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Close-Up: JAY-Z

A Genealogical Interpretation of Plato's *Allegory*, Through the Lens of JAY-Z, the Re-Envisioned Philosopher King

ShaDawn Battle

Abstract

In this article, I use JAY-Z's art to interrogate Platonic ideals articulated in the *Allegory of the Cave* and their extant influence in today's society. I read JAY-Z as a redefined "Philosopher King" (PK) of rap culture, and prove that Plato's PK must be dethroned. White-supremacist society claims to have escaped the "cave of darkness" to embrace "Truth," "justifying" their "superiority" and the arbitrary division of society, no different than Platonic PKs. However, JAY-Z's art reveals the manner in which white supremacists' "Truths" concerning Black subjectivity are premised upon epistemological falsehoods concretized through systematic practices. JAY-Z could not name the shadows in their "true Form" (initially) because Platonic Philosopher Kings created the conditions of the shadows by manipulating the material world (i.e., *Marcy Projects*) in which he dwelled. However, JAY-Z's artistic evolution demonstrates his ascension and "enlightenment" insofar as he has learned to name the "shadows" that once conditioned his imprisonment, allowing him to seize a more viable image of Black masculinity.

Perhaps the truth was always a lie.

—RALPH ELLISON, *INVISIBLE MAN*

"Living in the shadows / Can you imagine what kind of life it is to live?"

—JAY-Z, FT. GLORIA CARTER, "SMILE"

In this article, I examine how JAY-Z's corpus of work challenges Platonic ideals outlined in the *Allegory of the Cave*. Appearing in Book VII of the *Republic*, the *Allegory* is a treatise on Plato's theory of ideas, justice, and higher education. The contemporary American social world is still afflicted by the central premises of the *Allegory*: prisoners trapped in a dark cave of illusions

are juxtaposed against the "enlightened" members of society inhabiting the upper world of "certitude." This results in exclusive claims to power and the arbitrary division of social classes. But conceiving of the *Allegory* within a Black hip-hop context—particularly, through twenty-two years of "volume after volume"¹ of JAY-Z's masterful aesthetics—necessitates a genealogical interpretation of the esoteric class of "Philosopher Kings" / "guardians," as well as Plato's apocryphal conception of justice. Plato considered Philosopher Kings ruling members of a "Just" society, given their "exclusive" capacity to wield "Truth" and "pure Knowledge" in his ideal Republic, after having escaped the metaphoric cave of shadows, or false perceptions of reality. Thus, given their "superior" intelligence, Philosopher Kings (PKs) were essential to the attainment of a perfect city-state.

A closer look at the "gangster" persona at the heart of JAY-Z's early work (from his first solo album, *Reasonable Doubt*² to his seventh, *The Blueprint 2: The Gift & The Curse*,³ unveils the role Platonic PKs play in architecting the "cave of shadows" endured by the imprisoned class to establish an exclusionary, pantheon world for themselves above. I examine the legitimacy of Plato's "PK" conferral through the context of the knowledge PKs claim to possess on "cave prisoners" (in this case, the "Black male other"), which is, in fact, not objective or truth-producing. Thus, I first demonstrate that Platonic PKs are themselves disillusioned frauds still wallowing in the very darkness that they have purportedly abandoned. Elsewhere⁴ I have claimed that JAY-Z is deserving of the "PK" moniker. But I now insist that if JAY-Z is a contemporary PK, it is not because he has acquired the crooked habits and single-sightedness of the ruling class. JAY-Z can only be considered a PK through an illumination of the means by which today's "guardians" once convinced him of his "brutish" identity, which kept him bolted to "the cave," impeding a true conception of self. Hence, my second goal is to paint a portrait of JAY-Z's epistemological reevaluation of selfhood—that is, of JAY-Z as a reconfigured PK who has liberated himself from his former ideological imprisonment in the "cave of shadows."

There are certainly parallels between JAY-Z and Plato's PK. JAY-Z's catalogue of music abounds with allegories, such as "Meet the Parents,"⁵ a figurative representation of the fissures within the Black American family structure. He, too, has been philosophizing about the composition of a "Just" society. In "Diamonds Is Forever,"⁶ he questions why some races are allowed to occupy "high society," while others are confined to a dark underworld. Also, in his verse in the collaborative track "No Church in the Wild,"⁷ he takes up Platonic concerns such as the central impetus behind piety, just as Plato pontificates in *Euthypro*. He is also the self-proclaimed rap version of Plato. During a Princeton University visit, after hearing Dr. Cornel West discuss Plato's immortalization of Socrates, JAY-Z responded, "Well, I have been playing Plato to Biggie's 'Socrates.'"⁸ JAY-Z's trajectory as an artist—that is,

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his ascent “[f]rom the bottom to the top of the globe,” as well as his initial reluctance to leave “the dark side” in the past before turning his entire being toward the “Sun”—is structurally contiguous with the sequence of events outlining Plato’s *Allegory*.

The comparison is thus warranted but disconcerting given the importance of the *Allegory* to understanding contemporary hierarchal social relations. The racial divide of today’s “Republic,” for instance, is a consequence of the history of slavery and genocide. Yet systems of domination are outcomes of false constructions of marginalized people. The earth’s “wretched”¹⁰ subjects are only “wretched” because those in the upper region say that they are, and they manipulate the material world to legitimize their claims, which justifies cordoning them off from the rest of society. High crime rates in Black communities are not outcomes of Black folks’ *natural* propensity for violence, as has been historically presumed. In fact, such a claim is ethically irresponsible and evidences a “superficial social analysis”¹¹ when one omits from conversations about “Black-on-Black crime,” the true culprits: structural inequality and institutional racism.

Thus, I argue that Platonic PKs in the modern Western world and in postmodern US culture in particular are agents of white supremacist power. They constitute repressive instruments of the State (i.e., the police, the courts, policymakers, or even white supremacist laymen) whose knowledge claims on or about “the other” are propounded as absolute truths. Their alleged superiority occurs vis-à-vis their establishment and maintenance of a culture of debauchery amid “cave prisoners,” such as the Black male populace. Since the Black rap body specifically is judged to be the quintessence of corporeal and cultural abjection in a country governed by a diverse syndicate of white supremacists, JAY-Z—a rapper who proudly rocks an afro that “got no perm in it”¹²—cannot be conceived of as a PK through a Eurocentric epistemological lens. As “hip hop’s Philosopher King,”¹³ JAY-Z is a transcendent representative of a cultural discourse of resistance to the “guardian class.” Subsequently, it is necessary to reconceive of Plato’s PK, the attainment of “pure Knowledge,” and all that comprises “cave imprisonment,” through the purview of dialectical race relations and repressive systems of power.

