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# Stealing the Mic: Struggles of the Black Female Voice in Rap

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**Stealing the Mic: Struggles of the Black Female Voice in Rap**

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“You’ve taken my blues and gone-You sing ‘em on Broadway-And you sing ‘em in Hollywood Bowl- And you mixed ‘em up with symphonies-And you fixed ‘em-So they don’t sound like me. Yep, you done taken my blues and gone” -Langston Hughes

From Langston Hughes to hip hop, African Americans have a long history of white appropriation. Rap, as a part of hip hop culture, gave rise to marginalized voices of minorities in the wake of declining employment opportunities and racism in the postindustrial economy beginning in the 1970s (T. Rose 1994, p. 2). The genre has been used to galvanize solidarity through a shared history in the face of a system of oppression as hip hop began as rhymed narratives voicing personal experiences. Emerging from the South Bronx in New York City, many of these personal experiences from the perspective of young black men and women (T. Rose 1994). These stories lived in the streets until “music entrepreneur Sylvia Robinson released “Rapper’s Delight” in 1979” and “rap music was ‘discovered’ by the music industry, the print media, the fashion industry, and the film industry, each of which hurried to cash in on what was assumed to be a passing fad” (T. Rose 1994, p. 3). Since then, hip hop has remained in the spotlight as the latest cultural trend to be profited on, by reproducing the same stories of black masculinity, femininity, and marginalization into neat packages for the mainstream young-white-(mostly male)-suburban consumer.

Hip hop was born of a time and place with its uniquely urban stories and struggles to share. As Tricia Rose (1994) explains, rap “music brings together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues in contemporary American society” (p. 1). As a large part of hip hop culture, rap was an exchange of fast-paced rhymed stories that detailed life

in the margins. Rap is an art form that celebrated and referred to “black cultural figures and rituals, mainstream film, video and television characters, and little-known black heroes” through an ever-changing insider language and rhythmic recontextualization of images, sounds and ideas (T. Rose 1994, p. 4). Born and premised on life on the margins, rap belongs to hip hop culture, however, its profitability to the white masses has recontextualized its marginalized content and instead marginalized its creators.

Hip hop and rap, like rock-n-roll before it, and jazz and blues before that, is now fully appropriated by white mainstream culture. The seductive beats can be heard on nearly every pop music radio station across the airwaves. Black music, and subsequently black culture, has been appropriated by dominant white mainstream culture. This cultural appropriation is used to sell a stereotypical and often harmful image of black America to the white mainstream, all the while reifying a power structure that functions to justify the oppression of black communities. This appropriation of black culture is not new. The popularity of hip hop and rap, especially amongst white urban and suburban youth, demonstrates a repetition of cultural theft that, once again, steals the sounds, style, and stories, of black youth without compensation of minority cultures. This is part of the history of American music. Music has been used by subjugated groups to cultivate solidarity and rejoice in a shared experience. Negro spirituals, a type of folksong born from the slave era expressed liberation and sorrow and later gave birth to blues, jazz, rock and roll, and the American music industry today. Scholars Artz and Murphy (2001) explain that pop culture works to maintain this cultural hegemony in their historic look at the theft and reclamation of minority group culture as seen in the Blues Brothers and Elvis using jazz and soul to boost their cultural wholesale to white masses. Black female artists experience this cultural appropriation in specifically sexist ways in which black femaleness takes on

stereotypical images of the “exotic other,” that is presented for the sexual pleasures and desires for the white mainstream audience. This same cultural theft without compensation continues on today in the world of rap and hip hop. Black female artists in particular have struggled to survive and thrive within the predominance of male rappers, and in doing so have created discursive spaces from which to deliver powerful messages of black female empowerment (Keyes 2000). This message becomes blurred, however, when white female artists cherry-pick aspects of black culture and represent them as their own. This puts the appropriation by current white pop moguls Miley Cyrus and Taylor Swift as a revamp of “Elvis syndrome” who similarly profit from black culture. The lack of recognition for black contributions is a cultural injustice.

Grounded in the same historical cultural theft, I will analyze a controversy within pop culture in order to examine contemporary flows of appropriation amongst female pop stars. The first part of the controversy occurred when black female rapper, Nicki Minaj tweeted about MTV not nominating her music video despite its clear impact on pop culture. Teen pop sweetheart, Taylor Swift, presuming the tweet was aimed at her, responded despite her record of black cultural appropriation being far from spotless. She answered reprimanding Minaj’s unsisterly subtweet that “pit[s] women against each other” and proposed that “maybe one of the men took your slot.” Her response sums up the problem of “white feminism” or how the prioritization of the needs of white women marginalizes the issues that affect women of color as she missed the point of Minaj’s swipe at the racist music industry.

The second part of the controversy occurred on live television between Nicki Minaj and white pop icon, Miley Cyrus, at the recent 2015 MTV Video Music Awards Show. Cyrus has a history of profiting off of aspects of black culture such wearing her hair in dreads, arming her teeth in grillz, dancing seductively by twerking, sexying up her lyrics and music videos all in an

attempt to revamp her Disney image. This has resulted in a tenuous relationship with Minaj who recognizes Cyrus's performance of black culture as problematic. This dispute resulted in Cyrus calling out Minaj for Minaj's post on Twitter about the lack of recognition black women receive for their influence on pop culture and the recognition of "women with slim bodies" amongst the awards nominees for 2015. The tweet was received as "not too kind" by Cyrus and the two had a public disagreement at the 2015 Video Music Awards when Minaj called her out with the now famous "Miley, what's good?" to which Cyrus composed herself enough to brush off the comment. The quarrel between these artists illustrates an interesting point to explore about the cultural appropriation that white artists enact to promote their careers.

This controversy is read to illuminate our current cultural moment in which issues of race, gender, and power are, once again, at the forefront of American culture and politics as evidenced by the Black Lives Matter<sup>1</sup> movement and the continued fight for gender equality<sup>2</sup>. In order to examine this controversy, I begin with a discussion of key theoretical terms including "cultural appropriation," "colorblind ideology," and "black female identity."

## **Culture: Appropriation and Appreciation**

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<sup>1</sup> A movement that began with the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin by a police officer, Black Lives Matter is a campaign that seeks to address violence against black people (<http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>)

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the "War on Women" which is an expression used to express the restriction of Republican party policies on the rights and reproductive rights of women in the U.S.

Culture, according to James O. Young (2005), “refers to the language, customs, basic values, religion, core beliefs, and activities of a group of people” (p. 136). Minorities tend to have shared histories, style of life, and language that are tools to bolster their capital in a society where the social order is stacked against them. When cultures meet there is opportunity for exchange that may take either the route of appreciation or appropriation.

