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The Rhetoric of *Lemonade*: Empowered Women Empower Women

Almost two years ago, Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* was released. Before it came out I was eager to see the trailer, especially after I heard her first song, “Formation”, released from the album. There was talk on social media that the inspiration for this album was found from the affair her husband, Jay Z, had had with another woman. I later found out that that was only partially true. As I looked closer, I found many other themes than just their marriage aspect, but also empowerment and a great pride in African American women’s culture. *Lemonade* is set in New Orleans, which is traced back to Beyoncé’s ancestors. You see plantations in a few of the chapters that this video consists of as well as other New Orleans traditions like the types of instruments played and Mardi Gras celebrations. She is also in the Saint’s Superdome, where she had her first Super Bowl performance show. Her mother, Tina Knowles, also expresses the video is more about hope and redemption after dealing with something tragic happening. How you heal from that is what it is all about (“Tina Knowles Lawson Says “Lemonade” Is About More Than Cheating and Betrayal”, www.youtube.com). The video is made up of several chapters or stages of grief that go through Beyoncé’s coping process of the affair. I wanted to break down each one and analyze them individually. The chapters include: Intuition, Denial, Anger, Apathy, Emptiness, Accountability, Reformation, Forgiveness, Resurrection, Hope, and Redemption. To start each chapter, Beyoncé speaks words from Warshan Shire, who is an African American female poet. In the article, “The Woman Who Gave Poetry to Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*”, the author, Amanda Hess, states, “*Lemonade*,” which credits Ms. Shire with “film adaptation and poetry,” may catapult her to a new level of pop-culture fame, but she is already known to many as a compelling voice on black womanhood and the African diaspora — one particularly resonant in the digital age. (Amanda Hess, “Warsan Shire, the Woman Who Gave Poetry to Beyoncé's 'Lemonade'.”, www.nytimes.com). Warshan Shire laid low when Lemonade came out and did not publicize it at all, which makes me think that Beyoncé really wanted to make people think those words came from herself. At first I was unaware of this because the way she says everything makes it seem like her own words. After finding this out, I was a little disappointed because she had taken words from someone else and used them as her own. An analysis of Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* exposes us to the private life of not only a celebrity but a whole group of individuals (African American women) who are empowered and stand for what is right. In this case Beyoncé calls Jay Z out for cheating, while also calling out police officers for brutality. She bands with other African American women to show their independence and the influence they can have on others.

While I do believe that Beyoncé wanted to incorporate the strong representation of empowered women, that was not my first reaction after watching *Lemonade* for the first time like I mentioned previously. I assumed it only had to do with Jay-Z having an affair during their marriage because that was mainly what I had heard in the media. The topic of the affair is also brought up heavily throughout the whole music video. The opening starts out with Beyoncé on a stage sitting and in a field walking in an all-black outfit. This scene immediately shows her vulnerability by the words she sings, “I pray to catch you whispering, I pray you catch me listening.” This song also leads into the first chapter, which is Intuition. The black and white screen and the soft music set a somber mood. She says, “I tried to make a home out of you, but doors lead to trap doors, a stairway leads to nothing. She compares Jay Z to her father in the sense that, “he is a magician and cannot be in two places at once.” She accuses him of lying when coming home late at night. She gets strong feelings that he is taking advantage of her and relates this to her parents, saying her mother’s intuition was similar. Throughout *Lemonade*, we are given examples of how her parents and grandparents were and, from generation to generation, love appears this way in a negative light. She begins stating what a curse this love is to her. You see a very powerful image as well toward the end of the chapter. Beyoncé is on the edge of a building getting ready to jump. As she falls she plummets into the water, where she talks about her healing process. She states that she tried to change. This is a message to women specifically, meaning you cannot and should not change for anyone (“Lemonade by Beyoncé: The Full Visual Album”, www.marquettesharie.com).