JAY-Z’s early espousals of a villainous identity and his later “moment[s] of clarity” regarding his imprisoned subjectivity substantiates the notion that “truth was always a lie.”¹⁴ That is, JAY-Z may have believed that his early “gangster” presentation was innate or that he really was “like Satan,” as he declares in “Politics as Usual.”¹⁵ But how might gentrifying practices in urban dwellings like Marcy Projects have provoked his Satanic behavior while imprisoned in this metaphoric “cave?” Further, the hypermasculine ethos witnessed in albums like *Reasonable Doubt* or *Volume 3... Life and Times*,¹⁶ on which the infamous “Big Pimpin” appears (wherein JAY-Z boasts about

possessing a “heart cold as assassins”), vastly differs from championing Black fatherhood and monogamous love, as he does on his latest oeuvres 4:44¹⁷ and his love-inspired collaborative album *Everything Is Love*.¹⁸ Does the radical shift in JAY-Z’s masculine performance of identity signify his departure from the “cave” of false perceptions, determined by white supremacist curators of social meaning and the architects of taxonomic classifications of human identity? I employ an anticolonial lens to tackle these questions through an explication of JAY-Z’s art.¹⁹

White supremacists claim to have escaped the “cave” to embrace “Truth” and “pure Knowledge,” justifying their “superiority,” and consequently the division of the social classes. However, the “Truths” of the white racists²⁰ have only consisted of a different set of “shadows.” I prove this by uprooting “Truth” and “pure Knowledge” from the Platonic tradition and reconceiving of both concepts through the perspectives of the Black rap body. JAY-Z’s art reveals the manner in which the “supremacy” of “whiteness” is consolidated through false constructions of Black (male) ontology and sustained through systematic practices, which kept him bound to the “cave wall,” facing the “shadows” of his subjectivity. However, as I will demonstrate, he eventually reimagined his masculinity in opposition to the “legible”²¹ images of Black masculinity available to him in “the cave.”

I: Context: The *Allegory* and Its Legacy

The books prior to the *Allegory* explain the members of Plato’s “Just” society (guardians/Philosopher Kings, auxiliaries, and producers); the four virtues of the good society (wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice); the division of the soul; and, the role of each member. In Book VII, Plato continues his philosophical catechism on the role of justice in an ideal city-state through a dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon, Plato’s brother. Socrates instructs Glaucon to imagine men dwelling in a dark cave since childhood, facing the wall of the cave in restrictive shackles that prevent their ability to turn away.²² There is a blazing fire behind them that casts shadows of objects onto the wall they are facing.²³ As “perpetual prisoners,” they cannot describe the objects in their true “essence” because they only recognize the shadows created by the fire. In Book VI, we learn that those members of society who are not PKs possess “true beliefs,” which are illusive interpretations of reality with the potential to become “pure Knowledge” but are not yet so. But in Book VII, readers learn that those other than PKs cannot apprehend objects, cast in shadow form by the fire, in their “true Form,” because they are restricted by “leaden weights.”²⁴ Socrates rhetorically questions, “[F]or, to begin with, tell me do you think that these men

would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?"²⁵ To this inquisition, Glaucon affirms the reality of their obstructed vision by pointing to their "fettered necks."

The cave allegory privileges the stability of "Truth" or the very "essence" of things that our souls must apprehend after ascension into the realm of rationality, in contrast to the ephemerality of empirical knowledge that defines the imprisoning world of the cave. Plato's cave metaphor is therefore an epistemological analogy for what he terms a "Divided Line." This metaphysical boundary separates those existing within the cave of sensory knowledge from those inhabiting the region of a priori knowledge—knowledge that is fixed and derived from antecedent origins. But in the context of race construction, the instability of "Truth" and "pure Knowledge" is, in fact, exposed when one considers the systematic practices that circumscribe the full potential of certain human beings who are said to exist below the "Divided Line." Thus, it is fair to say that Plato's "Divided Line" has been indiscriminately drawn.

Modern philosophers have nevertheless inherited many ideals from classical predecessors like Plato, such as exclusive claims to "pure Knowledge" and the separatist structures described above. Enlightenment thinkers such as Carl Linnaeus and Immanuel Kant, for instance, accepted the Platonic ideology of hierarchal social relations. But they rely instead on racial difference to arbitrarily classify the human species and further divide societies. The project of ranking the human races based on the premise that Europeans are *naturally* endowed with moral and physical characteristics superior to nonwhite Europeans dominated the discourse of the eighteenth century. However, the untenable conclusions regarding racial distinctions (i.e., an "inferior" Black race comprised of "brutish" Black men) were ironically consequences of *presumed* intuitive premises and mere *approximations* of a priori epistemological claims (consistent with the system of knowledge practiced in Plato's upper region). Blacks who have heeded dehumanizing stereotypes over time, such as JAY-Z initially, have only tightened their own "neck fetters."

II: "Neck Fetters": JAY-Z's Hypermasculine Ethos

Until *Blueprint 2: The Gift & the Curse*, JAY-Z was firmly entrenched in the "cave of darkness." His earlier depictions of a hyperaggressive persona appear as an authentic representation of the self. JAY-Z informs his audience in the track "U Don't Know"²⁶ that the symbolic "G" on his chest is "not a sewn outfit" because he is "really about [the gangster life]." While he was certainly dedicated to the "gangster" mentality, as I later demonstrate, this was an image

devised by white supremacist factions such as urban developers, police, and even label owners, to further substantiate "Black inferiority" and the myth of the "Black male brute." JAY-Z's "bad guy" performance parallels the Platonic model of misapprehension and a failure to name objects in their "true Forms."