Etymologically speaking, *appropriation* derives from the Latin root *proprium*, meaning “one’s own” (Shugart, 1997, p. 210). Helene Shugart (1997) defines appropriation as “any instance in which means commonly associated with and/or perceived as belonging to another are used to further one’s own ends” (P#). While these exchanges may not be intended to deconstruct other’s meanings or experiences, the effect is still the same: reasserting the hegemonic social order. Culture is not only a way of living but an integral building block to identity formation. Cultural appropriation then, is the process by which marginalized groups serve as resources for these building blocks of identity which dominant groups then seize to bolster their own cultural identity. This process involves the “assimilation and exploitation of marginalized and colonized cultures in the survival of subordinated cultures and their resistance to dominant cultures” (Rogers, 2006, p. 474). Rogers sheds light on the flow of culture in making the distinction between cultural dominance and cultural exploitation. Cultural dominance is described as “the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed onto the subordinated culture, including appropriations that enact resistance” (Rogers, 2006, p. 477). Those appropriations that enact resistance would be what Shugart explains as a “popular strategy of members of various disenfranchised social groups that claim and utilize labels conventionally applied by their oppressors in a derogatory manner as a way of challenging their original meaning” (p. 210).



Rogers goes on to delineate cultural exploitation as “the appropriation of elements of a subordinated culture by a dominant culture without substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation” (p. 477). All of this is to say that cultural appropriation is a form of colonization that serves the colonizer and harms the colonized.

These cultural flows are dictated in part by the commodification of minority culture. Culture outside of the societal default of white are “othered” as they embody an identity in opposition to the white norm that is mysterious yet appealing. In her chapter “Eating the Other,” black feminist scholar bell hooks (1992) explains that “ethnicity becomes a spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture” (p. 44). She posits that mass culture in this contemporary location “both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference” (p. 52). These cultural dabblings act as appropriation of culture as a sort of costume or experience that can be used to titillate the mainstream but is ultimately not one’s own to reap the benefits or consequences of. hooks continues on to explain appropriation as “the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever the difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, *via* exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualization” (p. 58). The flows of pop culture carry stories of the existing power structure where hegemony is parceled out in instances of appropriation.

### **Black Culture: A History of Appropriation**

Black culture has a rich history fraught with theft in order to maintain the hegemonic status quo. D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* featuring the birth of blackface to a mass audience cemented and proliferated racist stereotypes (Epp 2003). Blackface conventions not only excluded African Americans from the stage but also were assumed to function to the white audiences as an authentic recreation of African American culture. An analysis of Spike Lee's (2000) film, *Bamboozled*, in noting American entertainment's history of discrimination and harmful minstrel stereotypes, is helpful in examining the continued borrowing and manipulation of black culture today. Blackface minstrelsy was "popular historically because it allowed 'white' audiences and performers to play at being 'black' and construct a discriminating 'whiteness'" (Epp 2003). Subjugated groups are rarely given the authority to shape their own portrayals as dominant groups create the mold into which the black identity is forced.

These performances projected and played up black stereotypes that acted as a controlling images to keep Blacks in metaphorical chains. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) details the portrayal specifically of black women as mammies, matriarchs, welfare queens, and jezebels undermines black women as individuals and justifies their oppression at the intersection of class, race, and gender. Their condition is normalized in binary thought process that looks at black women in relation to their opposite which consistently puts them at the low end of the power spectrum on the plains of "white/black, male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, fact/opinion, mind/body, and subject/object" (p. 80). With these binaries, women of color are "othered" as they fall outside the white male "norm." Keeping the power structure often involves the objectification of the subordinate group through these controlling images that are propagated by social institutions. When these images are proffered and turned into an expectation internalized by audiences for

generations of unrepresentative media portrayals, the effects are damaging and serve to normalize the black condition (Hill Collins 2000).

Postmodern blackface, like literal Blackface, is performative; however, “the performative nature of postmodern Blackface-as a form of talk with the self-is embedded, then revealed as a result of its mediation” (Moscowitz, 2009, p. 3). Postmodern blackface has merit as Epp notes the ability to play at being ‘black’ “might indeed be popular in the new millennium since desires for such play and group consolidation are key to American mass entertainment. Spike Lee’s film provides a look at black identity and claims to authenticity, especially in looking at the white audience participation as they gleefully attest that they too are ‘niggers.’ Scholars Chidester, Campbell and Bell (2006) note the problem of self-labeling “as an expression of power is no more a meaningful claim to authenticity than is an attempt to immerse oneself in the culture and behaviors of the Other” (p. 295). Associating oneself with a culture of the “Other” doesn’t afford one the right to claim authenticity, but rather affirms a white power structure in which the “audience is not addressed as capable of resistance but instead interpellated as deserving to have its assumed desires of whiteness fulfilled” (Epp, 2003, p. 22). Bauman characterized identity as a “modern invention because one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure where one belongs” (1996, p. 18). A reading of postmodern blackface in a time of rampant cultural exchange serves to answer this exigence of identity created by uncertainty. Mastery of the Other image boosts the culture capital of the dominant by robbing the subjugated group by claiming and re-presenting the symbols of the “postmodern image, shorn of all sense of historic roots or evaluative tradition, becomes whatever the consumer of the image wishes it to be” (Chidester et. al., 2006, p. 302). Black culture is used to bolster mainstream identity while consequently impinging on Black identity.

## **Colorblind to be Cool**

Following the civil rights movement, a “post racial America” emerged which serves to erase the color line and silence a progressive discussion of race and class issues. A colorblind perspective “insinuates that class and culture, and not institutional racism, are responsible for social inequality” (Gallagher, 2003, p. 22). Charles Gallagher (2003) argues that colorblind depictions of US race relations in the media serve to maintain white privilege by suggesting that discriminatory racial barriers have been dismantled. He goes on to cite commodification and mass marketing across the color line as a responsible factor that perpetuate colorblindness. The music industry especially reaches across the color line into the pockets of white consumers to market hip hop culture to a wide audience. A white suburban kid wearing a baggy shirt emblazoned with “Straight Outta Compton,” a Chicago Bulls snapback, and the newest Jordans is a manifestation of the post racial marketing goal. Black neo-conservatives like Clarence Thomas, Condoleeza Rice, and Ben Carson whose principles focus on the economy and gloss over racial aspects of citizens’ well-being also add a little spit shine to America’s colorblind lenses. In this way, colorblind ideology does not ignore race but rather “acknowledges race while disregarding racial hierarchy by taking racially coded styles and products and reducing these symbols to commodities or experiences that whites and racial minorities can purchase and share” (Gallagher, 2003, p. 25).

