences, but also to experiment with new type of sound. Electric guitar was a symbol of modernization of society in general.<sup>66</sup>

One of the prominent R&B stars of 1950s was for instance Big Maybelle, or Ruth Brown. She introduced a new and modern sound that differentiated her from the stars such as Bessie Smith, had the delivery style comparable to Billie Holiday and at the same time looked forward to style of Diana Ross.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 132–36.

<sup>65</sup> Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 176.

<sup>66</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 138.

<sup>67</sup> Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 177.

Electric guitar and the success of gospel also encouraged the emergence of rock'n'roll. Rock'n'roll reached the popularity peak with the songs of Chuck Berry or Little Richard, but probably the best selling rock'n'roll artists of all time was, Elvis Presley. The genre was a mixture of gospel, jazz, ragtime, and partially classical music as well. And even though the best-selling artist was white, the roots of the genre are African-American. Chuck Berry is often called "the creator of Rock'n'Roll" or "the epitome of Rock'n'Roll". Songs such as "Roll Over Beethoven", "Johnny B. Goode", or "Reelin' and Rocking" became the anthems of the youth of the 1950s that represented the newfound sexual freedom, and the rejection of many morals and attitudes of previous generations. All this was brought one step further by Little Richard whose "Long Tall Sally" or "Tutti Frutti" had great impact on the youth of the day. Little Richard was perhaps, in a way, even more important than Elvis or Berry. His performances were the first ones with racially integrated audiences and thus he can be seen as a catalyst of the transformation of the music industry. Both R&B and rock'n'roll however lost its prominence by the end of the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> In the early 1960s rock'n'roll developed into rock music with which mainly Jimi Hendrix came to be associated.

R&B and rock'n'roll were to a certain extent influenced by gospel, but represented secular music that was supposed to contribute to the promise of a new and good life for everyone after the WWII. Admittedly, the situation of African-Americans was slightly better than before the war, which is reflected in the new music of the time, but they were still at the bottom of the social ladder and belonged to the poorest classes. The prevailing discrimination was apparent in the music industry by emergence of so called "white cover" recordings. "White cover" recordings were R&B or rock'n'roll recordings by Caucasian musicians. These were often much simpler than the originals, but because they were "white" they sold better and made more money. The exploitations of African-American culture led many black people to question the value of commercial success in the music industry that is segregated and discriminates and to focus on gospel instead. The growing popularity of gospel, however, resulted in inevitable fusion with popular music again and brought soul to existence.<sup>69</sup>

Pioneer of the genre was Ray Charles who exploited gospel and mixed it with R&B sound, thus created fusion of religious and commercial music. Hits such as "I got a Woman" started the transformation of gospel music, which now had its place in concert halls, cabarets and nightclubs and the soul singers were becoming celebrities. In the beginning of 1960s, Charles also opened the door for more frankness in popular music when he used church moans as unmistakable allusions to sexual ecstasy. Soul music illustrated the demands for freedom and liberation not only of black communities,

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<sup>68</sup> Floyd, 178–82; Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 138–40.

<sup>69</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 140–41.

but individuals as well. Many singers then followed Charles' lead. The church, however, was not in favor of this musical transformation and claimed that leaving gospel for commercial music equals leaving God. Sam Cooke, for instance decided to move from church music to commercial scene and was murdered soon after. The church used Cooke as a deterrent example of the fate that awaits those who switch musical fields.<sup>70</sup>

Another commercially successful performer of soul was James Brown who is also associated with the development of funk. His career rose along with the power of the Civil Rights movement and his music basically provided the typical representation of the male-dominated Black Power movement. Manifestation of the movement through the music is for instance his song "Say It Loud – I'm Black And I'm Proud" from 1963. Even though the spotlight was mainly on men, women performers helped to define the era of soul music as well.<sup>71</sup>

A pivotal woman of soul music and women's activism in the revolutionary 1960s was Aretha Franklin who in 1967 recorded "Respect", which is considered to be a feminist anthem today. Her music ranges from jazz, R&B, soul, and gospel to rock'n'roll and is a great example of women empowerment in the time when black feminism reached its peak. Another woman figure that was involved in the Civil Rights movement and represents the spirit of the period was Nina Simone. Simone received a classical music education, which influenced her music like no other performer. She saw the racial oppression as a very personal issue and her music reflected both the struggle for equality of the whole race and the oppression of black women.

During the Civil Rights era music was an important medium for African-Americans that united them in their struggles. Even King used music from his sermons to spread important information among communities and later used the so called "freedom songs" to promote non-violent form of protests. African-American organizations such as SNCC used music to spread the news about their campaigns, organize people for protests or to raise money. "Freedom songs" of 1960s and 1970s drew on original slave songs and the gospel tradition; in fact the song "We Shall Overcome" became the anthem of the movement.

Moreover, 1960s saw rise of black owned recording companies. The most successful one was Berry Gordy's Motown Records that was established in Detroit in late 1950s. Motown became a literal star factory. Gordy's target audience were young listeners and he did everything in his power to appeal to them. He took part in every step of the recording and production process and created a number of celebrities among which were for instance Marvin Gay (whose album *What's Going On?* became the first

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<sup>70</sup> Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 203–4; Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 141.

<sup>71</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 142–43.

concept album reflecting on the events of the time), Steve Wonder and for a period of time even Jackson 5. His greatest success was a female trio from Detroit, The Supremes, and solo career of Diana Ross.<sup>72</sup>

The years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act brought a rapid decline of optimism among African Americans, which was again reflected in music. Gospel music, even though it still produced talents, continued to develop mainly outside the mainstream, within the black communities where it functioned as a relief to the political frustration, gradually worsening living conditions and creation of ghettos. As in the years of the Civil War, gospel raised a new wave of religious tradition. On the other hand, it's dynamic and energetic character continued to influence other musical styles and helped the emergence of the "soul's stepchild" – funk – and at the beginning of the 1970s of pop-rock.<sup>73</sup>

1970s music was a mixture of the optimism of the previous decade on one hand and the harsh reality of African-American life on the other. Funk became one of the prominent mainstream genres of the time and it might be defined as "the simplification, as well as the amplification, of soul music".<sup>74</sup> Its roots were in R&B and gospel, but it also drew on the figures of the 1960s rock such as Jimi Hendrix or Sly Stone. The genre was brought to perfection in music of already mentioned James Brown. As a result of the Civil Rights Act, African-American musicians started to be more integrated into the mainstream music industry. However, many of them were adopting rather separatist attitude rooted in the Black Power movement, which led to white audiences seeing and hearing more black music than ever before on one hand, but often misunderstanding the artists on the other.<sup>75</sup>

In these years most of the new musical influences came from Europe. Established genres were complemented by synthesized dance beats and gave rise to disco. Although often ridiculed by fans of rock, disco introduced producers to the potential of computer music. Moreover, it created a domain where African-American female performers such as Donna Summer, Gloria Gaynor and others took the lead since men kept dominating other genres. Their fan base became gay males of all races who used the disco music as a way of their campaign for civil rights and acceptance.<sup>76</sup>

Popular music kept mixing the styles and genres and led to great diversity in the 1980s. In the diverse musical environment the commercial scene got some of the greatest artists of all time that defined the term pop music for the following generations. Among these artists was Michael Jackson who became the most successful and best-

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<sup>72</sup> Peretti, 151–55.

<sup>73</sup> Peretti, 143–47.

<sup>74</sup> Peretti, 158.

<sup>75</sup> Peretti, 159.

<sup>76</sup> Peretti, 160–61.

selling recording African-American artist in the history and the first African-American whose music video was broadcasted on the newly established music TV channel (MTV). Jackson was the proof that African-American music was central to the industry. Another star with exceptional musical skills was Prince Rogers Nelson. The 1980s also produced strong female figures such as Tina Turner, Janet Jackson or Whitney Houston whose empowering characters paved the way for the later major female stars.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Peretti, 161–62.

## 2.3. Hip-Hop and the Rap Years

The most recent innovation of African-American popular music is hip-hop and rap. It is generally called the voice of the new generation and it dramatically differs from all the previous forms of expressions. Hip-hop has its origin in the late 1970s in South Bronx, New York and appeared as a way to challenge the social and aesthetic norms of white, middle-class society.<sup>78</sup>

Quality of life of African-Americans was declining, a great number of the youth of the day spent their free time in the streets, which led to appearance of street gangs that soon started to be used by drug dealers. Thus, black neighborhoods were turning into disintegrating ghettos and the criminality was rising rapidly. In this environment women often sought comfort in relationship and babies, which led to a dramatic increase in number of underage and unwed mothers and children living in unhealthy conditions. Simultaneously, black middle class was growing more rapidly than ever before. For the first time, more Afro-Americans moved to the South than out of it as it became a site of economic opportunity and political leadership. The era, in which hip-hop emerged, was full of contrasts and the genre became a reflection of them. Finding a type of music that better reflected the contradictions of lives of African-Americans was virtually impossible.<sup>79</sup>

Hip-hop music is a product of the hip-hop culture represented mainly by urban African-Americans and the new uses of new technologies. At the beginning of the 1980s the so-called block parties became very popular, mainly in New York. These parties included the use of turntables and made scratches a part of the beat. These were manipulated by DJs and complemented by MCs who were adding streams of informal poetry to the mixed samples. DJs and MCs are two of the key elements of hip-hop music and along with break dancing and graffiti writing constitute the roots of the whole culture. The main difference between the new genre and all of those that preceded it was the use of non-melodic, but rhythmic speech. This speech continued the oral tradition that had its place among African-Americans since the times of the slavery. Rappers basically became the continuators of this oral tradition where messages had to be masked or disguised in a creative way. They provided a social commentary while heavily using metaphors and/or humor as well as artful insults. This created another important element of the hip-hop culture. Creative use of language was part of both the lyrics and the stage names of the rappers.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Peretti, 162.

<sup>79</sup> Peretti, 165–66.

<sup>80</sup> Peretti, 162–64; Guillermo Rebollo-Gil and Amanda Moras, “Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music: Misogyny, Violence and the Negotiation of (White-Owned) Space,” *The*

The first hip-hop record that gained wider popularity became the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" from 1979. Later in 1982, Grandmaster Flash, recorded "The Message", which was a social critique of the terrible living conditions that foreshadowed the development of rap in the 1980s. The popularity of the genre grew considerably in the 1990s as it managed to cross the USA borders and mix with other styles and genres to fit the needs of various marginalized communities. The downgrading conditions, in which hip-hop artists produced the music and that provided the inspiration for the lyrics gave rise to a subgenre called gangsta rap. The subgenre was source of even more social criticism, as for instance in case of Public Enemy or rappers from the west coast such as Ice-T, Dr.Dre or Tupac Shakur.<sup>81</sup>

The content of the lyrics was often full of sex, violence and anti-homosexual rhetoric. The rise of gangsta rap with this content soon became a subject of criticism from many whites and blacks respectively as it was often difficult to distinguish where is the line between social criticism of the violent reality, in which the songs originated and the loud proclamation of hostility of all sorts. However, As Rebollo-Gil and Moras point out, rap was becoming more and more commercialized and "On many occasions, sex and violence are present in rap songs solely because they sell."<sup>82</sup> The greatest problem, and unfortunate side effect, of commercialization of rap music is the fact that it reinforces the negative stereotypes about black people. These include "black males as angry, violent, and/or otherwise dangerous creatures that are manipulated simply to increase sales and have the end result of moving the music further away from its inner city origins."<sup>83</sup>

Reinforcement of negative stereotypes is, however, not an issue only for men. Objectification of women and problematic treatment of black women's sexuality by male (and sometimes even by female) rappers is perhaps even bigger issue of the genre. The stereotype of Jezebel is present in majority of rap lyrics. Sexual images of black women in hip-hop are therefore one of the main thematic domains of female rappers.<sup>84</sup> In her book *Black Sexual Politics*, Collins notes that "by portraying African Americans as exotic, erotic, or oversexed, one decontextualizes their experience, marginalizes them, and removes the possibility of self defined sexuality."<sup>85</sup> That does not mean that the

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*Journal of Popular Culture* 45, no. 1 (February 2012): 119–20, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00898.x>.

<sup>81</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 166–67; Rebollo-Gil and Moras, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music," 120.

<sup>82</sup> Rebollo-Gil and Moras, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music," 120.

<sup>83</sup> Rebollo-Gil and Moras, 120.

<sup>84</sup> Tricia Rose, "Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music," in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (University Press of New England, 1994), 147.

<sup>85</sup> Rebollo-Gil and Moras, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music," 121.



problem is that male rappers use sex and women as themes, but rather in the violent, anti-women, and abusive representation of them in their lyrics. This representation of women has another troubling aspect and that is the fact that there appears to be an enormous audience willingly accepting such images and that this audience includes young black women.<sup>86</sup>

Hip-hop culture now displays a great diversity as more women have entered this male-dominated sphere since 1990s. Among the first ones was for instance Queen Latifah or groups such as Salt'n'Peppa or TLC, who opened a space for artists such as Laurin Hill or later one of the best-selling female rappers Missy Elliot, Lil' Kim, Eve or contemporary star Nicky Minaj. Their voices however face great difficulties given the misogynistic and sexist nature of the whole hip-hop community. Women in hip-hop are fraught with contradictions as they participate in the culture that systematically reduces them to mere object of men's desire on one hand and challenge their depiction as sex objects and/or "gold diggers" on the other. Moreover, they often have to act as advocates of the misogyny in rap on account of race solidarity. The result is the lack of images depicting successful and assertive black women in today's rap. The images that seem to prevail are those of half-naked, unrealistic, back-up dancers functioning as an enforcement of masculinity of the male rappers.<sup>87</sup>

The relationship between men and women rappers is highly complex and often put into complete oppositions. Tricia Rose, however, states that rather than opposition it should be seen as a dialog as the works of female rappers are partially responses to not only claims made by men in hip-hop, but responses to other works by females as well. In fact, popular music in general is a product of ongoing social and historical dialogue.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Rebollo-Gil and Moras, 126.