The "Badman"

In the 1990s and early 2000s, hip-hop was no longer a mere aesthetic cultural space of resistance and belonging for Blacks and Latinos; corporations began to see the art form as "big business." The corporatization of hip-hop was arguably the peak era of JAY-Z's career. As Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois explain in *The Anthology of Rap*, hip-hop's corporatization was accompanied by a particular profit demand: a homogenized image of the hyperaggressive Black male driven by the "gangster aesthetic."²⁷ While JAY-Z's earlier music abounds with a hypermasculine ethos, in many cases, his "Black male gangster" persona reveals a socioeconomic incentive. Listeners learn from his verse in "Renegade"²⁸ that living in a ghetto requires youth to tote iron under their clothing as a necessary precaution while living amid scarce resources, resulting in imminent fratricide. He therefore warns, "Do not step to me—I'm awkward, I box lefty / An orphan, my pops left me / An often my mama wasn't home." JAY-Z's violent disposition was a consequence of growing up in a crime-infested environment, and in a Moynihanian era of broken Black homes that were the handiwork of a political system that deemed Black female-headed households an assault on patriarchal power. If this track announces the presence of a rogue, bellicose Black youth of whom America has "been afraid," he was born from American structural inequalities.

As the "angry, Black male 'renegade,'" JAY-Z personified the "badman" trickster figure—a recurring motif in the African American expressive tradition, dating as far back as the late-nineteenth century. Echoing Robin D. G. Kelley's description of the "badman,"²⁹ in *Hip-Hop Revolution*, Jeffrey Ogbar adds that one defining characteristic of the "badman" is his "willful ability to inflict violent harm on one's adversaries."³⁰ However, he explains that the "badman" in rap is an expression of Black masculinity retaliating against a history of social, political, and economic disempowerment. Hypermasculinity was the counter-response to the pejorative label "boy," political disenfranchisement, and to an overall history of curtailing human rights.³¹ Yet, the sociopolitical and economic wellsprings of the "badman" are often ignored in the face of discourses claiming it to be a *natural* province of Black masculinity. Although Black men have historically relied on the "badman" persona as a mode of resistance to a history of Black male subjugation, the "badman" in hip-hop reifies the myth of the "Black male brute,"

and Black men in rap culture pay a perilous price for complying with this dehumanizing construction. As Kelley argues in *Race Rebels*, the Black man's will to subvert his public emasculation has culminated in "the price of reckless abandon."³² He holds no qualms about inflicting harm on other Black men, women, or children, in efforts to create an "upside down world where the oppressed are powerful."³³ Unsurprisingly, white corporate power capitalized on the self-destructing "badman" persona to sustain economic and cultural domination.

The cultural domination of oppressed groups is often a prerequisite for their economic exploitation. The Black rap body exists in a colonized cultural space, governed by the deeply rooted ideological imperatives of a white ruling class whose dehumanizing constructions only aid in fattening the bellies of its white corporate "imperialists."³⁴ Because hip-hop emerged as a global cultural force at the center of popular entertainment, the "Black male gangster" was cemented in the American cultural imaginary as "America's worst nightmare," as JAY-Z declares in "Young, Black, and Gifted."³⁵

Unfortunately, this fictional persona works to stabilize the racial hierarchy. To pivot from Homi Bhabha,³⁶ similar to the colonized "other" the recalcitrant Black rap body is the "sign of the inappropriate," in need of "reform, regulation, and discipline"³⁷ when juxtaposed to the "civilized" white subject.³⁸ Not surprisingly, constructing Black masculinity in hip-hop as *essentially* brutish proves advantageous for the maintenance of hierarchal social relations, and by extension, corporate control of the genre and culture. This is true, since white adolescents were primary consumers of hip-hop music during the advent of "gangster rap," owing chiefly to their vicarious identification with the rebelliousness and social deviance espoused by rap music's ubiquitous "badman." The "badman" was, and is still, inextricably tied to the *layered* interests of the contemporary Platonic PKs of the rap industry: white corporate authorities. The history of colonial racism provides a lens to better interpret the dialectical relationship between Black male self-destruction, corporate imperialism, and white supremacy.

Fanonian Third Person Consciousness and Irrationality

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon offers a postcolonial perspective of the Negro encountering the white gaze, arguing that "his inferiority is determined by the Other" on "his home territory."³⁹ The Negro, he insists, suffers an ontological erasure in the face of the white gaze; he is "fixed" as "an object among objects" in the white colonial imaginary.⁴⁰ The objectified Negro leads Fanon to postulate his theory of "third person consciousness." There is the initial, objective perception the Black man has of himself as a holistic, soul-bearing being with his own "agencies" and "customs."⁴¹ This is

first person consciousness, and, for the purpose of this argument, is beyond the reach of prisoners who subscribe to "true beliefs" regarding their subjectivity. Second person consciousness is such that the Negro understands himself to be a subject of examination unto himself and others.⁴² But when confronting the white gaze, there is a third person consciousness whereby the Black man's initial image of "his body is solely negating . . .";⁴³ he now "exist[s] in triples." His first person consciousness is transposed and "deafened" by expectations of barbaric behaviors. He is subsequently hyperaware of the mere corporeal image that he sees reflected in the white gaze—"the only valid one."⁴⁴ I argue that (a) JAY-Z "the prisoner" was "fixed" as object by the white gaze, and he regarded the "shadow" of his falsely determined identity as real; and (b) his third person consciousness signifies the manner in which the "guardians" discursive and ideological constructions of "blackness," are continually consolidated as "Truths." The Negro's imprisonment within the white colonial imaginary parallels the cave imprisonment of the members of Plato's Republic. Fanon's work contextualizes the mechanisms responsible for JAY-Z's "neck fetters" at the start of his rap career.