Notions of black pride or discussions of race have been decried as inherently racist and in stripping the racially coded material from rap and replacing it with colorblind symbols, effectively nullifies the threat it poses to white society (Gallagher 2003, Rodriquez 2006). In participating in hip hop and carving out the black coded images, hip hop is shorn from its

historical and cultural roots and redefined as belonging to the societal collective. Whitewashing with a colorblind brush deconstructs hip hop as a threat to the social order and assimilates it to reify the white power structure. Racial relations tend to center around white feelings and guilt and the assimilation/deconstruction of black culture through colorblind ideology allows whites to inhabit a social and psychological space that is free of racial tension (Gallagher 2003).

Colorblind participation in black culture is about making oneself comfortable in an environment by resignifying certain elements to make it one's own.

As Rodriguez (2006) makes note in his case study on white participation in hip hop culture, colorblindness is used as a rhetorical strategy that allows whites youth to claim they are simply “cool people moving in a cultural milieu of blackness while avoiding [...] white guilt” (p. 656). Hip hop culture is on the cusp of new trends to be swept up by popular culture and acts as the youth cognoscente of slang and fashion trends. Another draw to hip hop is the essence of otherness as white teenage rap fans are “fascinated by its differences, drawn in by mainstream social constructions of Black culture as a forbidden narrative, as a symbol of rebellion” (T. Rose, 1994, p. 5). The problem with this is that it legitimizes the current social, political, and economic structures that privileges the white populace.

### **Black Female Identity**

Black females face many barriers in entering and maintaining relevance within the rap sphere. *Essence*, the leading Black women's magazine reduced rap to a simple formula of “...throw a few ‘bitches’ and ‘hoes’ in your lyrics, brag about their performing sex acts and make a few obligatory references to ways to keep women in check” (Hunter & Soto 2009). Black

female emcees (femcees) often utilize similar discourse used by male rappers in order to exist within the same domain. This is most often exemplified in the reappropriation of the terms “bitch” or “ho” as stated above as Haugen explains in “Unladylike Divas” that in doing so, the artist “has and displays ‘solidarity’ to herself and presumes power over the addressee” (Haugen 2003, 434). Thus black women are filtered through an oppressive cycle where their sexualized bodies are proliferated by male rappers and these stereotypes are then picked up and profited on by white pop artists.

There is importance in maintaining black female representation in music as Reid-Brinkley (2008) explores how black women’s discourse, described by Olga Davis (2002) within the article as “a rhetoric for survival” illustrates how black female voices serve as a vehicle for black feminism. Black feminism in rap provides “countervailing voices against male sexism and misogyny” by combatting commonly held stereotypes of black female inferiority and instead performs social reality (Oware, 2009, p. 788). The exploration of “safe spaces” or “social spaces where black women can speak freely” that are free of observation from dominant social groups (meaning both white individuals and black males) is where this rhetoric is constructed (Reid-Brinkley 2008). Black female identity is challenged by stereotypes and appropriation that carries and promulgates those stereotypes and black women are under pressure to reconcile their identity to conform to an ideal. A lack of black female voices contributes to this lack of representation that is detrimental to that identity.

## **Methodology**

Through a cultural criticism lens of feminist ideology, I will discuss the ways in which the appropriation of black culture has functioned to maintain a social stratification of accessibility for black females in the music industry and how that is reflected in their societal status. The coverage of this controversy positions these women within different stereotypes, which, in turn, often distract from and leave issues of racism and identity unaddressed. Digging beneath the surface of these images to examine the roots of the stereotypes, I will navigate the shared space of black female and white female artists to create a more comprehensive look at the race and gender related issues of today.

This paper engages in the culture politics of authenticity and commodification and its effects on black female identity as played out in the rhetorical space created by this controversy. Each of these texts functions as a specifically crafted representation of a bigger picture concerning race and gender that invoke a broader socio-cultural meaning in discussing black female identity within American society.

In order to assemble a thorough account of the controversy, I gathered the exclusive interviews, dialogue from televised interactions and social media interactions, and public statements of each of the women. Searching LexisNexis Academic with each of the women's names, keeping my search within the week of each part of the controversy, narrowed the material for an analysis of mainstream media coverage. I coded the words associated with each woman in the interviews and consolidated the patterns into the stereotypes that were perpetuated. These stereotypes placed the women in varying subject positions that imposed limitations on the messages stemming from the controversies.

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci introduces the function of ideologies in his theory of cultural hegemony, as a form of social control. The theory describes ideologies as stabilizing

agents for society by serving as social laws. These laws lay out norms to follow and weigh the acceptability of opposing norms. Culturally born and enforced, these social laws subsequently “invite us to understand the world in certain ways, but not in others” (Foss 2009). The dominant ideologies muffle the voices of non-dominant ideologies and their silence is taken as compliance to the dominant ideology. The dominant ideology in this case is the portrayal of black female sexuality as an objectified and commodified entity in pop culture that saturates media, and thus, society has a two dimensional idea of black female identity that acts as a continuation of the subjugation of the non-dominant group in the music industry: black female rappers.

### **Swift: Brushes with Appropriation**

From her music video “Wildest Dreams” to “Shake It Off,” Taylor Swift has had her fair share of accusations of cultural appropriation and racial insensitivity. However, stemming from the safety net of being America’s pop sensation sweetheart, these accusations are generally hurled from the fringes. The music video for “Shake It Off” released in 2014 on her wildly successful album *1989*, features an array of backup dancers from various ethnicities however the twerking section of the video definitively featured a faceless Black female backside with a lily white Swift gawking from below. The video effectively “positioned herself and her dancers in such a way as to elitize some dancers and reduce others” (Jackson 2014). She looks respectfully at the white ballerinas as their expressive faces grace the camera’s pan, whereas the camera only entertains closeups of the lower half of the twerking women’s bodies as she stands in the gaudiest, over-the-top “black girl” costume. The women of color in her video are exclusively featured within the twerking scene which symbolically relegates them to a booty-shaking



stereotype. Using disembodied black women as the backdrop for an I'm-socially-awkward-let's-dance-it-out montage was careless and disrespectful and reminiscent of the way black women are used as props by black male rappers.

“Wildest Dreams,” also released in 2014 on her *1989* album, was problematic as it romanticized African colonialism. The music video takes place in Africa where Taylor Swift plays a colonial-era actress falling in love with her white co-star, surrounded by her white staff members. The barbarous and exploitative history of white colonialism in Africa is glossed over to watch the love story unfold on a landscape glorified for its visually aweinspiring scenery and animals but not its people as there is not an African person in sight. In these videos, Swift exploits various racial backdrops to tell her story while erasing theirs.