<sup>87</sup> Peretti, *Lift Every Voice*, 168; Rebollo-Gil and Moras, "Black Women and Black Men in Hip Hop Music," 128–30.

<sup>88</sup> Rose, "Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music," 147–48.

### **3. Black Feminism Through Music**

In the previous chapters I have talked about the black feminist thought and its evolution and African-American popular music. I decided to include the overview in order to provide a background to the second part of the work, in which I intend to look more closely at lives and music of chosen black women artists, namely Aretha Franklin, Betty Davis, Janet Jackson, Queen Latifah, Beyoncé and Janelle Monáe. I believe that general historical and musical context is helpful for better interpretation of the messages their music conveyed.

Since the Black Feminist movement reached its peak in the period of the Civil Rights movement I decided to start further examination of African-American women artists from the 1960s and then continue through the decades leading to the new millennium. The aim of the following chapters is to provide a content analysis of the chosen songs by artists mentioned above. The most common themes that are recurring throughout their music are: love, sex and relationships, encouraging resistance, solidarity with oppressed people and fight against inequality, celebration of black female body, women empowerment and general representation of black women. My goal is to examine the way the leading African-American women singers and performers of each decade dealt with these themes in their music. More specifically, I am interested in answering how did the artists chose to express and/or address these themes, and what language they used to achieve a certain effect. Additionally, I would like to look at whether the focus of their lyrics and the language they used changed over time and if so in what way. I have chosen songs that I believe are the best musical representations of the given time period and also contain a black feminist message.

My decision to focus on popular music springs from a belief that it is one of the most powerful tools to spread messages and awareness on certain topics. As it is intended to reach masses it has the ability to influence large number of people at once. Moreover, it also has the power to establish and perpetuate or reject sociocultural norms. Thanks to this ability music became a significant instrument in social and political activism and as a root of African-American culture it helped to better define identity of black women, which was one of the crucial steps for black feminists. Today, the songs I have chosen are often considered to be feminist anthems since in the time of their origin they marked a turning point for the development of black feminist consciousness. It is, however, important to note that no text, including song lyrics, can be analyzed in isolation. Time and social situation within which the song originated, target audience as well as for instance the way it was marketed, or its visual appearance has to be taken into account. My analysis of the chosen songs will therefore attempt to cover the relevant factors as well to provide more complex image.

### 3.1. Aretha Franklin: the Voice of the Oppressed

Aretha Louis Franklin was born in Memphis, Tennessee on March 3, 1942 as a fourth child of reverend C.L. Franklin and Barbara Siggers. Her mother was a talented gospel singer and her father was a famous preacher at New Bethel Baptist Church in Detroit where the family moved. She started to sing in the church choir when she was twelve and soon became one of the three soloists.<sup>89</sup>

Growing up in Detroit and with a strong and well-known father figure she had the opportunity to meet with a number of stars of the music industry of the time and to soak up their musical influences while developing her own style. Some of the frequent guests in Franklin's house were, for example, the gospel celebrity Mahalia Jackson, Clara Ward or Maria Williams, who were not only friends of her father, but to a certain degree represented a mother figure in Aretha's life. When she was eighteen years old her fascination with them led her to abandon church music and to pursue a career as a professional R&B singer instead.<sup>90</sup>

Fact that Franklin does not like to talk about is that before she decided to make the transition to popular music she gave birth to two children. She was only 14 years old when she became one of many teenage mothers in her community. Many believed that it was a result of the touring and singing she did with her father's choir and thus reinforced the general belief that popular music is the "devil's music". According to Bego, becoming a mother in such a young age was traumatic experience for her and "set a pattern of victimization by men in her life."<sup>91</sup>

She left Detroit in 1960 and went to New York where she auditioned with John Hammond (man standing behind the success of Bessie Smith or Billie Holliday) who offered her a six-year contract with Columbia Records, one of the major recording companies. Franklin recorded ten albums under Columbia, but did not receive the recognition she was after. The breakthrough came in 1966 when she signed up with Atlanta Records, which was a leading label particularly within the area of R&B music. She started the cooperation with Jerry Wexler who brought to the front her gospel roots and together they created astonishing soul records where Franklin's energy, piano skills and exceptional vocal range finally brought her the attention of mainstream audience.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Mark Bego, "The Gospel Years," in *Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul*, 2012 ed (New York, N.Y: Skyhorse Pub, 2012); Jeffrey Jensen, "Aretha Franklin," *Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia*, January 2016, EBSCOhost.

<sup>90</sup> Bego, "The Gospel Years."

<sup>91</sup> Bego; Jensen, "Aretha Franklin."

<sup>92</sup> Mark Bego, "Aretha Arrives," in *Aretha Franklin: The Queen of Soul*, 2012 ed (New York, N.Y: Skyhorse Pub, 2012).

Under Atlantic, Franklin recorded some of her biggest and best selling hits that not only established her as a remarkable singer and ‘Queen of Soul’, but also defined the direction of the popular music of the 1960s. Moreover, she became the voice of 1960s America that managed to speak to white and black audiences respectively.<sup>93</sup>

Despite establishing a successful international career that started to change the direction of popular music, as a person she has been rather introvert who had to deal with a number of personal struggles. Her first husband, Ted White, who was also her manager in the years of her greatest popularity, caused Franklin a lot of emotional as well as physical pain.<sup>94</sup> Songs such as “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)” or “Chain of Fools” (and many more) hint on the frustration and the emotional pain she felt in the marriage, on the other hand she also shows her commitment to love and her relationship. Only after the final break up with White, Franklin started to take more control of her life and started to demand the respect she was lacking.

Franklin’s persona provides an example of the oppression, from which black feminist movement arose, as well as of empowered woman that became a role model for many young black women. Many of her songs focus on themes of love and relationships in which woman in unhappy, and on men’s power over women and draw on her personal experience. Her music is, however, also underlined with sexual energy through which she challenges the sexual stereotypes, implies the freedom of women to express sexual desire and thus provides empowering message for black women. In 1960s Aretha became an inspiring symbol of black equality. Bego adds that:

“With her own sense of pride and her dignified stance, she represented the new black woman of the late 1960s. In her own way she embodied the social and cultural change that was taking place in the country, merely by being herself without pretense. Respected by black and white America, she was the “natural woman” that she sang about.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bego; Jensen, “Aretha Franklin.”

<sup>94</sup> Bego, “Aretha Arrives.”

<sup>95</sup> Bego.

### 3.1.1. Respect

“Respect” was one of the most important recordings for Franklin. It was recorded in 1967 and it became a second single Franklin released after her transition to Atlantic Records. It immediately became a hit that got to the top of the charts, sold millions and eventually turned into a trademark of Aretha. It is especially important given the time of its release. 1967 was one of the years of great changes in the society, which included Civil Rights movement, Equal Rights Amendment, Black Power movement, and Vietnam War. Women played a significant role in most of the movements yet they lacked the proper recognition. Releasing song demanding respect, sang by a woman belonging to an oppressed group was thus an important statement that led black feminist movement – as well as other oppressed groups - to adopt the song as its anthem.

The song has an interesting history as well and proves how important gender can be in music. It was originally written and recorded in 1965 by Otis Redding, Franklin rearranged the song from the musical as well as lyrical side and effectively re-authored the song two years later. A comparison of the two versions is quite interesting.

From the musical point of view, Franklin’s changes to melodic structure make the song almost unrecognizably different from the original.<sup>96</sup> For example, Franklin added the female backing vocals, which create the effect of call-and-response throughout the song. According to Collins, call-and-response is an expression of what she calls an “ethic of caring.” Ethic of caring consists of three components - the value placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy – and is one of the important parts of black women’s epistemology.<sup>97</sup> Malaway adds that it also creates an impression of a dialog between Franklin and her black “sisters” – in this case quite literally since her sisters Carolyn and Erma sang the backing vocals. The backing vocals also “articulate Aretha’s main points and offer support and confidence.”<sup>98</sup>

Tricia Rose noted, that music is essentially of dialogical nature.<sup>99</sup> Thus, “Respect” can be looked at as a response to Otis Redding and by extension to men in general. Franklin added the bridge, which the Redding’s version did not have and its signature

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<sup>96</sup> Victoria Malaway, “‘Find out What It Means to Me’: Aretha Franklin’s Gendered Re-Authoring of Otis Redding’s ‘Respect,’” *Popular Music* 33, no. 02 (May 2014): 186–87, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143014000270>.

<sup>97</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 263–64.

<sup>98</sup> Malaway, “‘Find out What It Means to Me,’” 193–94.

<sup>99</sup> Rose, “Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music,” 147–48.

hook “R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me”<sup>100</sup>. By adding this section to the song, Franklin suggests that her understanding of “respect” differs from Redding’s. Moreover, by spelling the word out and nearly silencing the instruments she puts and emphasis to her voice, which makes the demand for respect even more powerful and urgent. The difference is not only in the structure, though.

In the first verse Franklin sings “What you want/ Baby, I got/ What you need/ Do you know I got it?”<sup>101</sup> thus complimenting herself and projecting self-confidence. Redding sings, “You got it”<sup>102</sup> instead and expresses his dominance over his wife and effectively tells her to be satisfied with what she has from him. Franklin continues by singing that all she is asking is “a little respect when you come home.”<sup>103</sup> The line is addressed to her husband implying that she waits at home while he is at work and is not treating her well when he comes back. Redding’s “when I come home”<sup>104</sup> also implies that a wife is waiting for him at home. But while Aretha is demanding better treatment from her husband, Redding’s interpretation of respect is rather sexual. The term “respect” was often used as a euphemism for sex at the time. Therefore, it is obvious that when sung from a man’s perspective the storyline of the song significantly changes. Throughout the song Redding asserts his gender-given right to sex and woman’s subordination. It should be noted, however, that even Franklin’s version is problematic at times since it reinforces traditional gender roles. Malaway however explains that rather than reinforcement of a stereotypical gender roles it is an example of “making personal political”, which goes back to blues tradition and is something that resonates strongly with feminist movement.<sup>105</sup>

Franklin also shows bigger commitment to the relationship. By stating “I ain’t gonna do you wrong while you’re gone/ Ain’t gonna do you wrong ‘cause I don’t wanna”<sup>106</sup> she expresses her decision to stay faithful. Redding on the other hand sings “Do me wrong, honey, if you wanna/ you can do me wrong while I’m gone”<sup>107</sup> suggesting adultery that he himself possibly commits. Difference in the interpretation of the word respect can be seen in the following verse where Franklin uses the term “probers” instead of respect. The word was often used during 1960s as slang for “proper

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<sup>100</sup> Aretha Franklin, *Respect* (Atlantic Records, 1967),  
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/arethafranklin/respect.html>.

<sup>101</sup> Franklin.

<sup>102</sup> Otis Redding, *Respect* (Atlantic Records, 1965),  
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/otisredding/respect.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Franklin, *Respect*.

<sup>104</sup> Redding, *Respect*.

<sup>105</sup> Malaway, ““Find out What It Means to Me,”” 200.

<sup>106</sup> Franklin, *Respect*.

<sup>107</sup> Redding, *Respect*.

recognition”.<sup>108</sup> Redding further asserts his power as man as well as breadwinner over the wife by saying “Hey, little girl, you’re sweeter than honey/ and I’m about to give you all my money”<sup>109</sup>, in return he expects “a little respect”, in other words - sex. It again shows his lack of commitment and such objectification makes Redding’s version even more misogynistic. Franklin responds with “Ooo, your kisses/ sweeter than honey/ and guess what?/ so is my money”<sup>110</sup> showing that while she appreciates his attention she is financially independent woman.<sup>111</sup>

Looking into a different layer of meaning of the lyrics shows that Franklin’s version contains sexual references as well (even though to a lesser extent). She not only expresses her sexuality and desire but also challenges the men’s sexual privilege. Lines such as “give it to me when you get home”, “whip it to me”, or “sock it to me”<sup>112</sup> are quite ambiguous as the “it” may refer to respect and better treatment as well as it can express a woman’s sexual demands. According to Angela Davis, these references in music can be seen as signifiers of personal sexual liberation as well as a metaphorical liberation of the oppressed group.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, Franklin’s demands can be seen as demands of all black women. Jerry Wexler, who produced the song, for instance claims that the song was a call for “sexual attention of the highest order.”<sup>114</sup> bell hooks then notes that these sexual interpretations were far from how the black communities heard the song. ““Respect” was heard by many black folks, especially black women, as a song challenging black male sexism and female victimization while evoking notions of mutual care and support.”<sup>115</sup>

Franklin’s songs are generally multilayered in meaning – love and relationships on the surface, and sexual liberation and women’s empowerment within. Many black feminist intellectuals argue that feminism should take into account the interrelatedness of sex, gender and class oppression. Franklin’s “Respect” represents this diversity and intersectionality. The song projects a female protagonist who is strong, financially independent and in control of her body and sexuality. In other words, the song projects respect for self and others as well as self-reliance. Franklin’s demand is energetic, honest and its spirit is the type that makes up the black feminist politics.<sup>116</sup> The song resonates the same way today as it did during the revolutionary 1960s.

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<sup>108</sup> Matt Kohl, “Aretha Franklin, ‘Respect’, and the OED,” OxfordWords blog, March 25, 2013, <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2013/03/25/r-e-s-p-e-c-t-find-out-what-it-means-to-me/>.

<sup>109</sup> Redding, *Respect*.

<sup>110</sup> Franklin, *Respect*.

<sup>111</sup> Franklin.

<sup>112</sup> Franklin.

<sup>113</sup> Malawey, ““Find out What It Means to Me,”” 194–95.

<sup>114</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 69.

<sup>115</sup> hooks, 69.

<sup>116</sup> Malawey, ““Find out What It Means to Me,”” 202–4; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 116.