In "U Don't Know," JAY-Z demonstrates third person consciousness as he recounts in detail the conditions of the Marcy Projects "cave" from which he emerged. The first verse expounds upon the corruption of a quarantined underworld subjected to the control of a distant white gaze. The "cave prisoners" are denied resources and can only survive by "earning scars," which affords them safety and social recognition, through violence. The resignation in the lines, "[They] say that *we* are prone to violence, but it's home sweet home / where . . . chrome meets chrome," exemplifies cave imprisonment. The prisoners know only the shadowy expectation of violent behavior in their line of vision and, as Socrates notes, they do not object to their imposition. Moreover, "prone" suggests a *naturally* violent disposition. The line above reveals an acceptance of an objectified identity. The "we" implies the collective inability to act as agents who impose their will upon the social world in which they exist—tenants constituting Enlightenment's thinkers' criteria of Universal freedom for self-determining human species. In *Anthropology*, Emanuel Kant argues that the human condition is marked by a rational creature who is not passive in the face of the external world. He possesses moral character that enables him to determine what he "*makes of himself*."⁴⁵ However, JAY-Z unveils an inability to determine codes of conduct and calibrate his own moral barometer. Instead, the speaker informs listeners of the expectation of Marcy inhabitants to navigate the underworld as mere bodies that violently retaliate against the external world. "[W]hen shells come," JAY-Z warns, "you better return 'em," or risk having your "brains blown." Stripped of a subjective identity, JAY-Z portrays his younger self (and peers) as objects amid other objects (bullets "follow 'em" and mounds of cocaine

surround them) who have acceded to their *object*-construction ("Welcome to Hell . . ." he raps). They accept as "Truth," their reduction to bodies severed from their moral consciousness—bodies whose fates and behaviors are calculated by dehumanizing expectations of a disembodied "white gaze."

No different than the corporatization of hip-hop, a dehumanizing construction of "blackness" yields a profitable return: the creation of dark ghettos like Marcy Projects. As Robert Staples argues in *Black Masculinity*, the ghetto is a colony of presumed malefactors exploited for labor or political control.⁴⁶ JAY-Z later reflects upon the objectification of Blacks in slums in "Do You Wanna Ride:"⁴⁷ "You know why they call The Projects a 'project,' because it's a project! / An experiment, we're in it, only as *objects*." The "experiment" of maintaining undefiled white spaces during eras of urbanization, relied on quarantining Black bodies and exploiting them in the process. But it also necessitated (and culminated in) the perpetual presence of "the brute." This meant the "experiment" involved a *fixed* variable: an "essence" of Black masculinity. Subsequently, this objectified "gangster" mentality became deeply entrenched in the psyches of Black men. The white man had *already* "woven" him out of "a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories."⁴⁸ So, in the words of JAY-Z, "nigga, duh!"⁴⁹ Since the Negro possessed no "ontological resistance" to his objectification in the face of a white (here distant) gaze⁵⁰ and his predetermined mythological invention, he "transported [him]self . . . far, very far, from his self, and gave [him]self up as an object."⁵¹ He thereby served the agenda of the "guardian class" of urban developers. The "G" that JAY-Z boasts about wearing on his chest is therefore an outcome of the venal structural policies that birth desperate underworlds for exploitative purposes by relying on a construction of Black male youth as mere violent bodies, severed from their souls and discursively "fixed" as "animal," "wicked," and "bad."⁵²

Third person consciousness is abetted by what Fanon terms an irrational construction of race. Fanon argues that the perversity of the racially constructed hierarchy between whites and Blacks in which superiority is monopolized by the white race only is fundamentally irrational. The Negro may rationalize the world for himself, but when he is rejected, he resorts to irrationality.⁵³ "For the sake of the cause" [in our examples, surviving in a racist, capitalist patriarchy], Fanon continues, "I had adopted the process of regression . . . I am made of the irrational; I wade in the irrational."⁵⁴ The effectiveness of irrationality is contingent upon the normalization of the objectified Negro, as the establishment of norms can and do enforce hierarchical relations. If the objectified Negro is the established *norm* of a white supremacist society, dogmatic acceptance of this irrational construction owes to one's desire to avoid social alienation and abject poverty. These individuals then rationalize the irrational world in which they "wade."

In his song "Devils,"⁵⁵ JAY-Z's third person consciousness typifies a concession to a normalized, irrational racial construction. In the song, JAY-Z recounts feeling compelled to rob a peer: "The Exorcist, got me doing sticks like 'homie / You don't know me but the whole world owe me, strip!'" Yet, he insists, "I can't be held accountable, Devils beating me down, boo." He has been conscripted and held transfixed by the "devils," the white racist imaginary that has *irrationally* reinvented Blacks as violent, corporeal (non) beings. But JAY-Z had different expectations for the governing rules of the social body in which he exists. He preferred amicable social relations between him and his Black male cronies. Yet, they are all reduced to warring, corporeal enemies, and he rationalizes their irrational construction: "But then again, maybe [their hostile interactions] are for the best, though." His accepted inertia suggests he "wades" in this irrational construction. To survive in a world where he is economically and politically disenfranchised (JAY-Z names "money and power" as catalysts for his behavior), he accepts the "shadow" of an embodied and violent existence mandated by "devils," which becomes a normal reality (he avows, "That's right, it's wicked, that's life I live it"). The absence of remonstrance is indeed a consequence of the need to survive. But applying the Platonic evocation, objection is also nonsensical because the "shadows" are all the prisoners have known (and seen). The social myth of the deviant Black male has been mobilized as an accepted belief through widely disseminated discourses and omnipresent images of the "badman" in the media. It is clear why "devils" effectively "infect" JAY-Z with its "lethal" poison and inhibit a desire to challenge the given construction.

The character's acceptance of this irrational construction of Black manhood is also demonstrated when JAY-Z dismisses those who suggest there is a "way out." Unconvinced, JAY-Z argues that these critics "couldn't understand the mechanics / And the workings of the underworld," to which any resistance is clearly futile. In *Power and Powerlessness*, political sociologist John Gaventa examines power, quiescence, and rebellion, shedding light on the effects of JAY-Z's despair and resignation: "A sense of powerlessness may manifest itself as extensive fatalism, self-deprecation, or undue apathy about one's condition."⁵⁶ The more one feels powerless, the more she or he is susceptible to internalizing social norms created by the dominant group.⁵⁷ In this light, Platonic PKs can "just kick back and chill somewhere,"⁵⁸ because cave prisoners, as JAY-Z proves, eventually tighten their own "neck fetters."