### **Swift-Minaj Controversy**

The controversy began July 21st 2015 when the MTV Video Music Award nominations were released. Among the Video of the Year Award nominees was Taylor Swift's “Bad Blood.” Nicki Minaj's “Anaconda,” despite breaking the record for the most Vevo views in 24 hours (19.6 million), wasn't nominated for the most widely noted and coveted award nor was her collaboration with Beyoncé, “Feeling Myself” nominated for any awards (Harris 2015). “Anaconda” was one of the most memed, most GIF'd<sup>3</sup>, and most parodied music videos - with parodies on Ellen and SNL - making it one of the most popular videos of the year. Minaj was

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<sup>3</sup> GIFs or Graphics Interchange Format is a very short video clip capturing a snippet of movement generally from television shows, movies, or other parts of pop culture and widely shared via social media

rightly angered by the lack of a nomination. Minaj voiced her dismay in a series of tweets that began with a sarcastic jab at MTV asking “Lol you guys did we miss the deadline??” referring to the additional absence of “Feeling Myself” in the line-up. She then continued on more emphatically, this time shifting to a discussion of “Anaconda” in stating, “If I were a different ‘kind’ of artist” and “When the ‘other’ girl drop a video that breaks record and impacts culture they get that nomination.” She goes on to say, “If your video celebrates women with very slim bodies, you will be nominated for vid of the year.”

About an hour later, Swift, believing that the tweets were directed to her, took to the Twittersphere to chastise Minaj. Swift responded with, “I’ve done nothing but love & support you. It’s unlike you to pit women against each other. Maybe one of the men took your slot...” To which Minaj responded “Huh? [You] must not be reading my tweets. Didn’t say a word about [you]. I love [you] just as much. But [you] should speak on this.” While Taylor Swift was the subject of the tweets, she wasn’t the target and Minaj highlighted this point following Swift’s confusion by retweeting a fan’s tweet that stated: “It’s not even any shade to the other artists. It’s just that Nicki is getting snubbed for doing the same thing they’re getting awards for.” Swift then responded to Minaj with “If I win, please come up with me!! You’re invited to any stage I’m ever on” which effectively dismissed Minaj’s point. At this point, the rest of the Twittersphere is reacting with celebrities like Ryan Seacrest saying Minaj “took a jab” and Piers Morgan tweeting an op-ed about “whiny” Minaj and telling her to not “play the race card” calling her a “stroppey piece of work whose video wasn’t as good as Taylor Swift’s.” The same day, Bruno Mars and Ed Sheeran made light of the situation by hopping on the bandwagon and starting their own fake “twitter beef.” While Minaj’s followers jumped to her defense, most of the media blew the controversy up as a “catfight” in which Minaj was pegged as the guilty attacker and Swift was

placed in the role of the innocent victim. Fans from both sides of the controversy begged the artists to simply get along. Former *Breaking Bad* star, Aaron Paul repeated similar sentiments in offering to end the spat over breakfast food in his tweet: “Dear @taylorswift13 and @NICKIMINAJ, I love you both. How about we all get together and talk this thru? Coffee? Pancakes?? My treat. Ap.” Swift came back to the Twittersphere the next day to apologize with “I thought I was being called out. I missed the point, I misunderstood, then misspoke. I’m sorry, Nicki.” Minaj accepted her apology with “That means so much Taylor, thank you.” The two performed together at the VMA’s a few short weeks later, which was read as a public “burying of the hatchet” by many news outlets which continues to allow Minaj’s criticisms of the industry to go unexamined by fans and industry insiders alike.

### **Swift-Minaj Media Portrayals**

Much of the mainstream coverage of the controversy played up the stereotypes to put Minaj and Swift in simple polarized positions. This is firstly played out in the images that were chosen to represent the two women in articles discussing the controversy. The pictures of Taylor Swift tended to be flawless snapshots of her smiling a red-lipped grin almost shyly, her hair perfectly done, and her outfits a classy red carpet look. The images that were used for Minaj depicted her with a displeased resting face, her mouth agape and yelling, baring her teeth, giving a “side eye,” and/or wearing her hot pink wig to complete her “Harajuku Barbie” persona. The images culminate to create this wild, angry, outlandish representation of Nicki and an innocent, angelic, girl-next-door representation of Taylor.

These representations merely set up the reader for the continued rhetorical separation of these women through the language used to describe these women and their actions in conjunction with one another. Nicki is described in articles as the aggressor with quotes such as “their spat, which Minaj started,” “[Minaj] ended her feud with T Swift [...] but quickly launched another,” “[Minaj’s tweets] an obvious shot at Taylor,” and many others that put her on the offensive parallel to Swift (Hind 2015; “Censors buckle” 2015; Hicks 2015). The aforementioned images and the rhetorical positioning played right into the “angry black woman” stereotype, effectively casting a shadow of dubiousness that undercut her entire argument.

Part of Minaj’s public persona is an unapologetic, hypersexualized “boss bitch” (her own phrase that she coined as a reclamation of agency) however her righteous anger was portrayed as being ungrateful. She is shown with her flashier outfit choices and she is painted as an object of wealth. The interview she did with The New York Times following the VMA’s painted a visual for the viewer in saying “you can picture Minaj in her Maybach as she considered this particular affront” which created a visual of Minaj firmly placed in a position of wealth while creating a dissonance in that visual to have her be contemplating her anger towards the VMA’s (Grigoriadis 2015). The reporter described the various designer dresses she “had poured herself into” and how her hotel room was full of outfits she had “considered and rejected for Fashion Week,” (Grigoriadis 2015). The reporter further describes Minaj “she was in shadow [...] all I could see other than the diamonds glinting in her ears” which “in shadow” visually connotes evil or darkness while again mentioning her affluence (Grigoriadis 2015). Minaj is rhetorically placed as comfortably perched in the upper echelon who then dares to speak out about an unfair nomination. She is expected to be grateful to have beaten the odds in a sexist and racist industry but Minaj rightly demands what she deserves.

Swift, on the other hand, is portrayed as humble and grateful pop star whose country star beginnings serve as a foundation for the girl-next-door relationship she has with the public. She is described as having “fallen out with Katy Perry” which gives her a passive participation in the feud considering her music video “Bad Blood” plays out her revenge on Perry (Hind 2015). She is described as “gracious” and leaving the VMA stage “drama-free” as well as being described as “the good girl” or “golden girl” (Fekadu 2015; Grigoriadis 2015). In embodying the girl-next-door persona, Swift is in the ideal rhetorical position within the controversy as the public identifies with her innocent qualities.