### 3.1.2. Think

Aretha Franklin wrote “Think” with her former husband Ted White and released it under Atlanta Records in 1968. It became another big hit for her as well as another proof that Franklin is a major voice of the 1960s speaking to and for the oppressed race and gender. Similarly to “Respect” (and many other songs of this era) there is an undisputable influence of gospel music - beginning with the piano, which is after 8 seconds joined by the rest of the band and then Franklin’s voice. Moreover, the use of backing vocals again refers to the tradition of call-and-response and shouts. The song conveyed an emotional message to black women during the time of formation of their own movement.

The theme of demanding respect keeps echoing throughout this song just as it does throughout “Respect”. “Think” is also another example of multilayered lyrics in term on interpretation. One layer of meaning is addressed to all black women and expresses protest against the inequality between men and women, the stereotypical gender roles and the often inhuman treatment of women at home. It is an attempt to challenge general treatment of women and a call for “freedom” from expectations, restrictions and disrespectful attitude towards women. Franklin’s powerful voice encourages women in a confident way to stand up to men that objectify them and that do not respect their feelings and emotions, thus effectively producing a call to action.

Another layer of meaning can be seen from the political and cultural point of view. The song was released on May 2, 1968 – almost a month after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The death of the leader of African-Americans in this revolutionary period deeply shook all black communities and many were losing hope that their fight for equality can succeed without his persona. Given the time of the release and the frustrated mood of the African-American society, “Think” can be viewed as not only a call to action for women but for the whole race as well.

Therefore, the line “You better think, think about what you’re trying to do to me...let your mind go, let yourself be free”<sup>117</sup> can be interpreted as both a reference to men who should think about the way they treat women and liberate their minds from the gender stereotypes and as an appeal to the American society to think about what institutionalized racism does and to open their minds to change. She then reinforces the same point by singing “I ain’t no psychiatrist, I ain’t no doctor with degrees/ It don’t take too much high IQ’s to see what you’re doing to me”<sup>118</sup> – she as a woman sees how much the disrespectful treatment can affect women’s psyche without the need of higher

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<sup>117</sup> Aretha Franklin, *Think* (Atlantic Records, 1968), <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/arethafranklin/think.html>.

<sup>118</sup> Franklin.



education and at the same time she points out the dreadful reality African-Americans live in. The most powerful section of the song contains the repetition of the word “freedom”, which accentuates the urgency of equality of gender and race even more.

Further in the song Franklin sings “People walking around everyday, playing games, taking scores/ Trying to make other people lose their minds/ Well be careful, you’re gonna lose yours”<sup>119</sup>, which can refer to men’s lack of commitment to their wives or girlfriends. These lines suggest that men are often playing with women’s emotions and are trying to make women fall for them even though they are committed somewhere else. Franklin addresses this as a warning – perhaps to her then husband who was known to be abusive and unfaithful to her – to be careful and think about the long-term consequences of one’s actions as she, and by extension all women, is not afraid to leave and take control of her own life. The call to be aware of the consequences can be again extended to the whole society.

Just like in “Respect” she states that her commitment to the relationship is bigger than man’s by saying “I was gonna change, but I’m not, if you’re doing things I don’t”<sup>120</sup>. Meaning she chose the relationship and is committed to the choice, but can just as easily chose to change her mind if he will not show her proper respect. In terms of women’s movement of the time, this is another statement calling for equality pointing out that black women tried to cooperate with white ones, but prevailing racism makes it a task more than challenging.

Finally, by proclaiming that “you need me and I need you/ without each other there ain’t nothing we can do”<sup>121</sup> she refers to the fact that men and women as well as people of color and white people need to cooperate if they want to live in peace next to each other. To emphasize this point it is once again followed by the “freedom” section with the backing vocals further accentuating the demand.

“Think” became another feminist anthem by Aretha Franklin that still leaves the empowering impression as it did in 1968. It makes an important point for black feminists as well as for other black movements of the time.

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<sup>119</sup> Franklin.

<sup>120</sup> Franklin.

<sup>121</sup> Franklin.

### 3.2. Betty Davis: A Woman Ahead of Her time

Betty Davis is an exceptional woman of African-American music. Despite her career being short, she managed to become a cultural phenomenon and laid the groundwork for black women artists such as Macy Gray, Erykah Badu, or Missy Elliot as well as for white soul singers like Amy Winehouse. Her persona is unique and is basically an embodiment of many feminist concepts, although in Davis' case this was rather unintentional. "Davis projected a self-assured, sexually charged, musically creative singer-songwriter"<sup>122</sup> and according to many was a living prototype of the word "funk". Her former husband, Miles Davis, said in his autobiography published in 1989 that "If Betty were singing today she'd be something like Madonna; something like Prince, only as a woman. She was the beginning of all that when she was singing as Betty Davis. She was just ahead of her time."<sup>123</sup>

Davis emerged to the scene in 1970s, which was the time of important feminist events such as publishing of groundbreaking works by Alice Walker, Toni Morrison or Maya Angelou, founding of the *Essence* magazine by and for black women or Shirley Chisholm's run for presidency. In this time period her music, look as well as performances were considered to be very provocative even within some black communities. She represented a sexually liberated, independent and self-reliant woman that was fundamentally different from the expectations of the society. Not only she was a woman asserting traditionally male role in all aspects of life, on top of that, she was black. Sexual liberation and presentation of black women not as always available sexual objects but rather as beings fully in control of and comfortable with their sexuality echoes throughout her body of work. Many black women attempted to confront the promiscuous Jezebel stereotype by silencing themselves (adopted the so-called "politics of silence"). Davis confronted it by public and honest exploration of black female sexuality. Moreover, she was in charge of every step of the production of her works, thus adding a new dimension to the image of emancipated and confident black woman.<sup>124</sup> Betty Davis' experience with the music industry shows just how much black women

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<sup>122</sup> Nikki A. Greene, "The Feminist Funk Power of Betty Davis and Renée Stout," *American Studies* 52, no. 4 (2013): 58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ams.2013.0117>.

<sup>123</sup> Kevin Bloom, "Madonna before Madonna: The Woman Who Introduced Miles to Hendrix Finally Speaks," September 7, 2010, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2010-09-07-madonna-before-madonna-the-woman-who-introduced-miles-to-hendrix-finally-speaks/>.

<sup>124</sup> Maureen Mahon, "They Say She's Different: Race, Gender, Genre, and the Liberated Black Femininity of Betty Davis: Race, Gender, Genre, and Liberated Black Femininity," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23, no. 2 (June 2011): 147–48, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-1598.2011.01277.x>; Cheryl L. Keyes, "'She Was Too Black for Rock and Too Hard for Soul': (Re)Discovering the Musical Career of Betty Mabry Davis," *American Studies* 52, no. 4 (2013): 44, <https://journals.ku.edu/amerstud/article/download/4476/4299>.

had to fight for control in all aspects of their careers from the music to their stage presence.

Davis was born on July 26, 1945 as Elizabeth Mabry in Durham, North Carolina. She spent a lot of her childhood with her mother and grandmother who exposed her to blues musicians like Muddy Waters, B.B.King, Big Mama Thornton, or Johnnie Taylor. Blues became the music, which influenced her the most and that affected her own work. Her openly sexual lyrics stem from the openness and often sexual character of blues. Moreover, as a child she was never a churchgoer; therefore she did not have the gospel roots like majority of black women. This fact in particular made her figure so distinct from other black female artists. At the age of 16 she moved to New York to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology. She was already writing songs and thanks to the fashion industry she met and befriended a number of influential people – she is often connected to Jimi Hendrix or Sly Stone. Later she opened a private club called The Cellar and by 1966 a black rock band, The Chambers Brothers, recorded her song “Uptown Harlem”.<sup>125</sup>

Around that that time she met Miles Davis who later became her husband. Even though their marriage did not last long (they divorced after a year) she had enormous influence on his work. She effectively stood behind his musical transformation that culminated in 1969 with release of one of his best-known albums *Bitches Brew*. She also introduced him to Hendrix and he then helped her to her own recording sessions with Columbia Records. Betty wrote all the songs they recorded and she controlled every part of the recording to achieve the result she desired. The album was, however, shelved and was not released. Davis’ husband was very supportive of her musical career, but was also abusive at times, which eventually led Davis to leave him.<sup>126</sup>

She released only three albums during her career - *Betty Davis* (1973), *They Say I’m Different* (1974), *Nasty Gal* (1975) – and then disappeared from the scene. Davis’ unconventional presentation and behavior were perhaps the reason why she never gained the well-deserved commercial success and potentially led to her abrupt disappearance. Her legacy is, however, preserved in music of later rappers and her open exploration of sexuality, control of all aspects of her career and her refusal to give in to conventions influenced the direction, in which black women artists that followed her presented themselves. Her visual presentation was perceived as shocking in 1970s, but at the turn of the millennium came to be viewed as a statement of empowered femininity.

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<sup>125</sup> Mahon, “They Say She’s Different,” 149; Greene, “The Feminist Funk Power of Betty Davis and Renée Stout,” 58–59.

<sup>126</sup> Greene, “The Feminist Funk Power of Betty Davis and Renée Stout,” 59; Mahon, “They Say She’s Different,” 149.

### 3.2.1. Anti-Love Song

“Anti-Love Song” was featured on Davis’ first album – *Betty Davis* - from 1973. Davis created a fusion of sound of the late 1960s and early 1970s rock, blues and funk with which she entered a scene largely dominated by men. However, unlike her contemporaries, she decided to explore themes conventionally acceptable for men and thus reversed the historically established gender roles not only in her music, but in her personal life as well.

The dominant character of texts or lyrics were usually men, Davis’ songs were the first ones that challenged this dominance by depicting woman narrator demonstrating her control over a romantic relationship and by extension over the addressed man. This fact was apparent not only because of her gender but because of the lyrical content and her vocal expression as well. Unlike Aretha Franklin, who was demanding better treatment from her man, Davis automatically assumes respect – in the same way men did – and does not hesitate to voice it and add expressions of her sexual desire and enjoyment. Her “Anti-Love Song” demonstrates that women, just like men, can enjoy a relationship without commitment, do not have to be the ones waiting for their partner and can be emotionally unbind or even play with men’s emotions if they wish to.

The song openly declares her lack of commitment to a man, effectively showing that her attitude towards a relationship is comparable to the attitude of many men and disproves generally accepted fact that women seek out only monogamous relationships. She does not deny that men have the ability to “have me shaking” or “have me climbing the walls”<sup>127</sup>, but she also claims that she is able to make them feel the same way or that she can have even more power when she sings “You know I could make you crawl/ and just as hard as I fall for you/ boy/ well you know you’d fall for me harder”<sup>128</sup>. By expressing this amount of comfort with her sexuality she gives a proof of being in control of her emotions and body and she refuses to submit to social norms. She further reinforces the theme of woman as an emancipated self-aware being by stating “I’d have you eaten your ego/ I’d make you pocket your pride”<sup>129</sup> and thus once again showing that she is the one in control of her life. On the other hand, parts of the song, such as “When it got real/ I know you’d disappear/ that’s why I ain’t gonna love you”<sup>130</sup>, may be interpreted as expression of Davis’ emotional side through which she explains that her lack of commitment to a relationship is a form of emotional self-defense. Therefore, she

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<sup>127</sup> Betty Davis, *Anti-Love Song* (Just Sunshine Records, 1973), <http://www.sweetslyrics.com/724446.Betty%20Davis%20-%20Anti%20Love%20Song.html>.

<sup>128</sup> Davis.

<sup>129</sup> Davis.

<sup>130</sup> Davis.

is caught up in a definition of romantic love, which she rejects. Interestingly, many fans also interpret the song as a metaphor to an addiction to heroin.

The timbre and her stretching and squeezing of her voice further complete the overall sensual tone of the song. As she was not trained in the gospel church, her voice diverged from the expectations of how a black woman should sound.<sup>131</sup> Moreover, it is underlined by the visual presentation Davis chose for her album. “Her lyrics and imagery broke the rules of black middle class respectability that throughout the twentieth century sought integration through “proper” behavior.”<sup>132</sup> In other words, she rebelled against the tradition of mainstream women performers, which dictated what they should wear, how to groom their hair and how to behave during a concert. Instead of dressing up in elegant attire, Davis is showed on the cover of her album in denim shorts, midriff blouse and silver platform boots up to her thighs. Furthermore, she refused to straighten her hair as was usual for women at the time and wore her hair in a voluminous afro, which signaled a strong identification with her African heritage and was perceived as rather confrontational by mainstream society.<sup>133</sup> According to Nikky A. Greene, the album cover was the closest contact a consumer could have with an artist outside of concert and therefore could provide a sense of intimacy. Davis’ direct display of her body, provocative dress and suggestive poses were very closely related to sexual fantasies and fetish. In combination with her unconventional vocals she was operating as both, thus contributing to her funk power.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Mahon, “They Say She’s Different,” 152.

<sup>132</sup> Mahon, 156.

<sup>133</sup> Mahon, 155–56.

<sup>134</sup> Greene, “The Feminist Funk Power of Betty Davis and Renée Stout,” 61–62.

### 3.2.2. Nasty Gal

Betty Davis released the song “Nasty Gal” on the eponymous album in 1975. It was received with mixed reactions in part because Davis refused to tone down her vulgarity and open embrace of her sexuality, which caused backlash on the side of conservative white part of the society as well as from middle-class African-Americans as they felt she is not the proper representation of their culture and was often described as dangerous. Her previous music met with disapproval and led to boycotts of her performances even by NAACP. Releasing of *Nasty Gal* then caused even stronger negative emotions and eventually led Davis to end her career altogether.

Nevertheless, “Nasty Gal” is an excellent representation of Davis’ confidence as a black woman and another revolutionary work that opened the door to more explicitness in music by mainstream black women artists. It can also be viewed as a response to the public nuisance that Davis’ bravado caused. She unequivocally expresses her indifference to the opinions of the society by proudly acknowledging the image of herself she created as she states “I’m gonna run it down to y’all/ Tell them anything you wanna know/ I ain’t nothing but a nasty gal now”<sup>135</sup>. Moreover, her claim to be a “nasty gal” further reinforces her sexual reputation. Throughout the song she continues to list other “names” she was given, supposedly by men. These include for instance “witch”, “evil wench”, or “alley cat”<sup>136</sup> and within the context of the song have sexual connotations but they do not seem to bother Davis at all. Rather she takes pride in what is being said about her and asserts her power over the man character in the song. Essentially, she again reverses the conventional gender roles by her unwillingness to be subordinate to any man.