JAY-Z normalizes the perverse construction of the "badman" by commoditizing it, again demonstrating "quiescence," and thus self-imprisonment. In his 2011 book *Decoded*, he recounts stabbing the record producer Lance "Un" Rivera. JAY-Z was infuriated with the fact that his album at the time, *Vol. 3.*, was leaked prior to its official release date, and he suspected the stabbing was an inside job. When he confronted Rivera at a club, JAY-Z writes, "[Rivera]

got real loud with me right there in the middle of the club. . . .”⁵⁹ “[I]n a state of shock” after reflecting upon Rivera’s *verbal* retaliation, JAY-Z approached him once more, “but this time I was blacking out with anger,” he remembers.⁶⁰ JAY-Z stabbed “Un,” pleaded guilty to charges of assault, and was sentenced to three years of probation.⁶¹ He was convinced there was no other way to deal with the confrontation outside of a violent, *embodied* response. JAY-Z again proves his third person consciousness by resorting to the lore of physical violence that he had been conditioned to accept as an instinctual response to the transgressions of the physical world.

In a moment of regression, JAY-Z normalizes the violence by exploiting the commercial viability of the debacle with Rivera in his music. An example can be found in “Dear Summer”:⁶² “I pick the gun up / Niggas back up; they know I’m not no fronta / I don’t talk shit, I just flip it *Un ya* / Sorry Lance I’m just trying to advance my quotes, by making you the butt of my joke.” JAY-Z’s violent confrontation with “Un” gives his lyrics semantic depth, evidenced by the phonetic and homophonic play on words with “Un,” his then enemy’s pseudonym, and the prepositional phrase “On you.” JAY-Z fails to rationalize the gravity of the confrontation and the potential deadly outcome. Instead, he sees it is an opportunistic yet pivotal moment in his construction of the “badman” persona, *and* a display of lyrical dexterity. Both meet the criteria for selling power in the rap industry and so are enticements for consumption. As cultural sociology scholar Roberta Sassatelli proposes in *Consumer Culture*, consumption has a normalizing function. She insists that the consumption of certain commodities signal societal progress in that one consumes “commendable” *things*, thereby “promot[ing] certain lifestyles as ‘normal.’”⁶³ Likewise, JAY-Z supplies a pathological and an objectified representation of Black men as sparring bodies to be consumed in a society where a very irrational display of Black male aggression is strangely “commendable”—at least in the purview of those consumers who subscribe to the myth of white supremacy. It is especially difficult to cast off the “neck fetters” when one has been conditioned to understand violence as a normal reality of Black male existence and when there is a monetary incentive for “quiescence.”

III: “Moment[s] of Clarity”: Deserting the “Shadows”

The turning point in the *Allegory* is the prisoner’s emancipation and subsequent indoctrination into an “enlightened” society as a PK. Socrates questions, “[W]hat do you suppose would be [the prisoner’s] answer if someone told him that what he had seen before was all a cheat and an illusion, but that now, being nearer to reality and turned toward more real things, he saw more truly?”⁶⁴ Socrates orders the chosen prisoner to turn away from the wall

and mere semblances of truth. While *Blueprint²: The Gift & the Curse* marks JAY-Z’s transcendence and the *beginning* of a recalibrated vision (there are still signs of regression in his music hereafter, proven, for instance, by his verse in “Dear Summer”), his “Philosopher King” recognition is guided by a revisionist logic insofar as it does not constitute adherence to closed, Eurocentric orders of knowledge. JAY-Z’s ascension toward the “Sun” occurs when he actually begins to question the “a priori” knowledge claims regarding Black masculinity, propagated by the “guardians.” After exposing their epistemic limitations, he disabuses himself of those forces that facilitate his corrupted vision. The focal point of this section is therefore the initial “moment of clarity.”

Deserting the Criminalized “Badman”

As an objectified “cave prisoner,” JAY-Z understood his mere corporeal “nature” to be his *fait accompli*. But he demonstrates having discarded his “neck fetters” by returning to first person consciousness and redirecting his vision toward “the Sun.” He now refuses to commoditize the “hyperaggressive Black male” image lodged in the racist American imaginary. In “I Did It My Way,” his coy revision of the “Un” confrontation evidences a new oppositional consciousness:

So imagine how disturbed I was / When I seen how big they made my fight scene
at the club / Let me explain how this shit was / This nigga Un yo I scratched him,
he went home without an aspirin / But it’s cool ‘cause we back friends, it hap-
pened and it’s over / It’s in the past and I’m glad, now I’m back to bein’ Hova.⁶⁵

JAY-Z claims an authorial position over his own narrative and subjectivity. He reframes the confrontation, retelling it dismissively and euphemistically (“stabbed” is replaced with “scratched”). He also offers a more “civilized” ending, unlike the normalized “badman” account that the media and he himself had construed while facing “shadows.” He appears to recognize the destructive consequences (penal and ideological) of exploiting intra-racial violence endemic to rap culture. These narratives endorse criminal behavior and sparring Black male bodies perpetuate reductionist myths about Black masculinity (i.e., the “Black male brute”). Such narratives can also intensify surveilling mechanisms of the State that disproportionately target Black men. “Hova” is no longer interested in aiding in the maintenance of a homogenized rap culture which functions through the collective concession to normalized, irrational racial constructions, resulting in the “fettered necks” of Black men.

It is a good thing that JAY-Z eventually turns his whole being (in this case, not merely his rap persona) away from the “cave,” in part by deviating from the commoditization of the “badman,” given the intensified

criminalization of rap music/the Black rap body. *Huffington Post* writer Lilly Workneh reports that Black rappers's artistic expressions, which often champion violence or drug distribution, have been targeted by the criminal justice system. She quotes conscious rapper Killer Mike, who has been extremely vocal on this epidemic. He argues that the intensified criminalization of the Black rap body is a tactic of the modern Jim Crow system.⁶⁶ JAY-Z adds his voice to this small chorus of rappers by contesting carceral injustice affecting Black men and rappers, lyrically and through political activism. He began to elucidate the role of US carceral injustice in maintaining his (and others') "fettered neck," through his altercation with "Un" Rivera and the systematic criminalization of "violent, Black rap bodies," as early as 2002. In "I Did It My Way," he condemns the "hypocrite system"⁶⁷ that allowed the very modes of production that white America renounces (rhyming and drug distribution) to release him (a Black male rap body) back into the "wild" to conduct unfinished business with another Black male (Rivera in 1999). JAY-Z illuminates the way the criminal justice system yields Black male recidivist outcomes.