### **#SquadGoals: White Feminism and Friendship**

Taylor Swift’s “naive” wench in Nicki Minaj’s initial argument against the industry’s racist bias highlights the issue of white feminism and its historic ignorance of the needs of black women. Feminist theory emerged from “privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of men and women who live on the margin” (hooks, 2000, p. 44). Feminism has largely been constructed around the needs of white, upper-middle class, able-bodied women and they have spoken to what it means to be and struggle as a woman. Therefore mainstream feminism is not a fully formed theory. Swift however, owns the feminist label and as the pop icon that she is, she has become a prominent figure representing the movement but she is a prominent white feminist which models what feminists like her should value. The music industry is sexist and female musicians banding together in solidarity is positive in principle, however the industry is also racist and this problem is compounded when you are a woman of color trying to succeed within the industry.

When Taylor insists that “it’s not like you to pit women against each other” and offers that “maybe one of the men took your slot...” she is asserting a key aspect of white feminism. Bonding as “‘victims,’ white liberationists were not required to assume responsibility for confronting the complexity of their own experience” and could then ignore their feminism’s lack of variety in human experiences (hooks 1984). Swift, lacking a variety in point of view by insisting that the only enemy is men, she effectively absolves her responsibility and does not recognize nor confront the enemy within. White feminism uses the bonds of “Sisterhood” as a shield against the negative realities impacted by class, race, etc. This version of Sisterhood “dictated that sisters were to ‘unconditionally’ love one another, that they were to avoid conflict and minimize disagreement; that they were to not criticize one another, especially in public” (hooks, 1984, p. 46). The “unconditional” aspect of white Sisterhood is that it negates the different experiences of women that don’t fit the cultural standards of white, euro-centric, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, upper middle class.

Swift’s responses continue to play on her innocent character as she tells Minaj “you’re invited to any stage I’m ever on” which is an extension of her earlier call for friendship. In this way she is reaching out a hand to Minaj but it’s dismissive of her point and is patronizing to Minaj, sufficiently putting her on a metaphorical moral high ground whereas Minaj has to be lifted from her perceived pity party. Swift maintains her naive image in her responses and Minaj recognizes Swift’s position as well in responding to Swift earlier in the controversy, “I love you just as much. But [you] should speak on this” functioned as “her way of kindly, but firmly, challenging her friend-who is in a unique position of dominance-to do more” (Harris 2015).

While Minaj’s argument was not aimed at Taylor for winning the nomination of Video of the Year when the controversy was then constructed as a heated rivalry, their music videos were

compared to give weight to either side of the arguments. Swift's "Bad Blood" and Minaj's "Anaconda" both feature the artist surrounded by their respective "squad." Swift is ringed by her gang of predominately white, thin models who play more than a part in her music video but make up her real-life friends who decorated the stage in a display of homogenous "girl power" to serve as the background to her acceptance of her VMA Moonman. Swift touts the importance of her girl friends to be close and support one another in saying that especially "in this climate, when it's so hard for women to be understood and portrayed the right way in the media...now more than ever we need to be good and kind to each other and not judge each other" (Zimmerman 2015). This is an admirable goal however, it strikes notes of hypocrisy in also accusing Minaj of pitting women against each other in this controversy but to also create a music video completely premised on taking violent revenge on a girl traitor. In claiming the need to band together and support one another but in the same sweep, calling Minaj out for her just outrage at the music industry's racism, Swift is too blinded by her white privilege to see that black women need to be included in this claim. She trumpets a fight against the patriarchy and unfair media when black women suffer, often more harshly, under the same system of dominance that she plays into by silencing those who don't fall under her specific brand of feminism because she can't recognize any oppression beyond her own.

Minaj's video on the other hand, touts a message of female empowerment as well, surrounding herself with full-bodied black women in an anthem that celebrates curvy women by reclaiming the male gaze embodied in Sir Mix-A-Lot's well known chorus. Nicki Minaj owns her sexuality in the video with her agency rather than subjugation but her rap persona as a "fly girl" further extols the ownership of one's sexuality as a black woman. Her flashy persona is reminiscent of rap's "fly girl" persona, lionized by female rappers Salt-n-Pepa, and it portrayed

as “a party-goer, an independent woman, but additionally, and erotic subject rather than an objectified one” (Keyes 2000, p. 260). bell hooks further articulates that “Black women’s erotic consciousness is textualized around issues of body esteem [...] ‘to accept and love our bodies; [...] [and] to be empowered by healing eroticism’” (Keyes 2000, p. 260). Nicki is epitomized as owning her sexuality and flaunting it on her terms. “Anaconda” shocked its viewers with an oversexualization that takes on aspects of the male rapper ideology and subverts these objectifying ideals to push a message of pride in one’s curves and black femininity. Each video clearly praises a different form of feminism however, Swift’s parade of white women caters to the preferences of the mainstream whereas Anaconda features women who embrace their sexuality which doesn’t sit well with societal norms that police women’s sexual freedoms. The Best Video Award acts as a societal nod to what is acceptable: Swift’s size zero white gal pals and their “sisterhood” over Minaj’s black female empowerment.

Minaj and Swift’s part of the controversy came to a close on the VMA stage with a surprise performance together. Minaj brought Swift out as a surprise guest to sing Minaj’s song “The Night Is Still Young” together before also singing Swift’s “Bad Blood.” During the last performance their circling each other on stage, exchanging fierce glares teased the audience as their Twitter argument was still fresh in their minds. “Bad Blood” being Swift’s song, Minaj was subsequently positioned as the villain in this stage performance which subtly added to Swift’s moral high ground. The coverage of the performance also focused on how they “bur[ied] the hatchet” and how they “hugged it out” to re-cover the controversy and vilify their established opinions of Minaj as the attacker (Marquina 2015; Robinson 2015). The burying of the hatchet served to further bury Minaj’s point as the media coverage was primed for the next “catfight” and believed Minaj’s point, that was painted more as a tantrum, to be over. The end of the



controversy was mockingly described as “all was right with the world” and “I guess everyone’s at peace now” reinforcing the subjugation of the controversy along with Minaj’s point (Hicks 2015). The focus on the hug and how they “made nice” further infantilized and trivialized the controversy and Minaj’s point about the racist music industry was left unaddressed.