The references to “witch” or “alley cat” can be interpreted as her statement of independence and self-awareness as well as they can be a comparison to her own life i.e. living on the margins of society as a black woman with unusual attitude to standardized norms and unwilling to change for anyone but herself. She continues to say, “You dragged my name in the mud all over town”, which may be a reaction to the boycotts and the outrage her persona was causing at the time. At the same time it may refer to the unpleasant names she mentions earlier in the song.

Her reluctance to behave in expected way for a woman and her untamed character are projected in the second half of the song. “You said I loved you every way but your way”<sup>137</sup> refers to her disobedience and is later followed by Davis singing, “You

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<sup>135</sup> Betty Davis, *Nasty Gal* (Island Records, 1975), <https://www.lyrics.net/read/b/betty-davis-lyrics/nasty-gal-lyrics.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Davis.

<sup>137</sup> Davis.

said I pricked your nose with a diamond/ I hurt you bad and I caused you pain yea/ You said I wasn't nothing but a dirty dog/ But still you want me back again"<sup>138</sup>, which not only gives an impression of Davis being uncontrollable, but also seems to imply that despite her dominance, which is clearly uncomfortable to many, people look at her as if she is a jewel and keep coming back to her. It also implies that she is a highly attractive woman that is aware of her attractiveness, yet her man-like attitude towards love and sex is somehow intimidating.

The cover picture of the album furthermore enhances the wildness. Davis is portrayed lying on the floor wearing a black teddy and fishnet stockings while holding one of the high-heeled shoes she is wearing. Out of the three albums she released, this cover photo is perhaps the most provocative and shows Davis in a very suggestive pose. This brought her to a conflict with her record label as they were afraid that her explicit visual image would not appeal to the mainstream audiences. To that Mahon notes, that it should be remembered that black male artists were successfully producing and selling sexual material during that period. As an example she points out Marvin Gaye's *Let's Get It On* (1973). Therefore, the reason for the controversy around Davis was the result of the double standard applied to black women artists. Moreover, Davis's sound was not rooted in the traditional African-American musical expression.<sup>139</sup> Davis herself stated in an interview with Bob Weinstein and Sue Richards that racial and gender politics is the main reason for her demise:

“There are many reasons why I turn audiences off. Number one, I'm a woman. And a black woman....I look one way and people think I should be sounding another way. I work like a man. I don't really work like a woman. [Judy] Garland used her hands expressively, for example. Well, I use my body to create similar effects.”<sup>140</sup>

Even though Davis kept challenging the gender stereotypes and effectively put herself outside the appropriate self-representation for a black woman, her characterization of her work as “like a man” shows how deeply the notions of gender-appropriate behavior are rooted. Her liberated femininity, however, created new possibilities for many contemporary black female performers.

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<sup>138</sup> Davis.

<sup>139</sup> Mahon, “They Say She's Different,” 157.

<sup>140</sup> Mahon, 158.

### 3.3. Janet Jackson's Pop Revolution

Janet Jackson was born on May 6, 1966 in Gary, Indiana to Katherine and Joseph Jackson. Her father built a successful performing career for his sons and Janet was supposed to follow their footsteps. Throughout her life she struggled to escape the shadow of her famous siblings, notably her brother Michael who came to be known as King of Pop, but thanks to her strong personality she managed to build her own brand and tackle a number of important racial and gender issues along the way.

She started her career at seven years of age as an actress in TV sitcoms. Thanks to her father she later signed a record contract and entered performing field as well. Janet recorded her first album, *Janet Jackson*, in 1982, with her father in the managing role. Similarly to Aretha Franklin, her father was a dominant figure in her life controlling every aspect of it, which left marks on Jackson's confidence. According to her autobiography he was also very emotionally withdrawn person and insisted she calls him Joseph instead of dad, thus creating even more authoritative impression.<sup>141</sup> Under the pressure her father was causing Janet recorded one more album, *Dream Street*, and then decided to turn her life around, specifically by firing her father as a manager and starting to control her life and career.<sup>142</sup>

This decision was not revolutionary only for Jackson's life, but marks a revolution in development of popular music as well as revolution for black women consumers and in the industry. The result of this risky yet groundbreaking decision was her album *Control*, recorded in 1986. She managed to create unconventional work that combined funk, rap, disco and R&B (in other words fusion of popular and urban genres that rarely managed to enter the mainstream scene) and effectively started a wave of new jack swing sound, which is characteristic for the 1980s popular music.<sup>143</sup> According to musicologist Richard J. Ripani, *Control* created the first bridge between R&B and rap music and as a result led to further incorporation of rap and hip-hop music into the mainstream. Jackson became the leading figure of this incorporation and many black women build their careers based on model that she created.<sup>144</sup> The album was unconventional from the visual point of view as well. Jackson hired choreographer

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<sup>141</sup> Janet Jackson and David Ritz, "Gods and Dogs," in *True You: A Journey to Finding and Loving Yourself* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

<sup>142</sup> Jane Cornwell, *Janet Jackson* (London: Carlton, 2002), 2–24; Colin Larkin, "Janet Jackson," *The Encyclopedia of Popular Music*. (London: Music Sales, 2011), <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4886696>.

<sup>143</sup> Peter Silverton, "New Jack Swing | New Jack Swing | Britannica.Com," September 11, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150911140722/http://www.britannica.com/topic/New-jack-swing-1688519>.

<sup>144</sup> Richard Ripani, *The New Blue Music: Changes in Rhythm & Blues, 1950-1999*, 1st ed, American Made Music Series (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006), 131.



Paula Abdul that created innovative choreographies for her, which helped to integrate MTV (to this day Jackson is the only black female artist to win the MTV Video Vanguard Award).

Furthermore, the album helped to redefine what it meant to be a black female superstar. Jackson had a certain urban element not only in her music, but in her self-representation as well. Compared to her contemporaries, such as Whitney Houston, she was different, relatable and thanks to the incorporation of hip-hop elements into her music managed to make a foray into both urban black communities and mainstream production. She became the pioneer of female-empowering artist in the music industry who proved to be not only a proud black woman, but a woman with social consciousness as well.

Jackson continued to produce socially conscious work ever since. Her next album, *Rhythm Nation 1814*, combined black feminists thoughts and was voicing concerns and spreading awareness about experiences of all African-Americans in the USA. With her following music she continued to explore social as well as feminist themes and addressed issues like racism, poverty, teenage pregnancy, education, domestic violence and later even started an exploration of female sexuality offering a look at sex from the female perspective. The underlying message in all of her work was, however, the same regardless of the theme explored – woman in control of her life, body and decisions. As Patricia Hill Collins noted in her book *Black Feminist Thought*, black feminism is specific for it is created not only within academia or among scholars. In fact, the level of education is secondary when learning about black feminism or spreading awareness. Most of the work is done on the margins of the society, as it is where black women live their experiences and art is often the medium they use.<sup>145</sup> Janet Jackson is an excellent example.

Because of her patriarchal father, she never went to college, even though it was her wish rather than pursuing musical career. But as an artist she felt the need to be part of the sociocultural discussion and decided to use music as the medium of the conversation.<sup>146</sup> By “living” within the borders of general acceptance in the mainstream music she managed to influence millions of people (women and men respectively), turn attention of the society to the important issues such as racism or gender inequality and popularize black pop music with an expression of black female pride. Artists such as Beyoncé or Rihanna are considered her direct continuators, as they are only able to exist because of the ground that Jackson broke.

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<sup>145</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 14.

<sup>146</sup> Michael Saunders and Globe Staff, “THE 3 DIVAS Janet Jackson Turns Her Focus Inward,” *The Boston Globe (Boston, MA)*, October 3, 1997, 13, <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-8454075.html>.

### 3.3.1. Control

“Control” is one of the five singles from the eponymous breakthrough album Jackson recorded in 1986 after changing her management and teaming up with producers Jimmy Tam and Terry Lewis. The album was certified quadruple platinum for sales of over four million copies in the USA and effectively started a revolution of black pop music and helped to change the demographics of the mainstream music consumers.<sup>147</sup>

The song starts with a spoken intro, “This is a story about control/ My control/ Control of what I say/ Control of what I do/ And this time I’m gonna do it my way/ Are we ready?/ I am”<sup>148</sup>. This is sort of continuation of the African-American musical tradition. Blues singers often used melodically spoken passages in their performances to enhance the meaning of the lyrics, the themes and the tone they used was however very sensual. Here Jackson speaks in her typically soft voice, but with newly found confidence with futuristic sounding background. Listeners are therefore driven to pay attention to the main message she wants to convey, which is very straightforward and represents significant and empowering statement from black woman to black women.

The song is then filled with sounds of synthesizers, percussions and other sound effects creating rather industrial undertone throughout the recording. In the following verses she touches personal themes that led her to eventually taking the control she sings about. One is her complicated relationship with her patriarchal father and the other is her short marriage to singer James DeBarge. She acknowledges her naivety in both relationships and implies a regret of letting the men take over her life. She goes on to say “but that was long ago...now I know I got to take control”<sup>149</sup>, thus proclaiming her emancipation and her ability to be more than a puppet of others.

The rest of the song is then an encouragement addressed to other women who feel that their surroundings or social hierarchy detracts their free will, their right to have and fulfill their dreams or are trapped in an oppressive relationship. Jackson sings “so let me take you by the hand, and lead you in this dance”<sup>150</sup> referring to her personal experience and the first chance to make decision concerning her life as well as she attempts to help black women to feel empowered and self-aware enough to stand up to whatever they think they have no control over. She continues her encouragement with “So make your life a little easier/ when you get a chance just take control”<sup>151</sup>. She also

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<sup>147</sup> Larkin, “Janet Jackson.”

<sup>148</sup> Janet Jackson, *Control* (A&M Records, 1986),  
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/janetjackson/control.html>.

<sup>149</sup> Jackson.

<sup>150</sup> Jackson.

<sup>151</sup> Jackson.

challenges the conventional position of women in the society by using a rhetorical question “And me wants to groove/ is that okay?/ Yeah!/ Control”<sup>152</sup>. She is aware of the risk she took by defying her father as well as the risk of being seen as not “respectable” enough as a result of her decision. The power of the song lies primarily in showing and selling black woman’s pride and at the same time promoting that black women should not be afraid to express and/or follow their inner cues regardless of what the society or even the black community perceives as “correct” behavior. Furthermore, it shows Jackson’s concern with identity and self-definition, which is, according to Patricia Hill Collins, one of the crucial points in developing black feminist consciousness.

Jackson also created an outstanding visual representation of proud black woman with her videos. The “Control” video bluntly shows Jackson’s dominant father from whom she eventually runs away. Not only was the story relatable for many black women, but the video’s popularity was enhanced by carefully crafted choreography by Paula Abdul. This take on self-presentation was so well received that the new music channel – MTV – was forced to give more space to black women performers and thus brought black pop music closer to greater number of people and helped to desegregate the music market.

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<sup>152</sup> Jackson.

### 3.3.2. Nasty

Another important feminist statement from her third album was the song “Nasty”. It was inspired by an incident Jackson encountered after she moved away from home and was left unguarded for the first time in her life. A group of men stalked and harassed her on the street, but instead of running she confronted them. The feelings of control and self-respect were then transformed into the lyrics of the song.<sup>153</sup>

Jackson starts the song with a shout “Gimme a beat!” calling for attention and then continues to point out her defiance to be objectified by singing “better be a gentleman or you turn me off...Nasty/ Nasty boys, Don’t mean a thing.”<sup>154</sup> This sets the tone of the whole song that criticizes male “nastiness”. Jackson expresses her anger at the objectification of women and at the same time provides early retaliation against a hip-hop culture that was showing signs of misogyny. In the song Jackson embodies confidence and respect, which she demands from men. “I am not prude (no)/ I just want some respect (that’s right)”<sup>155</sup> shows that she enjoys men’s attention, but only on her own terms and just as long as she is being treated with respect, which can be seen as an allusion to Franklin’s famous song. Following passage of Jackson’s “Nasty” - “No my first name ain’t baby/ It’s Janet/ Miss Jackson if you’re nasty!”<sup>156</sup> – then became an iconic incarnation of Aretha’s demand of respect and simultaneously an empowering motto of black feminism of the 1980s. Jackson herself said in an interview she reacted to the fact that so many men call women “baby” that it takes away their dignity.<sup>157</sup>

The theme of the song becomes even more expressive when interpreted along with the video. She first appears to be harassed by a group of men in the movie theatre, but then decides to stand up and take control. In the video, she shouts, “Stop!” instead of “Gimme a beat” to get the attention and then she starts to dance and soon enters the movie screen, by which she distances herself from the objectifying male gaze. Jackson then uses her dance moves to assert her right to feel “nasty” and dance to a “nasty groove”<sup>158</sup>, which refers to her right to express her sexuality and criticize the male gaze at the same time by for instance appearing on top of the pyramid of male dancers and adding an angry undertone to her voice while singing, “Hey!/ Who’s that thinking nasty

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<sup>153</sup> Janet Jackson and David Ritz, “Control,” in *True You: A Journey to Finding and Loving Yourself* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

<sup>154</sup> Janet Jackson, *Nasty* (A&M Records, 1986),  
<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/janetjackson/nasty.html>.

<sup>155</sup> Jackson.

<sup>156</sup> Jackson.

<sup>157</sup> Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul*. (London: Continuum International Pub. Group, 2003), 297,

<http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=436783>, (accessed December 10 2017).