In *Decoded*, the rapper provides personal anecdotes that attest to the developing partnership between the criminalization of hip-hop and the thriving prison industrial complex. Because the Black rap body is a "problem"⁶⁸ and requires militarized modes of social control, the NYPD, JAY-Z informs, "created a squad division to deal with the gun-toting and mafia-like behavior of rappers."⁶⁹ But JAY-Z inverts the equation: as the prototypical Black male rap body, he assumes the role of antagonist to the systematic criminalization of Black rappers and men. In 2018, he spearheaded the fight to exonerate the unjustly incarcerated Philadelphia rapper, Meek Mill, and created an award-winning, 2017 docuseries on the late Kalief Browder. Browder served three undeserved years in the dehumanizing environment of Rikers Island, which occasioned his suicide at age twenty-two. JAY-Z later taunts those "at his neck" for his growing political involvement in carceral politics, intimating that a documentary on the slaying of Trayvon Martin—a teen whose 2012 murder was the result of his white assailant suspecting "suspicious" intent—will soon augment his latest political endeavors.⁷⁰ As the unofficial hip-hop ambassador of prison reform and the over-policing of Black male bodies, JAY-Z has helped to mitigate the problem of relegating these bodies to the "cave" by irrationally constructing them as innately violent and deviant. This is made clear as their pathologized identities rely, in part, on this repressive carceral system.

Deserting "D'Evils" and Redefining Masculinity

JAY-Z also removes his "neck fetters" by realizing he is no longer powerless to or conscripted by "d'evils." He is done with "wading" in the

irrationally constructed culture of toxic masculinity. He instead offers a countervailing model of Black masculinity. The first song on 4:44, "Kill Jay Z," is one of harrowing self-reflection. As "the re-constituted PK," JAY-Z advocates killing "the former Jay-Z"—the ego-driven, uber-masculine JAY-Z, who shot his own brother and "stabbed Un over some records" simply because "[h]e was talkin' too reckless!" Here he understands that "even if people backstab you," the former "gangster" identity signified by the "G" on his chest, was actually an irrationally contrived *persona*, rather than a realistic presentation of self. "The 'fuck everybody' attitude ain't natural," he confesses, proving the "violent Black male" disposition cannot be explained away as an "essence" of "blackness." He now knows the importance of acquiescing to a more vulnerable and fluid conception of manhood. He informs "the old Jay-Z" of the necessity of "get[ting] softer," for instance, for his family. In "Cry, Jay-Z," he admonishes the former shell of himself.

The reinvention of self, witnessed in "Kill Jay Z," indicates a refusal to be held captive by the hyper-masculine demands of the "d'evils." His identity is now determined by his *own* human desires, moral consciousness, and conception of manhood. There are new sources of motivation. He is inspired by the fact that he "owe[s] the truth / to all the youth that fell in love with Jay-Z." But more importantly, his first daughter, Blue Ivy, and the thought of allowing his masculine ego to result in "another nigga playing football with [his] son," galvanizes him to bury "the old Jay-Z." He is also driven by the fear of allowing his wife, Beyoncé, to evade his grasp, due to his infidelity and emotional unavailability. In "Friends,"⁷¹ JAY-Z claims he has parted ways with the misogynistic and polygamous expectations of hip-hop. No longer conscripted by "d'evils," he stands convicted in his goal of becoming a devoted husband and declares that nothing can compromise his marriage a second time: "I'm not going to nobody nothin' when me and my wife beefin' / I don't care if the house on fire, I'm dyin'; / nigga, I ain't leavin'." JAY-Z's pledge of "never giv[ing] [his] heart to a woman," expressed in "Big Pimpin',"⁷² is a lost mentality.

The artist exhibits a newfound respect for Black women in general. If the "badman" is also driven by America's emasculating ideals and practices and solidified through masculine prowess and misogynistic sensibilities,⁷³ "the new Jay-Z" no longer co-opts Black women as objects to reclaim and substantiate Black male power. Instead, as JAY-Z informs listeners in "713,"⁷⁴ "America's a motherfucka to [Black men] / Lock us up, shoot us." But addressing the "Black queen," he repeats three times in a solemn, dissenting voice: "you rescued us." His reappraisal of Black women's worth to Black men undermines and dislodges white supremacist, patriarchal discourses that identified Black women as the culprits for "castrated" Black families and men in the mid-twentieth century. Recasting Black women as "saviors" strips such discursive manifestations of "d'evils," of their former power to dictate

the terms of Black love. As JAY-Z admits in the title track, "4:44,"⁷⁵ he now "let[s] love light the way."

Finally, escaping the shadows of compulsory hypermasculinity is difficult if one does not acknowledge both the lack of healthy models/"Forms" of masculinity and fatherhood worth emulating, as does JAY-Z in "Adnis."⁷⁶ "We all screwed," he spits, "cause we never had the tools." Presumably he means "the tools" to be real men and create healthy, egalitarian family structures rather than families whose foundations rest upon hypermasculine hubris or absent fathers. His biological father, Adnis Reeves, deserted the scene, "shot junk in [his] arms," had never given him a "blueprint" of manhood, and incessantly "punted" each time he announced his intention to visit.⁷⁷ Since his model of fatherhood was an elusive, unloving "shadow," JAY-Z encourages the establishment of a new, emulative paradigm of fatherhood. He ponders, "Who would have thought I'd be the dad I never had?"⁷⁸ He is a superhero to his children. He plays the role of the tooth fairy to Blue,⁷⁹ and he teaches them the value of procuring generational wealth in the "The Story of O.J." His version of fatherhood is thus closer to "the real thing" than being many times removed from a utopian reality. That is, *his* version will most likely produce offspring who will aid in the erection of a virtuous "city-state." JAY-Z's vision of fatherhood more closely aligns with a "Just" society.