### **Cyrus: History of Appropriation**

Miley Cyrus, like Taylor Swift is no stranger to cultural appropriation however, Cyrus takes on a more bluntly racist form that is displayed in her social media, her outfits, and her music videos. She said of her shift in genre “I want urban, I just want something that just feels black” which began her essentialization of black culture into a pegged stereotype promulgated by black male rappers but used by Cyrus as a tool for her new image. She has labeled herself as a “white Nicki Minaj” (or claimed that others have called her that), and said that in her past life, she ‘feels like that was me’ in reference to Lil’ Kim, saying ‘I feel like Lil Kim is, like, who I am on the inside’” (B. Rose, 2015). These comments were bolstered by the release of her music video “We Can’t Stop” that featured Cyrus clad in all white, popping in her gold grillz and twerking with “her homegirls with the big butts” aka a background of black women (Cyrus 2013). In the video, Cyrus is partying and laughing with her thin white “friends” interspersed with scenes of her dancing surrounded by curvy black women who serve as props. She aligns herself with these white friends but places herself as separate from the black women as she interacts with them only by having them admire her twerking and in her slapping their faceless bodies. These themes of appropriation are further played out in her 2013 VMA performance where her all black back-up dancers again function as props. The show is fraught with undertones of minstrelsy as she profits on her garish interpretation of “black music” as part of

her own image and an exaggerated version of black women's sexuality as fodder to bolster her own sexuality. Cyrus has brought black culture to the forefront but its expansive nature has been reduced to an easy formula of grillz, bitches, and twerking which Cyrus can don as a costume and remain in a position of privilege.

### **Cyrus-Minaj Controversy**

The issues between Miley Cyrus and Nicki Minaj played out in interviews and the VMA stage. Following the rise and fall of the controversy with Swift and Minaj over Twitter, Cyrus did an interview with The New York Times (Coscarelli, 2015) where she was asked about Minaj being upset that she wasn't nominated. Cyrus at first brushed it off saying she "didn't really get into it" but when asked more, she said that Nicki "was saying that everyone was white and blonde that got nominated." Cyrus continued on and said that Minaj should have "come at things with love" and that what she said "was very Nicki Minaj, which if you know Nicki Minaj is not too kind. It's not very polite."

The controversy came to fruition on the 2015 VMA stage where Cyrus was hosting the show and Minaj came up to accept her award for Best Hip-Hop Video. After thanking her fans, Minaj called out Cyrus with "And now back to this bitch that had a lot to say about me the other day in the press-Miley, what's good?" (Hamilton 2015). Minaj's mic was cut off however, the camera caught her mouthing to Cyrus "don't play with me bitch." To which Cyrus looks visibly taken aback but quickly composes herself to respond with how "we all know how [the press] manipulates shit." She returns to reading the script about voting and then loops back into an

argument about her losing the award in 2008 and how she was “fine with it” because it’s “no big deal! It’s just an award!” She ended her rant with “Congratulations Nicki.”

The aftermath of the event played out in another interview with The New York Times (Grigoriadis 2015) this time with Nicki Minaj explaining why she called out Cyrus. In referring to Cyrus’ dismissal of Minaj’s argument, Minaj explains that it’s unfair for Cyrus to use of black men and women in her videos and performances and not want to hear how they feel about the music industry undermining their success. She says “If you want to enjoy our culture and our lifestyle, bond with us, dance with u, have fun with us, twerk with us, rap with us, then you should also want to know what affects us, what is bothering us, what we feel is unfair to us” (Grigoriadis 2015).

### **Cyrus-Minaj: Media Portrayals**

Minaj was still portrayed as embodying the angry black woman stereotype with images similar to those used to juxtapose her with Swift. All of the pictures used were from the night of the VMAs showing Minaj’s face either with a look of pursed-lipped disdain or more often with an open-mouthed, teeth-bared look of anger. Between Cyrus and Minaj, Cyrus gave the media much more fodder for her outfits and unpredictable nature and so Minaj wasn’t as blatantly positioned as villainous as she was when Taylor was the opposing woman.

Cyrus was positioned wacky, sexualized, and unpredictable in the images and rhetoric the media used in the discussion. Cyrus had many outfit changes throughout the night so the pictures sometimes didn’t use the picture of her right after Minaj called her out where she is wearing a two piece outfit designed to look like two eyes covering her breasts and a skirt meant to look like

a pair of lips. Some of the images were of one of her other outfits with strategically placed dots. The images also either showed her singing or talking on stage but most used an image of her face looking rather uncomfortable as she twirled her blond dreads in her hand moments after Minaj called her out. The rhetoric focused on her love of weed, in recalling how she “led the crowd through a chant extolling marijuana, shared a pot brownie with Snoop Dogg” and how she “littered her speeches with as many references to her affinity for marijuana as possible” (Farber 2015; Kennedy & Faughnder 2015). The media focused on her sexuality with comments about her outfits as “show[ing] most of her skin” or “left little to the imagination” (Fedadu 2015; NY Post). They focused on how she flashed the cameras with her breasts with many articles mentioning the nip slip more than once or stating that she “deliberately” bared her breasts (Fedadu 2015; Kennedy & Faughnder 2015). She was regarded as a erratic and zany as she “did her best to bring the outrage to the filter-free show,” “cursed like a drunken sailor, and “passed out avocados to photographers and reporters,”(Farber 2015; Kennedy & Faughnder 2015; Fedadu 2015). The fascination with her wackiness and elements of rebellion stem partially from the acts themselves as being out of the norm but also that she is in the midst of creating her new image as she was “extolling the virtues of purity rings but is now America’s pre-eminent ‘bad girl’” (Grigoriadis 2015). Cyrus’ raunchy subcultural image makes her vulnerable to more criticism and scrutiny within this controversy than Swift’s classy and innocent archetype was subject to.

### **Tone Policing: There’s a Way to Talk to People**

The way that Cyrus commented in her interview on Minaj’s way of approaching her frustration with the music industry’s racist tendencies negated the issue Minaj was attempting to

bring to light. Cyrus claimed that Minaj didn't approach the issue with "openness and love" but rather "sounded very Nicki Minaj, which if you know Nicki Minaj, is not too kind" (Coscarelli 2015). When she added that she didn't "respect [her] statement because of the anger that came with it," Cyrus tone policed Minaj (Coscarelli 2015). Tone policing acts as a red herring as it distracts from the issue a person is bringing up but instead focuses on the way that issue was delivered to contest that issue. Cyrus noted that Minaj's argument had to do with race and that it was more than the VMA nomination but referring to a "bigger issue" but in the same breath she undermines it but saying Minaj made it about herself and wasn't "very polite" insisting that "there's a way to speak to people" (Coscarelli 2015). Cyrus in this moment exhibits a pattern of oppressors in a position of privilege exerting their power over the oppressed by telling them what they can feel oppressed over. She silences Minaj and as a host for the VMA's she acts as an instrument of the same system and in doing so, proves Minaj's point.