<sup>158</sup> Jackson.

thoughts?/ Nasty boys!”<sup>159</sup>. Moreover, when she “jumps out” of the movie screen she leaves all the men in the video world, which reinforces her attempt to leave the objectification behind and show her self-assertion and confidence. The men that are left trapped in the screen represent the artificial world while she is back in the real world where she leaves no space for such disrespectful behavior. She uses the dance to further accentuate her sexuality in a way that does allow for men advances or diminish her control over her body.<sup>160</sup>

To make her feminist statement even more engaging and appealing she uses humorous depiction of the “nasty men”. In the video they are portrayed as “buffoons rather than overtly threatening or hostile figures.”<sup>161</sup> Roberts notes that her humor conspicuously contrasts with the misogynistic depiction of women in other music videos. Thus, exposing the prevailing sexism in popular culture.<sup>162</sup>

The song became one of the most influential works by Jackson and an important part of the black feminist politics. Later it was used as a soundtrack for many TV shows and films and it also became an inspiration for many other artists. Britney Spears’ “Break the Ice” is build on the same model and even includes the line “I like this part” originally used by Jackson. The band Panic! At The Disco references the song in the title of their “Miss Jackson” from 2013 and further references it in the chorus with the lyrics “Miss Jackson, are you nasty?”<sup>163</sup> Its popularity was revived in 2016 due to the third and final presidential debate on October 19. The then presidential candidate, Donald Trump, reacted to his opponent’s, Hillary Clinton’s, accusation of not paying the federal taxes by saying “such a nasty woman.” The musical streaming service Spotify reported that streams of “Nasty” spiked by 250% overnight.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Jackson.

<sup>160</sup> Robin Roberts, “‘Sex as a Weapon’: Feminist Rock Music Videos,” *NWSA Journal* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 10–11, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4315990>.

<sup>161</sup> Roberts, 11.

<sup>162</sup> Roberts, 11.

<sup>163</sup> Panic! At The Disco, *Miss Jackson* (Fueled by Ramen LLC, 2013), <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/panicatthedisco/missjackson.html>, (accessed November 27 2017).

<sup>164</sup> Jill Disis, “Janet Jackson Hit Soars on Spotify after ‘nasty’ Debate,” CNNmedia, October 20, 2016, <http://money.cnn.com/2016/10/20/media/janet-jackson-nasty-spotify-debate/index.html>, (accessed November 27 2017).

### 3.4. Queen Latifah and Feminist Rap

Queen Latifah, was born on March 18, 1970 as Dana Owens in Newark, New Jersey. Her parents, Rita and Lancelot Owens, divorced when she was ten years old, but she claims both were a great influence on her and her development of social as well as feminist awareness.<sup>165</sup> Owens adopted the name Latifah when she was eight years old. It draws on African tradition according to which a name should capture the essence of one's being. Latifah means 'delicate and sensitive' in Arabic, the Queen was then added as a professional rapper's name and it further reinforces the Afrocentric character of her persona and work.<sup>166</sup>

She was an active student involved in both sports and arts in the period when the hip-hop culture was on the rise. Latifah was attracted by hip-hop music but she had difficulties to relate to the misogynistic undertones of the culture. She started to be involved in it by beat boxing and soon gained the attention of MTV and Tommy Boy Records. When she was nineteen years old she released her first album *All hail the Queen*, which included her greatest contribution to black feminism, song "Ladies First".<sup>167</sup> She became one of the first women rappers that used hip-hop and rap, which are male-dominated forms that often denigrate the role of women in the society, to promote women and their contribution in various historical movements and to fight racism and sexism. Moreover, through her lyrics as well as visual presentation she emphasizes her African roots and by doing so she adds additional source of her strength and power as a black woman.<sup>168</sup> Her music shows a female perspective on issues that lie at the base of the black feminist philosophy, such as racism, sexism and gender oppression. Nevertheless, Latifah, like many rappers, rejects the feminist label, because for many black women feminism has a connection with struggle of white women only. Another reason is the fact that feminism is often seen in direct opposition to race struggles. Suggesting itself is the thought that Queen Latifah is in fact one of the first representatives of Hip-Hop Feminists in popular culture she, however, identifies herself as being first and foremost a black woman. Thus, her work within hip-hop music

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<sup>165</sup> Rachel A. Koestler-Grack, *Queen Latifah*, Hip-Hop Stars (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 14–20.

<sup>166</sup> Robin Roberts, "'Ladies First': Queen Latifah's Afrocentric Feminist Music Video," *African American Review* 28, no. Black Women's Culture, 2 (Summer 1994): 246, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3041997>.

<sup>167</sup> Noelle Chaddock, "'Ladies First' By Queen Latifah," in *Rebel Music: Resistance through Hip Hop and Punk*, Critical Constructions: Studies on Education and Society (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2015), 23.

<sup>168</sup> Roberts, "'Ladies First': Queen Latifah's Afrocentric Feminist Music Video," 247.

(mainly “Ladies First” and U.N.I.T.Y.”) can be viewed as a form of rebellion against the feminist labels in general.<sup>169</sup>

The visual representation Latifah chose is another important element of her work. Rap music’s focus is drawn to the lyrics and provides a space to “tell a story” or raise awareness. Music video can therefore do more than just augment the message the artist is attempting to convey with the lyrics. It can also draw attention to other issues not explicitly stated in the lyrics or make the consumer aware or test his knowledge of the topic. For feminist rappers it offers an opportunity to underscore their songs with alternative and/or positive images of black women that can help to reject or redefine the stereotypes of African-American women. This is the case of, for instance Latifah’s “Ladies First”. Moreover, to reinforce the Afrocentric nature of her music she used parts of traditional African attire on both covers of her hip-hop albums as well as in her videos.

Later she left hip-hop for other musical forms and acting, but due to starting her career as a rapper she is another pivotal figure in popular culture that managed to open the door to many other female rappers and artists that came after her. Her approach to advocating for women of color was less militant than that of for instance Sister Souljah and was centered more on black communities rather than general society. The same approach can be seen in works of rappers like Lil’Kim or Missy Elliot, who also focused their attention to the black communities and women within them. Furthermore, her use of the music videos for promotion of change and/or spreading social consciousness and her embracement of her African heritage visibly influenced African-American mainstream women performers, such as Beyoncé.

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<sup>169</sup> Lakeyta M Bonnette, *Pulse of the People: Political Rap Music and Black Politics* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 98–99.

### 3.4.1. Ladies First

“Ladies First” is Queen Latifah’s greatest contribution to the black feminist philosophy. The song conveys a political message, uses Afrocentricity and at the same time promotes Latifah as well as other African-American women.<sup>170</sup> Tricia Rose notes that “Ladies First” is a landmark example of centralizing a strong black female public voice and that the lyrics together with the video are:

“a statement for black female unity, independence, and power, as well as an anticolonial statement concerning Africa's southern region and recognition of the importance of black female political activists, which offers hope for the development of a pro-female pro-black diasporic political consciousness.”<sup>171</sup>

The song is Queen Latifah’s participation in the sociocultural debate that is popular music and the dialog is present even in the inner structure of the song. It is a powerful rap duet with Monie Love (whose name is a reference to the capitalistic society), which Latifah starts with explicitly feministic lyrics that set the tone of the whole song.

“The ladies will kick it, the rhyme that is wicked  
Those that don’t know how to be pros get evicted  
A woman can bear you, break you, take you  
Now it’s time to rhyme, can you relate to  
A sister dope enough to make you holler and scream?”<sup>172</sup>

Here she asserts women’s strength and power as well as the ability to create a quality hip-hop works in the same way men can. Her rhetorical question at the end of the verse then challenges sexism of hip-hop culture and asks whether men can respect a woman in the role of a rapper. Love then takes over and continues to praise women’s contribution in struggles along with men. At the same time, by saying, “I’m conversatin’ to the folks that have no whatsoever clue/ so listen very carefully as I break it down to you”<sup>173</sup>, she holds a mirror to those that disregard the importance of women in the society, especially the importance of black women. These first two verses are accompanied by images of influential black women and activists such as Sojourner Truth, Angela Davis and Winnie Mandela. The choice of women is not only educational

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<sup>170</sup> Roberts, ““Ladies First’: Queen Latifah’s Afrocentric Feminist Music Video,” 247.

<sup>171</sup> Rose, “Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music,” 164.

<sup>172</sup> Queen Latifah and Monie Love, *Ladies First* (Tommy Boy Records, 1989), <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/queenlatifah/ladiesfirst.html>.

<sup>173</sup> Queen Latifah and Love.



as it points out that black women are often omitted from the curriculum. Showing women from different time periods also draws attention to the length of the black women's struggle and proves the indifference of the society towards their agenda. By the use of African pieces of clothing and portraying herself in front of the images of strong and politically active women she emphasizes her Afrocentric feminist position.<sup>174</sup> The video and the lyrics are powerful rewriting of the contributions of black women in the history of racial struggles without attacking the black men.

Another dominant theme of the video is the military violence against protestors in South Africa. The images of women protesting in the first lines along with men further stresses the power and contribution of black women in the fight for equality. Moreover, it also provides an element of nationalism that was appearing in rap of the period in general and simultaneously challenges what Rose called "cozy relationship between nationalism and patriarchy."<sup>175</sup> Roberts then notes that by using images of the struggles in South Africa, Latifah brings attention to the internationality of the struggle without the need to mention South Africa in the lyrics and by her African attire clearly identifies herself as part of the fight.<sup>176</sup>

By the feministic character of the lyrics Latifah attacks sexism and by the militant images links it with racism. She also uses the so-called sampling, which is part of African American musical tradition and vital part of rap music.<sup>177</sup> By sampling Malcolm X's phrase "There are going to be some changes in here"<sup>178</sup> she re-contextualizes his voice to a support of both struggles in South Africa and the necessity to change the degraded status of black women and black women rappers.<sup>179</sup>

Latifah also focuses on the issues important to women in black communities like black motherhood. Latifah and Love stress the power of women as mothers as Love raps, "I'm the daughter of a sister/ who is the mother of a brother who's the brother of another / plus one more; all four...respect due/ to the mother who's the root of it"<sup>180</sup> thus referencing not only the familial ties that holds black men and women together and therefore should be respected, but also the lineage that goes back to the African roots.<sup>181</sup>

Overall, "Ladies First" raises questions of race and gender and challenges the notion of women in rap as subordinate. It draws on African traditions and creates a new space for black women to operate in.

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<sup>174</sup> Roberts, "'Ladies First': Queen Latifah's Afrocentric Feminist Music Video," 251–52.

<sup>175</sup> Rose, "Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music," 165.

<sup>176</sup> Roberts, "'Ladies First': Queen Latifah's Afrocentric Feminist Music Video," 253–54.

<sup>177</sup> Roberts, 248.

<sup>178</sup> Queen Latifah and Love, *Ladies First*.

<sup>179</sup> Rose, "Bad Sistas: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music," 166.

<sup>180</sup> Queen Latifah and Love, *Ladies First*.

<sup>181</sup> Roberts, "'Ladies First': Queen Latifah's Afrocentric Feminist Music Video," 255.

### 3.4.2. U.N.I.T.Y.

Another significant contribution to the black feminist thought is Latifah's song from 1993, "U.N.I.T.Y.". In the song she advocates for respect towards women and their contributions to the black community, addresses the issue of objectification and street harassment, domestic violence and lack of respect of black women in hip-hop culture. Similarly to Aretha Franklin, Latifah spells out the word "unity" to put more emphasis on it. By unity she addresses the urgency of cooperation of not only black women with other black women, but black women with men as well. Since she sees the black community as less powerful if the women within it are not treated with respect and are degraded to object of men's desire she stresses the need to act as a unified group to fight racial and/or gender oppression.<sup>182</sup> This is evident for instance from, "everytime I hear a brother call a girl a bitch or a ho/ trying to make a sister feel low/ you know all of that gots to go."<sup>183</sup> By this she criticizes the stereotypes of black womanhood and urges men to change their attitude in order to progress as a group.

She continues by saying "I bring wrath to those who disrespect me as a dame"<sup>184</sup>, which shows her anger at the treatment of women and by using the word "dame" she challenges the stereotype of black woman as an animalistic being. By rapping about an incident from the street she further criticizes the objectification of women while simultaneously promotes herself as a strong woman able to stand up for herself:

"I walked past these dudes when they passed me  
One of 'em felt my booty, he was nasty  
I turned around red, somebody was catching the wrath  
then the little one said, 'Yeah, me bitch' and laughed  
Since he was with his boys he tried to break fly  
Huh, I punched him dead in his eye and said 'Who you're calling a bitch?'"<sup>185</sup>

Throughout, the chorus she encourages women to have self-respect and to fight against such misogynistic behavior by saying "You ain't a bitch or a ho... You gotta let him know... You go, come on, here we go"<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> M. Morgan, "Hip-Hop Women Shredding the Veil: Race and Class in Popular Feminist Identity," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 3 (July 1, 2005): 439, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-104-3-425>.

<sup>183</sup> Queen Latifah, *U.N.I.T.Y.* (Motown Records, 1993), <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/queenlatifah/unity.html>.

<sup>184</sup> Queen Latifah.

<sup>185</sup> Queen Latifah.

<sup>186</sup> Queen Latifah.

Second verse addresses the issue of domestic violence. “All I knew was you, you was all the man I had/ And I was scared to let you go, even though you treated me bad”<sup>187</sup> Latifah portrays a relationship where the woman is scared to leave an abusive man for the fear of unknown future. However, by the use of past tense she implies the woman stood up to the ill treatment, which she then confirms by saying “You say I’m nothing without ya, but I’m nothing with ya/ A man don’t really love you if he hits ya/ This is my notice to the door, I’m not taking it no more.”<sup>188</sup> Moreover, she again encourages women to demand respect. The end of the second verse also references the novel by Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*. “And nothing good gonna come to ya til you do right by me/ Brother you wait and see” bears resemblance to the curse Celie used in Walker’s book towards her abusive husband.

The third verse appears to be a personal response to a feud Latifah had with another black female rapper in 1990s who she condemned for representing the black women stereotypes and reinforcing misogyny within the culture instead of working with other women to change the general attitude and sexist nature of the society. “U.N.I.T.Y” remains her biggest hip-hop hit, for which she also won a Grammy award in 1995. Similarly to many other rappers she does not use many metaphors or other language devices that code the message, which makes her work more accessible to wider audiences.