Conclusion

In "Smile,"⁸⁰ JAY-Z includes a poetic voice-over of his mother, Gloria Carter, who tells listeners that "life in the shadows" is unimaginable, referring to the many years she spent living as a closeted lesbian. Similarly, JAY-Z's initial dehumanizing "gangster" ethos, portrayed in his former music and public presentation, constitutes identity imprisonment. But if JAY-Z can now "smile," it is because his art unmasks the ways in which the illusions of self are maintained through the concerted effort of structural violence and third person consciousness. Escaping one's "neck fetters" proves particularly difficult when one's material conditions necessitate normalized behavior that corroborates an objectified identity engineered by the structural policies of the "higher ups" who produce crime-ridden, impoverished slums like Marcy Projects. This complex web is spun by the members of the upper region to keep marginalized members of society in a state of perpetual stupefaction. In a racialized political economy, the "guardians" are only possessors of absolute "Truth" and "Knowledge" of Black subjectivity because of the discourses and ideologies *they* create and proliferate, the structures *they* establish to sustain the "shadows," and the coercive power mechanisms *they* wield in doing so.

JAY-Z eventually throws off his "neck fetters," tramples the "Divided Line," and assumes the role of a re-envisioned PK. He calls for the obliteration of "the old, hypermasculine Jay-Z" to do so. The "new Jay-Z" unabashedly attacks US carceral injustice, as it maintains the "fettered necks" of Black bodies through their intentional criminalization. He also rejects essentialist representations of Black masculinity in hip-hop by refusing to normalize the irrational construction of the "badman," vis-à-vis a revisionist narrative of Black womanhood in twentieth-century US racial and gendered discourse. JAY-Z further redefines masculinity by refusing a powerless mind state, as well as supplanting an elusive model of fatherhood with a more stable and invested presence. These are all signs of apprehending a truer, self-defined image of Black masculine subjectivity. He is at last deserving of the title "Philosopher King."

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Notes

1. JAY-Z's "Moment of Clarity" from *The Black Album* (Roc-A-Fella Records, 2003), is frequently referenced throughout the article as evidence of JAY-Z's liberation from the "cave."

2. JAY-Z, *Reasonable Doubt* (Roc-A-Fella and Priority Records, 1996).

3. JAY-Z, *The Blueprint 2: The Gift and the Curse* (Roc-A-Fella Records and Def Jam Recordings, 2002). This album merely marks the early signs of a change in JAY-Z's vision, given his fleeting, lyrical moments of discernment. But as Plato informs, the prisoner's ascent is a gradual process. The prisoner "chafes" at the light initially since it "pain[s] his eyes" (G. P. Goold [ed.], *Plato in Twelve Volumes: The Republic*. Vol. V. Books VI—X. Trans. Paul Shorey [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930], 125.) JAY-Z's moments of perceptual regression in *Blueprint 2* and in some later works, symbolize the discomfiture he feels while embracing the light of the "Sun," with respect to understanding his own subjective identity.

4. ShaDawn Battle, "The Self-Reliant Philosopher King: Shawn Carter Exonerated," in *Jay-Z: Essays on Hip Hop's Philosopher King*, ed. Julius Bailey (North Carolina: McFarland Press, 2011), 191–210.

5. JAY-Z, "Meet the Parents," from *The Blueprint 2: The Gift and the Curse*.

6. JAY-Z, "Diamonds Is Forever," from *The Blueprint 2: The Gift and the Curse*.

7. Kanye West and JAY-Z, "No Church in the Wild" from *Watch the Throne* (Roc-A-Fella Records, Roc Nation, and Def Jam Recordings, 2011).
8. Jozen Cummings, "Five Things We Learned About Jay-Z's New Book at the New York Public Library," *The Wall Street Journal-Speakeasy Column*. 2010.
9. JAY-Z, "Oh My God" from *Kingdom Come* (Roc-A-Fella Records and Def Jam Recordings, 2006).
10. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963).
11. Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1963., <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr/The-letter-from-the-Birmingham-jail> MLK. criticizes white clergymen for focusing on effects of the protests, rather the causes.
12. The Carters, "Black Effect," from *Everything is Love* (Parkwood Entertainment, Sony Music Entertainment, S.C. Enterprises, and Roc Nation, 2018).
13. Julius Bailey, ed., *Jay-Z: Essays on Hip Hop's Philosopher King* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 2011).
14. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952). Ellison's nameless narrator in *Invisible Man* arrives at this conclusion at the end of the novel while ruminating upon the slipperiness of the trickster figure, Rinehart; 376.
15. JAY-Z, "Reasonable Doubt," from *Reasonable Doubt*.
16. JAY-Z, Vol. 3... *Life and Times of S. Carter* (Roc-A-Fella Records and Def Jam Recordings, 1999).
17. JAY-Z, 4:44 (Roc Nation, 2017).
18. The Carters, *Everything is Love*.
19. Theorists such as Diana Fuss and Susan Buck-Morss have argued that identification politics and theories of "otherness" (respectively) have their genealogical origins in colonial history.
20. In *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), Charles Mills explains that the Racial Contract is shared between the "white polity" and the remaining class of nonwhite subjects who are subordinate and inferior in the "white-ruled polity" (11). The Contract arbitrarily vests the white polity with the privilege of exploiting the lands, bodies, and resources of the nonwhite class (11). "All whites are beneficiaries of the Contract," Mills explains, "though some whites are not signatories to it" (11). I am specifically referring to those white subjects who have signed on to the notion of the "differential privileging" of whites as a group—those whites who endorse the myth of white supremacy. Nevertheless, I am very much aware that there is a much more complex racial dynamic underway, and that Black bodies often suffer at the hands of their own. For instance, as Michael Javen Fortner explains in *The Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015) some Blacks, irrespective of class distinction, have added their voices to conservative choruses that underscore the agency of Black folks in the violence and lawlessness in Black communities, going so far as to advocate for stricter punishments. Yet, I argue that (a) such agency is precarious when actuated within unjust structures; and (b) such Blacks have become "signatories" of white power structures and policies.
21. Mark Anthony Neal, *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinity* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). Mark Anthony Neal argues that caricatured images of Black masculinity proliferated in popular media are ironically legible, which means any performance of Black masculinity that belies "legible masculinity"—as defined by the white public imagination—is rendered "illegible."