Cyrus negates the issue again when she is confronted on the VMA stage. She defends herself by saying the press manipulated what she said and insisted that when she didn't win an award she didn't care because it wasn't a "big deal." The problem is that there weren't undertones of racism to Cyrus not winning an award in 2008 and in insisting it's not a "big deal" misses the point as she essentializes and trivializes Minaj's entire argument to being upset purely over her not being nominated for Video of the Year. In doing this, Cyrus continues to dismiss Minaj's argument because she doesn't feel that it is important. Cyrus' logic is rooted in colorblindness that "provides a level-playing field narrative that allows whites to inhabit a social and psychological space that is free of racial tension" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 32). Clinging to this normative ideology, Cyrus can "claim that [her] privileged social position relative to racial minorities reflects individual achievement rather than fruits of white supremacy" (Gallagher,

2003, p. 28). In making the parallel between how she reacted to not winning a VMA award and the way that she believes Minaj should have dealt with the loss, she attempts to align their situations as equal in weight when Minaj's situation is fraught with layers of a eurocentric beauty standards and a music industry that undermines the contributions of black women.

### **Long (dreaded) Hair, Don't Care**

Cyrus' disregard for Minaj's opinion on unjust standards within the music industry, standards which Cyrus benefits from, was made worse by her blatant theft of black culture. Having previously flaunted her grillz, twerking skills(z), and black backup dancers, the 2015 VMAs were no different in her display of ignorance through her choice of accessories and actions. The irony of her negation of Minaj while wearing a high pony tail of blond dreads was unreal, noting to an extent, the root of the problem was her (hair) roots. Hair may seem paltry but it is a gendered and racialized performance of self and African American hair carries a history but atop a rich white woman's head, that history is being erased as she uses it as an accessory to her new "ratchet" image. The accoutrements of being "ghetto" and "ghetto fabulous" have graduated to "ratchet" with "gold grills, extensions, long, intricate fingernails, contorting fingers into gang signs" that are now edgy and cool (Stewart 2013). Black women who made these looks popular are snubbed for wearing what the Kylie Jenners and Miley Cyrus' are then praised for wearing. White women can don parts of black culture as a costume however, black women are not only not applauded for what they are the originators of, they often have to deal with the negative realities that come with actually being black. White celebrities need to be "reminded that the stuff they think is cool, the accoutrements they're borrowing, have been birthed in an environment where people are underprivileged, undereducated, oppressed, underrepresented,

disenfranchised, systematically discriminated against and struggling in a system set up to ensure that they fail” (Stewart 2013). We need to remember that she is a young rich white woman who, thanks to her father’s “Achy Breaky Heart,” has been wealthy her entire life and she is merely impersonating a girl from the hood.

### **Good Girl Gone Black**

Miley Cyrus has consistently been one to push the envelope when it comes to her image, and her use of black culture has been a tool to mature her from her former Disney Channel self into America’s raunchy bad girl. Cyrus embodies hooks’ point in “Eating the Other” based off of the literal “ancient religious practices among so called ‘primitive’ people, [where] the heart of a person may be ripped out and eaten so that one can embody that person’s spirit or special characteristics” (1992). hooks argues that dominant cultures, in seeking racialized sexual encounters affirms power over the Other, similarly, Cyrus seeks to sample the oversexualized aspects of black female identity in her use of black backup dancers and cultural signifiers in order to partake in a similar encounter and reap the same benefits. Cyrus sees black culture as a way to establish herself as cool and transgressive as she purposefully strays from “white ‘innocence’ to a world of ‘experience’” as she indulges in “a bit of the Other” (hooks, 1992, p. 47-48). She uses colorblind ideology to give the idea that she is non-racist but rather progressive and not perpetuating racism but embracing her inner black self as was alluded to in her Lil’ Kim admiration. She gives the illusion of immersing herself in black culture by donning the stereotypes and she using the oversexualized bodies of black women to boost her cultural capital and challenge prior notions of her as an innocent child star while still distancing herself as she Others them.

Child stars have a history of exploiting black culture to up their societal backing and this maturing through black exploitation carries consequences for the exploited only. The pattern of “separating the art from the people leads to an appropriation of aesthetic innovation that only ‘exploits’ Black cultural forms, commercially and otherwise, but also nullifies the cultural meaning those forms provide for African Americans” (Hall 1997). Her performance of her stereotypical interpretation of black culture reinforces oppression by making it serve her as part of her own image and denying black culture its fullness and complexity. Black women are then seen as sexual identities to commodified which gives a two-dimensional picture of black culture. In this way, she is taking on postmodern blackface which, like literal Blackface, is performative but it is a performance for the self that is gradually revealed as a result of its mediation (Moscowitz 2009). Cyrus uses blackness a way of boosting her identity and portrays its as an accurate representation of blackness because she interprets “ratchet culture” as blackness in full. She promulgates narrow ideas of what it means to be black through exaggerated means of carrying herself which keeps African Americans in metaphorical chains tied to these stereotypes.

## **Conclusion**

The cultural appropriation of black culture is not new. The analysis of the Minaj-Swift-Cyrus controversy reveals, once again, how black culture is taken by mainstream media to boost both cultural and material capital. Taylor Swift’s parade of model gal pals as her physical manifestation of white feminist adherence to the importance of friendship and negation of black women demonstrates the need for black feminism and intersectionality. Miley Cyrus and her blatant disregard of black culture and its contributions to pop culture point to a continued mainstream disregard of black culture and its contributions. The media blew up the controversy



as a scandalous “catfight” which effectively also blew off the controversy as just another quarrel between girls. This “catfight” marginalizes the issues that are embedded within the controversy as nothing more than fun fodder for pop culture audiences rather than acknowledge that these issues have socio-cultural realities. Minaj sought to shed light on a cultural issue that has been repeated through generations of black rooted music and yet her point was buried by the distraction that composed the entire controversy which ironically proved her point of mainstream negligence to black voices.

Appropriation of black culture has functioned to maintain a social stratification of accessibility for black females in music. These controversies serve as examples of this issue as these are not isolated incidents but rather indicative of the quality of pop culture to reveal the underpinnings of racial and gendered ideologies that are consumed daily. These white artists function as a gateway for cultural appropriation as those that strongly identify with them are more likely to emulate their actions. Those that see Swift and Cyrus’ cultural appropriation are invited to partake in the cherry-picked aspects of black culture. The constant spotlight on celebrities can also serve in positive ways to identify accepted norms and call attention to injustices. We see that one’s rhetorical positioning in that spotlight is important to the message’s delivery in Minaj’s silencing. The current system of the entertainment industry understands that the voice of the Other can only be heard by larger audience and appreciated if drawn through a white filter.