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<sup>187</sup> Queen Latifah.

<sup>188</sup> Queen Latifah.

## **4. Music in the New Millennium & Black Feminism**

1990s are often said to be the period of the greatest popularity of hip-hop music, which is supported by the fact that music industry produced a significant number of black female rappers and girl bands, such as Lil'Kim, Missy Elliot, TLC, or Destiny's child. Thanks to the fact that hip-hop became accessible to the general public the political and/or black feminist agenda was available to a large number of young people who were the agents of societal change. Hip-hop and rap provided a platform for black women artists to spread awareness faster than in any other previous historical period. By using the language of common people it provided relatable thoughts and experiences for the youth of the time. Moreover, due to the explicitness of the lyrics of the songs, it provided a body of work that was easier to interpret than works of scholars.

During the decade it, however, underwent many changes. The genre originated in the streets of black communities and was a means of communicating and addressing social and political injustice and inequality between races and sexes. Its roots, thus lay in the social commentary and advocacy of change of the established social hierarchy. Women that entered the hip-hop culture then added a commentary on the disrespectful treatment and oppression they have struggled with for many years and provided a unique perspective on many issues.

Some of the songs by female rappers were of rather militant nature. Rapper Sister Souljah, for instance, agitated in her lyrics for war between the races, which she saw as the only way to change the attitude of the white majority towards African-Americans. The above-mentioned Queen Latifah, entered the sociocultural discourse and shifted the focus from the general society to the black communities and issues relevant to black women living within them. She addressed the silencing of black women with regard to their daily experiences and criticized the patriarchal system that trivialized the extent of the oppression of African-Americans. Furthermore, she embraced the African heritage of her culture and stressed the importance of history of African-Americans. This was, however, the case of many more artists in the 1990s.

The end of the decade then saw rather radical shift in expression of hip-hop artists, mainly in the self-presentation of black women. The new wave of performers chose different attitude to address the struggles and the prevailing stereotypes. The style of clothing was very provocative and the lyrics were becoming more explicit than ever before. Often, they were attempting to adopt the male attitude and use it to promote the need for change or to show the women's perspective on the topics such as sex, misogyny, relationships, or black communities. This approach soon started to spread outside the hip-hop genre.

This wave of artists and their new daring approach was, and in fact still is, accompanied with a critique of some feminists who see this type of self-presentation as a tool for reinforcing the patriarchal nature of the society and stereotypes black women have been fighting to divest. To this day the main problem lies in the stereotypes of Jezebel and Sapphire – in contemporary music (and mainly in hip-hop culture) the terms have been replaced by for instance “bitch” and/or “hoe” - which are used the most often. While the feminist critique of female rappers may be justified at times, when it comes to the stereotypes they provided a major change. Instead of fighting the stereotypical representation by challenging or rejecting it in their lyrics and visual presentation, through their work they managed to redefine them. Thus, for instance, the term “bitch” went from being used as a degrading label for women to becoming a euphemism for a strong, emancipated, and proud black woman.<sup>189</sup>

Another change is visible in terms of treatment of black female body and femininity. The clothes became more revealing in order to promote black female body as beautiful and encourage black women to feel comfortable and sexy the way they look and to not conform to the Eurocentric norms of beauty. This is, however, another aspect that stirs discussions among many feminists. The major issue and contradiction is the fact that, on one hand, explicit expression of female’s sexuality represents a woman’s freedom to be sexually autonomous and thus can produce an empowering effect. On the other hand, it has to be acknowledged that the idea of what is generally considered to be beautiful or sexy is a product of the patriarchal society and it is therefore questionable whether embracing one’s femininity by employing sexual images that are “rooted in stereotypically male-coded fantasy” really is the correct approach to add to feminist consciousness.<sup>190</sup>

This type of contradiction is present in many contemporary works and is often discussed in connection with performers like Beyoncé or Nicky Minaj. In the next subchapter I would like to look closer to the persona of Beyoncé Knowles and point out some disputable aspects of her work from the point of view of black feminism. For this purpose I will be referring to different songs from her body of work, mainly from the last two albums (*Beyoncé*, and *Lemonade*) as these are the most current and accurate representations of the artist. The very last subchapter will be focused on young artist Janelle Monáe and will examine the way she demonstrates her solidarity with oppressed groups and women of color in the song “Q.U.E.E.N.” from her album *Electric Lady*.

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<sup>189</sup> Kat George, “How Female Musicians of the 90s Reclaimed the Word ‘Bitch,’” *Dazed*, February 5, 2016, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/29629/1/how-female-musicians-of-the-90s-reclaimed-the-word-bitch>.

<sup>190</sup> Emilie Zaslow, *Feminism, Inc: Coming of Age in Girl Power Media Culture*, 1st ed (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 58.

## 4.1. The Feminism of Beyoncé Knowles

Beyoncé Giselle Knowles is one of the most influential contemporary pop superstars and in the last couple of years she has played a major role in catalyzing a number of debates regarding feminism, social justice, black movements and sexuality within popular culture. The reason for her becoming a subject of feminist debates was her performance at the MTV Video Music Awards in 2014 where she was scheduled to receive the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award. Prior to receiving the award she has performed a medley of her self-titled album released in 2013. The moment that started an avalanche of pictures, gifs, comments and articles on the Internet was Beyoncé standing in front of the word “feminist” in bright, capital letters while singing her song called “\*\*\*Flawless”.<sup>191</sup>

The claiming of the word “feminist” spurred a wave of critique due to a sexualized nature of her performances as well as her championing of her marriage. Since this particular performance the number of critiques started to grow and Beyoncé was accused of being a bad role model for young women. The question, however, is whether the critique is justified and why.

Out of the many people who joined the discussion the strongest criticism came from singer Annie Lennox and black feminist scholar bell hooks. Lennox called Beyoncé a “feminist lite” and expressed her issues with the overly sexual character of her presentation given the type of audience she attracts.<sup>192</sup> At a panel discussion at New York’s New School hooks described Beyoncé as a feminist “terrorist” and like Lennox voiced her concern about Beyoncé’s influence on young black girls.<sup>193</sup> The problem then lies in the potentially harmful interpretation of her self-presentation by young women as well as in encouraging the notions of sexuality and beauty built by patriarchy. Harris, for instance, aptly remarks that the criticism of Beyoncé’s use of her body provides a modern example of years old juxtaposition „of animalistic black sexuality versus controlled, intentional, and civilized white sexuality“ and contrasts the pro-sex performances and visual images to those of Madonna, who is generally viewed as a feminist icon.<sup>194</sup> The prevailing regulation of black female sexuality is perhaps also a

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<sup>191</sup> Nathalie Weidhase, “‘Beyoncé Feminism’ and the Contestation of the Black Feminist Body,” *Celebrity Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 128, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2015.1005389>.

<sup>192</sup> Chris Azzopardi, “Q&A: Annie Lennox On Her Legacy, Why Beyonce Is ‘Feminist Lite,’” *Pridesource*, September 25, 2014, <http://www.pridesource.com/article.html?article=68228>.

<sup>193</sup> *Are You Still a Slave? By The New School*, 2014, <https://livestream.com/thenewschool/Slave?t=1512499454>.

<sup>194</sup> Tamara Winfrey Harris, “Sex: Bump and Grind,” in *The Sisters Are Alright*. (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015), <http://www.totalboox.com/book/id-8351045642448394266>.

reason why up until the release of the album in question Beyoncé chose to perform her provocative choreographies as an alter ego named Sasha Fierce.<sup>195</sup>

Another contradiction that sparks debates whether Beyoncé's self-identification as feminist is based on genuine attempt to empower the next generation of black women or whether her claim of the term "feminist" is, to use Lennox's words, tokenistic<sup>196</sup> draws on her self-promotion as Mrs. Carter – the wife of hip-hop mogul Jay-Z. The pride she promotes through her relationship with a man who has made his living perpetuating hyper-masculinity is a thorn in many critics' eye that hold the opinion that such approach demeans her credibility as a feminist and reinforces stereotypical gender roles.<sup>197</sup> In my opinion, this claim can be disproved by the fact that she did not change her name to Carter. In fact, following their marriage both accepted a hyphenated surname of Knowles-Carter, which is not only a non-stereotypical departure from the tradition, but it also shows a mutual respect present in the relationship.

Furthermore, her latest album *Lemonade*, largely maps her journey through grief caused by her husband's infidelity and clearly shows that she will carry her husband's surname with pride only as long as she is treated with respect and her emotions will be accounted for within the relationship. It is, however, important to acknowledge that she speaks from the position of privilege that is difficult to relate to. Nevertheless, she draws attention to women's choice to leave if they find themselves in an emotionally abusive situation.

Lennox's notion of her tokenism is rather arguable given the popularization of feminism in recent years. Women in public sphere, including women in popular culture, have started to publicly proclaim themselves feminists, thus raising the question whether their allegiance to the movement is genuine or merely a marketing label and a strategic move to reach higher sales and popularity. Ironically, the person responsible for this popularization of feminism is Beyoncé and her performance from 2014.

Musically speaking, Beyoncé's engagement with feminism predated the performance in question. The work she has done with her former band, Destiny's Child, already contains elements of feminism in the simple and perhaps naive form; these are present in songs like "Independent woman Pt 1", "Bills, Bills, Bills" or "Survivor". Her second solo album *B-Day* from 2006 then focuses on control over her body and work and also marks the introduction of her all female band Sugar Mamas, which she has put together to inspire young girls to learn to play instruments and to give them a role-

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<sup>195</sup> Durham, "Check On It," 45.

<sup>196</sup> Azzopardi, "Q&A."

<sup>197</sup> Tamara Winfrey Harris, "All Hail the Queen? What Do Our Perceptions of Beyonce's Feminism Say about Us?" Bitch Media, May 20, 2013, <https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/all-hail-the-queen-beyonce-feminism>.

models at the same time.<sup>198</sup> Her album *Beyoncé* thus can be seen as a “coming out” as a feminist with full control over her body, work and property. Her latest visual album is then an example of not only personal exploration of feminist values, but also as an exploration of external factors that shape the experiences of African-Americans, black women in particular.

At this point I would like to focus on Beyoncé’s work to provide some examples of the contradictions surrounding her persona. As was mentioned in the discussion above, one of the major contradictions is her celebration of black female body and explicit expressions of her sexuality. In “Rocket” she openly asserts her sexual allure and shows her comfort with it. The song is addressed to her lover and is an invitation to enjoy her body the same way she does. By singing “I’m proud of all this bass/ let me put it in ya’ face”<sup>199</sup> she makes a reference to her buttocks and exhibits pride she takes in its size, which echoes through the whole song and is further accentuated by the accompanying video. The references to women’s behind within hip-hop culture are not sporadic and have roots in the treatment of black female sexuality by patriarchal society promoting Eurocentric norms of beauty.<sup>200</sup> bell hooks notes that celebrating of black women’s behind is in fact a form of resistance, by which black women “challenge the assumption that the black body, its skin color and shape, is a mark of shame.”<sup>201</sup> Beyoncé continues by singing “I’m comfortable in my skin/ and you’re comfortable in my skin”<sup>202</sup> and uses the video to show the beauty of her body, her pride and enjoyment of it. With words “my shit so good that it ain’t even right/ I know I’m right”<sup>203</sup> she asserts her sexuality and effectively states that she is not only proud to be a liberated sexual being but she is good at the act, which adds another element to the black feminist discourse. Moreover, it adds another challenge to the stereotypical image of Jezebel by rejecting the assumption of black sexuality to be deviant.

Her song “Partition” is another example of her celebration of black female body and her control over the presentation of it. Unlike “Rocket” it is, however, addressed to a specific man – presumably her husband. Thus, it brings about the question whether she puts herself in the position of an object of male gaze or challenges the objectification by having an absolute control over the situation, which in the song leads to an intercourse. The video of the song includes Beyoncé dressed in a bikini, strip teasing, and pole dancing which is again a play with male fantasies by which she

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<sup>198</sup> Weidhase, “‘Beyoncé Feminism’ and the Contestation of the Black Feminist Body,” 128.

<sup>199</sup> Beyoncé Knowles, *Rocket* (New York: Parkwood/Columbia Records, 2013), <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/rocket.html>.

<sup>200</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 89.

<sup>201</sup> hooks, *Black Looks*, 63.

<sup>202</sup> Knowles, *Rocket*.

<sup>203</sup> Knowles.



reinforces the stereotypical animalistic image of black woman and caters to the male gaze. According to Durham this approach can be interpreted as exploitative and liberating at the same time.<sup>204</sup>

Further focus on the beauty of black female body and criticism of Eurocentric beauty standards, to which women are expected to conform, is projected in her song “Pretty Hurts.” Visual images in her music video show Beyoncé at a beauty pageant and going through a great pain to remain thin and young looking. She is shown multiple times bent over a toilet and regurgitating hinting on what women often are willing to experience in order to be accepted by the society. After these images she is pictured on a scale, from which she is forced to leave by a white male who then continues by pointing at her thighs implying she is not thin enough. The video shows a woman that works hard to reach the idea of “perfection”, but is constantly reminded that her efforts are not enough. She feels unfulfilled until she decides to reject the beauty standards and expectations of her environment. This is visualized in her music video with her character smashing and destroying all of her trophies.

She starts by singing, "Mama said, you're a pretty girl/ What's in your head it doesn't matter/ Brush your hair, fix your teeth/ What you wear is all that matters" drawing attention to the influence mothers have on their daughters and how looks are often considered to be more important than education or creativity. The chorus then states “Pretty hurts/ We shine the light on whatever’s worst/ Perfection is a disease of a nation” and provides a commentary of the unrealistic expectations regarding women’s looks. “Pretty hurts” addresses the pain that women often go through to conform to the beauty norms as well as the pain of those who torture themselves to keep up with the high standards. She also addresses the fact that people only focus on the supposedly bad qualities, even though the notion of perfection is subjective. The obsession with perfection is then compared to a disease.