22. G. P. Goold, ed., *Plato in Twelve Volumes: The Republic*. Vol. V. Books VI—X. Trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 129, 137. Goold, ed., *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, 129, 137.
23. *Ibid.*, 121.
24. *Ibid.*, 137.
25. *Ibid.*, 121.
26. JAY-Z, "U Don't Know," from *Blueprint* (Roc-A-Fella Records and Def Jam Recordings, 2001).
27. Adam Bradley and Andrew Dubois, eds., *The Anthology of Rap* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 326.
28. Jay-Z featuring Eminem, "Renegade," from *The Blueprint*.
29. Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 187.
30. Jeffrey Ogbar, *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 75.
31. *Ibid.*, 76. Also see, Tricia Rose. *Black Noise* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 12.
32. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 76.
33. *Ibid.*, 187.
34. James Perkinson, "Imperial Whiteness Meets Hip Hop Blackness: A Spiritual Phenomenology of the Hegemonic Body in Twenty-First Century USA," in *Religion in Hip Hop: Mapping the New Terrain in the US*, ed. Monica Miller, Anthony B. Pinn, and Bernard "Bun B" Freeman, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 108–23.
35. JAY-Z, *S. Carter: The Hits Collection Vol. 1* (2003).
36. Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man," *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 121–31.
37. *Ibid.*, 122.
38. Jared Ball, *I Mix What I Like* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2011), 4. Journalist and hip-hop scholar Jared Ball also perceives of the corporatization of hip hop as an offshoot of the ongoing, transhistorical colonial project, and reminds readers that "[c]olonialism required an assault on the immaterial culture of a people to protect an assault on their material resources."
39. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 90.
40. *Ibid.*, 95, 89.
41. *Ibid.*, 90.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*, 92, 95.
45. Emanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 192.
46. Robert Staples, *Black Masculinity: The Black Male's Role in American Society* (San Francisco: Black Scholar Press, 1982), 39–40.
47. JAY-Z, "Do You Wanna Ride," from *Kingdom*.
48. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. 91.
49. JAY-Z, "Say Hello," from *American Gangster* (Roc-A-Fella Records, 2007).

50. Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*, 90.
51. *Ibid.*, 92.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*, 102.
54. *Ibid.*
55. JAY-Z, "D'Evils" from *Reasonable Doubt*.
56. John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence & Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 265.
57. *Ibid.*, 265.
58. Kanye West, "Diamonds from Sierre Leone," from *Late Registration* (Roc-A-Fella Records and Def Jam Recordings, 2005). JAY-Z spits these lines for Kanye West.
59. JAY-Z, *Decoded* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 110.
60. *Ibid.*, 110.
61. *Ibid.*, 111.
62. Memphis Bleek, "Dear Summer" from *534* (Roc-A-Fella Records, 2005). JAY-Z appears solo on the track.
63. Roberta Sassatelli, *Consumer Culture: History, Theory, and Politics* (New York: SAGE, 2007), 153.
64. Plato, *The Republic*, 123, 125.
65. JAY-Z, "I Did It My Way," from *Blueprint²: The Gift and the Curse*.
66. Lilly Workneh, "Rapper Killer Mike Says the Criminalization of Rap Music Is the New Jim Crow," *Black Voices*, 22 April 2015. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/02/killer-mike-rap-music-_n_6995852.html.
67. When JAY-Z raps, "I caught smaller cases, but I had capital / Hypocrite system let me right back at you," he implies that the revenue earned from drug dealing and from being a successful rapper results in vacated charges. The paradox is such that both are reprehensible modes of production, yet they enable his clemency. However, clemency positions JAY-Z to reoffend, with the hopes of Black fratricide being the end result. JAY-Z also condemns the ambivalence of "justice" when both victim and perpetrator are Black, and the "accused just happen to rap," compared to cases involving a Black male perpetrator and a victim who is the white face of virtue and (socially acceptable) enterprise. In which case, justice is firmly enacted so that "[white supremacist critics] can look good by 'paintin' [him—the Black rap body] as bad news," once again stabilizing the racial hierarchy.
68. JAY-Z, *Decoded*, 161.
69. *Ibid.*, 162.
70. The Carters, "Black Effect," from *Everything is Love*.
71. JAY-Z, "Friends," from *Everything is Love*.
72. JAY-Z featuring UGK, "Big Pimpin'," from *Vol. 3... Life and Times of S. Carter*.
73. Ogbar, *Hip-Hop Revolution*, 75–76.
74. The Carters, "713," from *Everything is Love*.
75. JAY-Z, "4:44" from *4:44*.
76. JAY-Z, "Adnis," from *4:44*.
77. *Ibid.*
78. *Ibid.*
79. JAY-Z, "4:44," from *4:44*.
80. JAY-Z, "Smile," from *4:44*.

Close-Up: JAY-Z

The Outside Meets the Institution: The Carters' "Apeshit" Video

Jenny Gunn

Abstract

Using the figure of the anamorphosis, this essay explores the critical labor of the music video for The Carters' "Apeshit" (Ricky Saiz, 2018, United States). By playing off the canonical artefacts of the Louvre collection, "Apeshit" stages a stunning array of lessons in contrast, thinking through blackness in relation to ontology, capitalism, and aesthetics. With "Apeshit," The Carters claim blackness as an aesthetic and affective force of sociality incompatible with canonical archival methods. Instead, the genre of the contemporary music video emerges as a form of radical archival practice.

I. Introduction

If Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* (2016) and JAY-Z's corresponding *4:44* (2017) stand as portraits to each as individuals, then *Everything Is Love* (2018) is the culminating testament to the couple. The opening image of the newly rebranded Carters in the album's viral announcement video "Apeshit" (Ricky Saiz, 2018) underscores this change in presentation (fig. 1). Like the traditional marriage portrait, such as Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) or Piero della Francesca's *Battista Sforza and Federico de Montefeltro* (1472–1474), "Apeshit" proclaims the wealth and status of the couple and celebrates their union as a sound financial investment. But while the traditional marriage portrait celebrates the woman as a form of property for her husband, the opening image of the Carters in the "Apeshit" video proclaims Beyoncé as equal partner in this post-infidelity redux of their marriage. Indeed, Beyoncé's equal status is reiterated by both her pantsuit attire and "Apeshit"'s lyrical celebration of her artistic success and financial wealth. In the "Apeshit" video, JAY-Z, master rap impresario and "modern-day Picasso," illustrates a new willingness to stand aside and celebrate the talent and success of Beyoncé as his equal.