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## **Appendix**

### **Minaj-Swift Controversy Timeline**

@taylorswift: GUYS!! You got Bad Blood nominated for Video of the Year at the VMA's!!  
Vote here pleeeeeease? [MTV link]

@NICKIMINAJ: Lol you guys did we miss the deadline?? #MTV? [instagram photo]

@NICKIMINAJ: Hey guys @MTV thank you for my nominations. ☐☐☐ Did Feeling Myself miss the deadline or...?

@NICKIMINAJ: If I was a different "kind" of artist, Anaconda would be nominated for best choreo and vid of the year as well. 😍😍😍

@NICKIMINAJ: Ellen did her own anaconda video and did the #choreo lol. Remember her doing that kick 😞. Even mtv did a post on the choreo @MTV remember?

@NICKIMINAJ: U couldn't go on social media w/o seeing ppl doing the cover art, choreo, outfits for Halloween---an impact like that & no VOTY nomination?

@NICKIMINAJ: When the "other" girls drop a video that breaks record and impacts culture they get that nomination. 😍😍😍😍😍😍😍😍😍😍😍😍

@NICKIMINAJ: If your video celebrates women with very slim bodies, you will be nominated for vid of the year 😊

@NICKIMINAJ: I'm not always confident. Just tired. Black women influence pop culture so much but are rarely rewarded for it. [Re: @NickiMPasties: @NICKIMINAJ i swear your strength and confidence motivates me SO MUCH]

Less than an hour later:

@taylorswift13: @NICKIMINAJ I've done nothing but love & support you. It's unlike you to pit women against each other. Maybe one of the men took your slot..

@NICKIMINAJ: Huh? U must not be reading my tweets. Didn't say a word about u. I love u just as much. But u should speak on this.

@taylorswift13

@NICKIMINAJ: @taylorswift13 I'm still confused as to why u just tweeted me when I made it abundantly clear...[screenshot of tweet from follower: @KingCaleb: It's not even any shade to the other artists. It's just that Nicki is getting snubbed for doing the same thing they're winning awards for.]



@taylorswift13: @NICKIMINAJ If I win, please come up with me!! You're invited to any stage I'm ever on.

During this time, the Twittersphere starts reacting and Nicki responds to how the interaction is being misconstrued; Swift is silent at this point:

@NICKIMINAJ: Nothing I said had to do with Taylor? So what jabs? White media and their tactics. So sad. That's what they want. [link to onairwithryanseacrest]

@NICKIMINAJ: Ryan posted a headline of Taylor saying she loves & supports me. But not me saying the same to her. Lol. Their headline says I took a "jab"?

@NICKIMINAJ: I'm so glad u guys get to see how this stuff works. Taylor took her music off spotify and was applauded. We launched Tidal & were dragged.

Bruno Mars and Ed Sheeran begin fake "twitter beef":

@BrunoMars: Yo I want in on this twitter Beef!! VMAs is the new WWF!! @edsheeran Fuck You!

@edsheeran: @BrunoMars any way we do dis you gon' come up short

Former *Breaking Bad* star Aaron Paul offers to settle the fight over breakfast:

@aaronpaul\_8: Dear @taylorswift13 and @NICKIMINAJ, I love you both. How about we all get together and talk this thru? Coffee? Pancakes?? My treat. Ap

Swift returns to Twitter to wish Selena Gomez a happy birthday next day

Piers Morgan weighs in his response:

@piersmorgan: "Don't play the race card, Ms Minaj. You're just a stropky piece of work whose video wasn't as good as Taylor Swift's. [links daily mail op-ed he wrote calling her "whiny"]

Nicki begins promoting articles describing why she was right to call out the music industry's racism and why Taylor Swift was wrong to call *her* out:

@NICKIMINAJ: Great article, thank u ☐☐☐ #MarieClaire [link to Marie Claire article]

"Marie Claire, thank u ♥☐ Time Magazine, The Guardian, New York Times, Complex, Vibe, Karen Civil, TV Guide, etc. The list goes on of news/media outlets who used their voice to help me make a very obvious point. Thank you so much. Nothing to do with any of the women, but everything to do with a system that doesn't credit black women for their contributions to pop culture as freely/quickly as they reward others. We are huge trendsetters, not second class citizens that get thrown crumbs. This isn't anger. This is #information. It's all love to MTV. Kisses to my fans and thank you for my 3 nominations. #ThePinkprintTOUR tonight in VA! Over 15 thousand people. I can't wait to see u guys. ☐♥☐ "

Katy Perry, the presumed target of Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood" video, weighs in with response about how "ironic" Swift's argument against Minaj is:

@katyperry: Finding it ironic to parade the pit women against other women argument about as one unmeasurably capitalizes on the take down of a woman (aka Perry)

@katyperry: The real travesty is where is the shine for #BBHMMVideo when VMA eligibility period was 7/7/14-7/1/15 & that gem dropped 7/1...@MTV

After an interview July 23rd in which Ed Sheeran describes Nicki Minaj's argument as "redundant," Sheeran responds by saying his comments were "taken out of context.":

@BuzzFeedUK: Ed Sheeran said Nicki Minaj's VMAs race argument is "redundant"

[link to buzzfeed article with interview]

@edsheeran: @BuzzFeedUK that's taken out of context and not what I was saying was redundant at all

Taylor Swift apologizes:

@taylorswift: I thought I was being called out. I missed the point, I misunderstood, then misspoke. I'm sorry, Nicki. @NICKIMINAJ

@NICKIMINAJ: That means so much Taylor, thank you. @taylorswift13 <3<3<3

@NICKIMINAJ: □ @katyperry

@NICKIMINAJ: I've always loved her. Everyone makes mistakes. She gained so much more respect from me. Let's move on. [link to twitter.com/minajtheillest...]

Full Timeline created from collection of these articles:

Jung, A. E. (2015). Well, this nicki minaj-taylor swift twitter exchange certainly spun wildly out of control. *Vulture*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.vulture.com/2015/07/taylor-swift-nicki-minaj-twitter-rant.html>

Lipshutz, J. (2015). Taylor swift & minaj's twitter argument: A full timeline of the disagreement.

*Billboard*. Retrieved from: <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop-shop/6641794/taylor-swift-nicki-minaj-twitter-argument-timeline>

McDermott, M. (2015). Nicki minaj vs. taylor swift: The complete timeline. *USA Today*.

Retrieved from:

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/entertainthis/2015/07/22/nicki-minaj-vs-taylor-swift-the-complete-timeline/77534486/>