Next verse of the song then explicitly addresses issues relevant to black women – “Blonder hair, flat chest/ TV says bigger is better/ South beach, sugar free/ Vogue says/ Thinner is better” – blond hair and thin body is historically considered to be the ideal image of woman. This is a beauty standard that cannot be fulfilled by black women and puts even more pressure on their psyche. The song exposes her vulnerability and by doing so it again adds another challenge to the stereotype of strong black woman, which is one of the prevailing controlling images mentioned by Collins.

*Beyoncé* was the first visual album she released and, for which she did not use any type of promotion. It is, however, only a set of video clips to accompany her music. Her latest album *Lemonade*, released in 2016, embraces a completely different concept. *Lemonade* is a 56-minute long film composed of twelve music videos connected by

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<sup>204</sup> Durham, ““Check On It,”” 39.

interludes of spoken word and visual images. The album revolves around themes from Beyoncé's personal life as well as it comments on African-American history with special focus on the role of black women in it. It's a call to action.<sup>205</sup>

The whole album is filled with ideas about intimacy, trust, oppression and freedom. She combines audio, visual and textual elements in a unique way to comment on her own experience as a black woman and by extension provides an overview of various ways women have been exploited throughout the history. In the same way that female rappers of the late 1990s redefined the derogatory labels for black women Beyoncé reclaimed number of items used for women's exploitation – these include for instance veils or masks - as well as devices generally viewed as tools of objectification of women in popular culture such as sensual lighting and dancing, slow motion and/or revealing clothing. Her use of these devices set the path to an important next step for black feminism within popular culture.

Using spoken word during the interludes helps to emphasize the words and later on the lyrics of her songs. Similarly to Queen Latifah Beyoncé uses the possibilities of music video to augment her lyrical call to action by showing images of black women, places resembling to slave houses, deep south and/or the stadium that was the place of her first big performance as well as a shelter for victims of hurricane Katrina. At the same time she combines her femininity with choreographies that make her activist statement more engaging and appealing in the same way Janet Jackson did.

Musically, she merges elements of different genres, such as R&B, funk (largely resembling to the works of Betty Davis) or hip-hop and rap. Furthermore, by exceptional use of sampling she created unique sound for each of the album's songs. Accentuating the beats is part of African-American musical tradition and helps performers to express their emotions and feelings – in this case anger, grief, urgency of change.<sup>206</sup>

Beyoncé Knowles is a person full of contradictions that is best analyzed through the lens of hip-hop feminism whose definition accounts for these contradictions. Personally, I believe that acceptance of Beyoncé's feminism is a matter of one's tolerance towards public proclamations of sexual freedom, which is the major issue her critics have. Her empowering effect on black women is, however, undisputable regardless of one's personal view of her approach to black feminism.

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<sup>205</sup> Carol Vernallis, "Beyoncé's Lemonade, Avant-Garde Aesthetics, and Music Video: 'The Past and the Future Merge to Meet Us Here,'" *Film Criticism* 40, no. 3 (July 12, 2016): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0040.315>.

<sup>206</sup> Roberts, "'Ladies First': Queen Latifah's Afrocentric Feminist Music Video," 250.

## 4.2. The Afro-Futuristic Feminist Janelle Monáe

Monáe's contribution to feminism has a different character than that of Beyoncé. While Knowles is often criticized for being overly sexual, Monáe faces opposite problem – her sexuality is being questioned since she does not present herself in such a reveling way. Instead she makes use of lyrics and Afro-futuristic images to spread black feminist thoughts and draw attention to issues black women and other marginalized groups struggle with. Bascomb defines Afro-futurism as “a technology of representation and a technology of imagination” whose critical power comes from “racialized tension between past, future, and present.”<sup>207</sup> Afro-futurist artists then work with images outside this world, which are used to rework the present world. Although her album *Electric Lady* as a whole represents a political statement that is focused on empowerment of women and the necessity to control the images of them, I would like to pay attention particularly to the song “Q.U.E.E.N.” as I believe it contains the highest concentration of social and political issues that are relevant to a number of oppressed groups.

“Q.U.E.E.N.” features African-American artist Erykah Badu and is constructed in the form of question and response, by which Monáe clearly draws on the African-American musical tradition of call-and response. It touches themes ranging from sexuality to religion. According to Monáe, the title is an acronym representing marginalized groups – “Q” stands for queer community, “U” represents the untouchables (people in poverty), “E” for emigrants, the second “E” stands for excommunicated (meaning those who served or still serve their time in prison), and “N” refers to those labeled as negroid.<sup>208</sup>

Monáe opens the song by saying “I can't believe all of the things they say about me/ Walk in the room they throwing shade left to right/ They be like ooh, she's servin' face/ And I just tell em, cut me up, and get down.”<sup>209</sup> “Throwing shade” and “servin' face” are slang expressions used primarily in black LGBT community. The former means to “publicly criticize or express contempt for someone”<sup>210</sup> and the latter to “pose

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<sup>207</sup> Lia T. Bascomb, “Freakifying History: Remixing Royalty,” *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 9, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528631.2015.1056403>.

<sup>208</sup> Jeff Benjamin, “Janelle Monáe Says ‘Q.U.E.E.N.’ Is for the ‘Ostracized & Marginalized,’” Fuse, September 18, 2013, <https://www.fuse.tv/videos/2013/09/janelle-monae-queen-interview>.

<sup>209</sup> Janelle Monáe, *Q.U.E.E.N* (Wondaland Arts Society/ Bad Boy Atlantic Records, 2013), <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/janellemone/queen.html>.

<sup>210</sup> “Throw Shade | Definition of Throw Shade in English by Oxford Dictionaries,” Oxford Dictionaries | English, accessed December 7, 2017, [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/throw\\_shade](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/throw_shade).

intensely in a photograph”<sup>211</sup>, which is used mainly within drag-queen communities. By using these slang terms she creates a link to the queer community. She uses this link again later in the song by asking, for instance, “Say is it weird to like the way she wears her tights?” or “Am I a freak because I love watching Mary?”<sup>212</sup> where she again shows her solidarity with the queer community and points out that people need to be accepted for what they are. Her link to the queer community is later placed within a religious discourse when Monáe asks “Hey brother can you save my soul from the devil?” and “sister am I good enough for your heaven ... or should I reprogram, deprogram, and get down?”<sup>213</sup> The juxtaposition of queer gaze and religion then poses a question whether there is something wrong with Monáe or with the ways religious tradition treats different identities.<sup>214</sup>

The concept of being a “freak” is central to the song and is repeated many times in the chorus question “Am I a Freak For Getting’ Down?”<sup>215</sup> Monáe questions the logic of how people are marginalized based on their identity and refers to the long history within the African diaspora, in which black bodies, particularly black female bodies, were viewed as an abnormality.<sup>216</sup> The most famous example of presenting a black female as a “freak” was Sarah Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus. Under the promise of fame she was brought from Africa to England to be shown to London audiences for money. The Europeans ridiculed her physical appearance and her exploitation eventually led to her early death. After she passed away her body was dissected and put on display in a museum. It was not until 2002 when she was buried in her homeland.<sup>217</sup>

In the video accompanying the song, the viewer is taken to the Afro-futuristic museum where Monáe’s is presented as both the leader of the “freaks” as well as a visitor of the museum. By placing the “freakishness” on display she questions the Western society’s expectations about women of color.<sup>218</sup> Her museum places her performance to a unique space where the past meets the present.

Monáe and Badu also address the constant struggle of black women to break the stereotypes historically placed upon them. “They call us dirty cuz we break all your rules now/ but we just came to act a fool is that alright/ they be like ooh let them eat cake/ but we eat wings and throw them bones on the ground”<sup>219</sup> is a reference to beauty

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<sup>211</sup> “Urban Dictionary: Serving Face,” Urban Dictionary, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=serving%20face>.

<sup>212</sup> Monáe, *Q.U.E.E.N.*

<sup>213</sup> Monáe.

<sup>214</sup> Bascomb, “Freakifying History,” 7.

<sup>215</sup> Monáe, *Q.U.E.E.N.*

<sup>216</sup> Bascomb, “Freakifying History,” 1.

<sup>217</sup> Bascomb, 6.

<sup>218</sup> Bascomb, 1.

<sup>219</sup> Monáe, *Q.U.E.E.N.*

standards, which have made perception of a black female body deviant. Phrase “let them eat cake” then serves as a parallel between the infamous statement of Marie Antoinette addressed to her subjects and the unnamed “they” Monáe questions in her song.<sup>220</sup> From the parallel she then moves to the racist stereotype of “fried chicken”, which is connected to African-Americans because of the way it is consumed, thus reinforcing the animalistic and savage image of black people.

Another question Monáe poses is “is it peculiar that she twerk in the mirror and am I weird to dance alone late at night?”<sup>221</sup> Similarly to Beyoncé (and a number of other African-American artists) she brings attention to her behind and encourages black women to be proud of their bodies. This interpretation lies in her reference to dance known as twerking, which has been historically linked to women of color as it is connected to genres like Dancehall, or New Orleans Bounce.<sup>222</sup> Suggesting itself is the comparison between pro-sex attitude of Beyoncé and Madonna mentioned in the previous chapter and Monáe’s question and Miley Cyrus who recently popularized the dance. The reason is that while white performer is praised for her dancing, woman of color is vilified as lustful and overly sexual.<sup>223</sup> The question Monáe poses thus attacks the double standard employed by the society due to which woman of color is likely to be shamed for performing a dance that is in fact one of the elements central to her culture.

The final passage of the song is Monáe’s rap blatantly addressing the injustices present among not only people of different races or gender. In her complaint she includes people with different sexual orientation or those at the bottom of economical ladder as well. The video moves away from the museum and shows Monáe in the spotlight in a black and white tuxedo, which became her signature clothing. Her rap clearly states the present problems, such as poverty, inequality and the exploitation of laborers by the capitalist society. Throughout the rap she makes a number of historical references – she compares African-Americans to the literary lost generation, herself to queen Nefertiti and Harriet Tubman or alludes Marvin Gaye’s protest song “What’s going On?” The passage ends with clarion statement of what can be done and what she herself does to fight the oppression. By “march[ing] to the streets” and “selling hope” she makes her final statement.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> “Did Marie-Antoinette Really Say ‘Let Them Eat Cake’?,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/demystified/did-marie-antoinette-really-say-let-them-eat-cake>.

<sup>221</sup> Monáe, *Q.U.E.E.N.*

<sup>222</sup> Christiana Mbakwe, “The Origins of Twerking: What It Is, What It Means, and How It Got Appropriated,” Time Inc. Style Collection, Time Inc. Lifestyle Network, xoJane.com, August 30, 2013, <https://www.xojane.com/issues/the-origins-of-twerking#>.

<sup>223</sup> Mbakwe.

<sup>224</sup> Bascomb, “Freakifying History,” 11.

Janelle Monáe is an artist, publicly involved in social activism, who uses her position of a public figure in an exceptionally clever way. Moreover, she is one of the first black female artists to intentionally include a variety of oppressed groups in her work.

## Conclusion

Music is deeply rooted in African-American culture and as such became an important medium for spreading various social or political messages. Thanks to the ability of popular music to reach mass audiences many African-American artists chose the commercial scene to help to spread social awareness and promote change. Despite the majority of these artists being men creating exclusively male centered discourse mainstream culture produced also a number of female artists who managed to provide a different type of music that was aimed at women and other marginalized groups. Whether they identified themselves as black feminists or not, they contributed to the black feminist philosophy and thanks to being a part of mainstream culture managed to influence and encourage empowerment of a great number of women of color.

Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins holds the opinion that black feminism grows mainly on the margins of society as that is the space that women of color generally occupy and that the level of education is secondary to be considered an effective contributor to the theory. This implies that even though academic scholars often overlook popular music as a relevant field of study, for black feminism it is one of the important platforms for expressing black feminist ideas and helping the cause. Artists within the music industry, specifically those that are the subject of my analysis, challenged the Eurocentric standards discriminating women of color and the stereotypical images used to represent them. By looking closely at their body of work I was able to select the most recurrent themes (love, sex and relationships, encouragement of resistance, solidarity with oppressed people, women empowerment, celebration of black female body and general representation of black women) and then examine the lyrics of chosen songs to find how the individual artists approach these themes. In many cases, a song deals with more than one of these themes at once.

Love, sex and relationships are, perhaps, the most common topics found in the examined music. Franklin's "Respect" and "Think" are multilayered in meaning, but the topic of relationship between a man and a woman clearly lies on the surface of both of them. She also touches the topic of sexual desire and challenges the historically given male sexual privilege. The sexuality in her songs is, however, dealt with only by implications and by use of expressions that are often ambiguous. Nevertheless, the ambiguity and layering of meanings helped her songs to become highly relatable by different types of marginalized groups, thus making her a perfect embodiment of the essential concept of black feminism, intersectionality.

Betty Davis is perhaps the most sexual of all the chosen representatives both in her lyrics and visual presentation. All of her songs were filled with sexual references and implications, which resulted in mixed reactions from the audiences. Her work

provides more explicit treatment of female sexuality than that of Franklin. In fact, even Janet Jackson, who was one of Davis' followers, was less explicit until the 1990s. Her visual self-presentation was very provocative compared to not only her predecessors, such as Franklin, but to her contemporaries, like Chaka Khan, as well. Davis ignored the expectations the society of the time had about black women and provided a great influence to later African-American female artists. Davis herself often compared her way of working to that of men, thus showing that despite constant rejection of traditional gender roles, she subconsciously subscribed to them.

Janet Jackson's "Control" and "Nasty" merged the urban and mainstream cultures together and thus managed to spread the black feminist awareness among a greater number of people. Her works largely represent an encouragement to resistance to disrespectful treatment of women. Her lyrics do not attack men, but challenge the first signs of misogyny of hip-hop culture and address the tendency to objectify women. Lyrically she is closer to Franklin's way of expression since her treatment of women's sexuality is rather indirect. Similarity to Davis can be seen in her confidence, self-reliance and control over her work. Davis and Jackson, however, differ in the treatment of women's sexuality. While Davis adopted a role of a man Jackson presented sexuality from a distinctively female perspective and thus added a new element to the black feminist discourse.

Even more explicit approach to feminist issues came with the emergence of hip-hop culture and rap music. Queen Latifah became a pivotal figure among black female rappers as she encouraged resistance to physical and emotional abuse, showed solidarity with the black women and objected the stereotypical images associated with black womanhood. Addressing these themes had an empowering effect on a large number of young black women and became an inspiration for contemporary artists. Latifah's use of language is not metaphorical in any way, which is perhaps the biggest difference compared to the previous artists. Moreover, her rap conveyed political message more than any of the women in question.

Women's sexual liberation and redefinition instead of rejection of the common stereotypical images of black women became the prominent element in the popular music of the 1990s, which continues to this day. Beyoncé became the most dominant representative of black women's sexual autonomy, which also made her a subject of feminist critique. The criticism, however, also brings to the forefront the double standards applied to women of color prevailing in the society. Unlike her predecessors she pays a great deal of attention to the controlling images of black female body and makes use of the redefined stereotypical labels for black women. She bluntly challenges the historical misconception of black female body being an abnormality and openly expresses her comfort with and enjoyment of her femininity to help empowerment of



women of color. Her visual work then further shifts the deep-rooted assumptions linked to African-American women and promotes pride of black womanhood.

Innovative ways to point out the important issues of black female experience can be found in work by Janelle Monáe. In both, her lyrics and visual images, she uses references to the history of African diaspora cleverly connected to the present situation, thus creating a new discourse for the black feminist philosophy. “Q.U.E.E.N.” in particular touches on all of the themes mentioned above, projects assertive urgency and clear political message. Moreover, her approach to lyrics includes all the marginalized groups of the society and for the first time intentionally and openly speaks for queer community as well.

To sum up, I believe that the most obvious change based on the presented analyses is in the explicitness of the lyrics. That is mainly visible in the treatment of female sexuality, which came from mere ambiguous implications to blatant enjoyment of one’s sexual autonomy. With the openness and explicitness also came women’s courage to address those parts of their daily experiences that are overlooked even within the black communities. Another major change is the treatment of stereotypical labels. Throughout the history women of color have tried to eliminate these labels, but in late 1990s their focus shifted to redefinition instead. Today, the originally derogatory terms thus have connotation of “strong black woman” and are used as one of the means of black women’s empowerment.

## Resumé

Předložená diplomová práce se zabývá černým feminismem a způsobem jakým afro-americké umělkyně vyjádřily ve své tvorbě jeho hlavní myšlenky, které byly zformulovány předními autorkami v oboru. Práce nabízí historický přehled vývoje černého feminismu a jeho hlavních definicí vzešlých z historických událostí ve Spojených státech amerických, a to zejména v období od šedesátých let dvacátého století až po současnost. V rámci teoretické části pak práce obsahuje i přehled vývoje afro-americké populární hudby, aby tak poskytla nejdůležitější historické údaje, které by měly být nápomocné k lepší interpretaci konkrétních textů vybraných písní.

Druhá polovina práce zahrnuje stručné seznámení s vybranými osobnostmi důležitými pro vývoj jak populární hudby, tak i pro rozšíření myšlenek černého feminismu do všeobecného povědomí. Cílem těchto analýz je poukázat na to jakým způsobem se jednotlivé umělkyně v rámci populární hudby vyjadřovaly k tématům relevantním pro feministické hnutí a zároveň ukázat, že i přes omezené prostředky populární kultury, konkrétně hudby, byly a jsou schopny nadále posouvat hranice vnímání tohoto žánru a současně poukázat na problémy plynoucí z dualistického přístupu k ženám (potažmo jiným marginalizovaným skupinám.)

Práce začíná shrnutím historie černého feminismu od prvních zmínek až po oddělení samostatného černého feministického hnutí. To vzniklo až v roce 1973 jako reakce na vyčlenění afro-amerických žen z ženského hnutí, které se rozvinulo hlavně v šedesátých letech dvacátého století. Druhým podnětem pro založení samostatného hnutí byl přetrvávající sexismus ze strany afro-amerických mužů vůči afro-americkým ženám. Jelikož každý ze zastánců jednoho z těchto hnutí považoval příklon černých žen k jedné nebo druhé straně za zradu buď rasy nebo genderu, dostaly se ženy do velice svízelné situace, ze které vedlo jediné východisko, a to samostatné hnutí, které by zohledňovalo jak rasovou, tak genderovou příslušnost. Samostatným hnutím byl také zdůrazněn základní koncept černého feminismu, a to „propojenost.“ Koncept propojenosti upozorňuje na to, že diskriminace se nedá posuzovat v izolaci, ale vždy jde ruku v ruce s jinými faktory určenými společností. Rasová diskriminace tedy nemůže být oddělena od genderové nebo třídní.

Základní body samostatného hnutí pak jasně sepsala skupina The Combahee River Collective a Alice Walker, která v rámci svých esejí dokonce vytvořila nové jméno pro příslušníky černého feminismu, a to „womanismus“. Navzdory tomu, že filozofie černého feminismu i womanismu je prakticky totožná, mnoho černých žen se mnohem raději hlásí k womanismu. Důvodem je asociace slova „feminismus“ s bílými ženami a také fakt, že černý feminismus ve své definici nenechává prostor pro jinou

sexuální orientaci. Womanismus naproti tomu definuje jako svou součást i lásku ženy k ženě bez ohledu na to, jedná-li se o sexuální kontext nebo ne.

V další části pak práce popisuje stereotypy historicky asociované s ženami jiného než evropského původu. Nejčastěji opakující se stereotyp je nazván „Jezebel“ a po vzoru biblické postavy naráží na ženu, která je divoká a promiskuitní. Tento stereotyp, který má kořeny už v době otroctví, v sobě také nese přesvědčení, že tělo ženy afrického původu (potažmo jakéhokoliv jiného než evropského původu) je abnormalitou, které přísluší jen výsměch.

Následující kapitola se zabývá přehledem vývoje afro-americké populární hudby, a to od otrockých písní a spirituálů až po vznik hip-hopové kultury. Prostor je v ní přenechán primárně ženám, které měly zásadní vliv na tento vývoj. První podkapitola popisuje jakým způsobem se vyvíjel jazz a blues, které jsou pravděpodobně největším přínosem afro-americké hudební tradice pro populární hudbu. Zároveň také představuje důležité umělce s těmito žánry neodmyslitelně spojenými. V další části je pak prezentován přehled hudby, která doprovázela revoluční 60. léta. Tento obsahuje nejen hudbu populární, ale i její spojitost s hudbou kostelní, tedy gospelem. Poslední podkapitola pak mapuje vývoj hip-hopové kultury a stejnojmenného žánru, který má dodnes na populární hudbu zásadní vliv.

Analytická část práce se zabývá vybranými umělkyněmi a jejich písněmi, které slouží jako reprezentativní vzorek afro-americké populární hudby každého desetiletí, ve kterém se vyvíjela filozofie černého feminismu. Umělkyně, na které se práce zaměřuje jsou Aretha Franklin, Betty Davis, Janet Jackson, Queen Latifah, Beyoncé Knowles a Janelle Monáe. Kapitola prezentuje stručné informace o jejich životě a stylu tvorby a také o jejich spojení s myšlenkami černého feminismu. Obsahová analýza vybraných písní z jejich tvorby pak poskytuje podklad k interpretaci skrz teorii černého feminismu.

Tvorba Arethy Franklin se vyznačuje především mnohovrstvým přístupem k textům. Jako ukázky jsou v práci zvoleny písně „Respect“ a „Think“, které jsou dnes vnímány nejen jako feministické hymny, ale také krásně ukazují zmiňovanou mnohovrstevnatost. Na první pohled písně hovoří o ženě nepříliš spokojené ve svém vztahu. Při hlubším zkoumání jde ale i o jasné prohlášení ženské nezávislosti a útok na historicky zažitou mužskou nadřazenost. Texty Arethy Franklin také obsahují mnoho dvojznačných elementů a narážek, které se často vykládají jako projev její sexuální touhy. Tato dvojznačnost umožňuje velké množství různých interpretací, zejména v případě písně „Respect“, což umožnilo různým skupinám bojujícím proti diskriminaci, aby se s její hudbou snadno ztotožnily a tím se Franklin v podstatě stala ztělesněním základního konceptu černého feminismu, tedy propojenosti.

Betty Davis je pak unikátním příkladem afro-americké umělkyně, která doslova předběhla svou dobu. Celá její kariéra je vnímána jako velmi kontroverzní a ve své době

vyvolávala vlny kritiky i mezi afro-američany. Davis se sice nikdy k feminismu nehlásila, je ale jednou z žen, jejíž přístup k životu i k práci s hudbou demonstruje nejzákladnější myšlenky tohoto hnutí. Pro analýzu byly zvoleny písně „Anti-Love Song“ a „Nasty Gal“, které představují její otevřený přístup k ženské sexualitě, a ve kterých ukazuje své tendence stavět se do typicky mužské role. Naneštěstí je dnes známá především jako jedna z manželek slavného trumpetisty Milese Davise.

Další zvolenou umělkyní je pak Janet Jackson, jejíž přínos filozofii černého feminismu leží hlavně v podpoře vzdoru proti mužské nadřazenosti a objektivizaci žen. Písně „Control“ a „Nasty“ nabádají ženy k převzetí kontroly nad vlastním životem a ke konfrontaci stereotypního vnímání žen jako sexuálních objektů aniž by na muže otevřeně útočily. Hudebně pak propojila typicky afro-americkou kulturu s kulturou mainstreamovou a podařilo se jí tak rozšířit demografii v rámci populární kultury. Později ve své tvorbě také obohatila diskurz černého feminismu o téma ženské sexuality popisované čistě z ženské perspektivy.

Queen Latifah byla zvolena jako zástupkyně hip-hopové kultury, která ve svých písních „Ladies First“ a U.N.I.T.Y.“ otevřeně kritizovala jak společenské stereotypy, tak fyzické i psychické týrání žen a zároveň propagovala hrdost ke svým africkým kořenům. Vzhledem k popularitě rapu mezi mladými využila tento žánr jako médium k rozšíření povědomí o problémech postavení žen v afro-amerických komunitách i k vyvolání společenské diskuze a propagaci změny rasové i genderové hierarchie ve společnosti.

Poslední kapitola této práce se zabývá změnou přístupu afro-amerických umělkyní k sebe prezentaci a k historicky zakořeněným stereotypům obklopujícím ženy africké diaspory. Tato změna se projevila ve stylu oblékání, který dostal velmi provokativní charakter a v redefinování výrazů, které snižovaly ženskou důstojnost. Tato redefinice vedla k tomu, že původně hanlivé termíny se staly výrazem hrdosti a síly černých žen. Jako reprezentantky afro-americké populární hudby nového milénia byly vybrány zpěvačky Beyoncé a Janelle Monáe.

Beyoncé je jednou z nejdominantnějších umělkyní současné hudební scény, která se veřejně hlásí k myšlenkám feminismu a propaguje je od úplných počátků své kariéry. Její velmi odvážná sebe prezentace, přímočaré vyjadřování v textech a otevřená láska k vlastnímu tělu má velký vliv na její publikum, které se primárně skládá z mladých žen. Pro mnohé je ale její osoba terčem kritiky a často je jí vyčítáno, že tento liberální přístup k sexualitě není dobrým modelem vzhledem k tomu, kdo tvoří základnu jejich posluchačů. I přes tuto kontroverzi jí ale nelze upřít schopnost svou hudbou vzbuzovat hrdost a sílu v ženách všech ras a původů.

Poslední zvolenou umělkyní je Janelle Monáe, která je také otevřenou zastánkyní filozofie černého feminismu a celá její tvorba je demonstrací její snahy upozornit na

sociální nerovnosti. Konkrétně píseň „Q.U.E.E.N.“ je ukázkou unikátního spojení historie a současnosti této nerovnosti a dvojího metru, se kterým ženy již mnoho let bojují. Jak text písně, tak i doplňující video je jasným politickým prohlášením a projevem rozhořčenosti nad přetrvávající diskriminací, a to primárně afro-amerických žen. Zároveň je také jednou z prvních afro-amerických umělkyní, která cíleně hovoří i k jiným marginalizovaným skupinám a queer komunitě.

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## Anotace

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Hlavním cílem této práce je seznámení se s černým feminismem a vybranými umělkyněmi afro-amerického původu, které se zasloužily o rozšíření a propagaci myšlenek černého feminismu v rámci populární kultury, konkrétně hudby. Práce se zabývá vznikem a definicí černého feminismu a jeho současné podoby a poskytuje také přehled vývoje afro-americké populární hudby a umělců, kteří zásadním způsobem tento vývoj ovlivnili. Praktická část se pak zaměřuje na představení vybraných umělkyně afro-amerického původu a analýzu textů písní, které reprezentují jednotlivá desetiletí vývoje černého feminismu a vizuální prezentace těchto umělkyně. Cílem této analýzy je srovnání vyjadřovacích a jiných prostředků, které ve své tvorbě využily k rozšiřování povědomí o zásadních otázkách a problémech černého feminismu a k boji proti rasové a genderové diskriminaci na základě formulací definic předních autorek a aktivistek v oboru.

## **Annotation**

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The aim of this work is to introduce the black feminist thought and women artists of African-American origin, who have contributed to broadening and promoting the ideas of black feminism within the popular culture, namely music. The work deals with the emergence and definition of black feminism and its present form, and provides an overview of the development of African-American popular music and artists who have fundamentally influenced these developments. The practical part focuses on introducing selected artists of Afro-American origin and analyzing the texts of songs that represent the individual decades of the development of black feminism and the visual presentation of these artists. The purpose of this analysis is a comparison of expressive and other means used in their work to expand awareness of the fundamental issues of black feminism and to fight against racism and gender discrimination based on the definitions of leading authors and activists in the field.