

WE MADE *LEMONADE*: BLACK WOMEN, SYNCRETIC RELIGION, AND
VOODOO AESTHETICS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Historically, syncretic religion has never been positively represented with such a broad platform as it has through Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. Through the historical origins of the practice with its inception in the Americas and the Caribbean during the colonial period through the commercialization of Voodoo culture in modern-day New Orleans, the true meaning and purpose for syncretic religious practice was lost up until April 2016. On April 23, 2016 Beyoncé released her visual album *Lemonade*. It addressed varying themes including her husband's infidelity, her increasingly louder political voice, and her endless support for Black Women. Much to the surprise of many, Beyoncé also made references to syncretic religious practice throughout the piece. This invited the question, "Why did Beyoncé choose to highlight syncretic religious practice throughout *Lemonade*?"

This thesis examines the role that syncretic religion played in Beyoncé's 2016 visual album, *Lemonade*. Using an interdisciplinary method of analysis including anthropology, film, history, and cultural studies, I use varying texts and cultural figures to make my point that Beyoncé's usage of syncretic religion in her visual-album transforms the negative connotation of syncretic religion into one that is more positive. I use Julia Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men* as tools to demonstrate syncretic religion in *Lemonade*, and support the positive utility of the practice. I also highlight Marie Laveau, one of New Orleans' most famous Voodoo Priestesses to illustrate the historical dominance of the practice through women.

These sources, in conjunction with many more, highlight the importance of community development, normalization of the practice, and spiritual healing for Black Women throughout *Lemonade*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter I: The Origin Story	16
Chapter II: Community in Action	27
Chapter III: The Everyday	41
Chapter IV: Healing for Survival.....	55
Conclusion.....	67
Bibliography	74
Appendix	80

*“If you are silent about your pain,
they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”*
– Zora Neale Hurston

Introduction

Beyoncé's performance at the 2018 Coachella Festival was a historic endeavor. Not only is she the first Black Woman to headline Coachella, but she did something her predecessors had never done before: she told a story of Black Culture at one of the most well-known festivals around the world. What makes this so significant is that her performance was distinctly Black in nature which contrasted with the predominantly White audience. She performed the Negro National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," referenced Malcolm X and Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, and she highlighted the culture of Historically Black College & Universities (HBCUs) through the replication of a Fraternity Probate. This performance was monumental. The festival was even renamed on social media circuits as Beychella in honor of the remarkable work that Beyoncé and her team had put together.

This superb performance did not come without critiques of the perceived reception by White attendees and viewers. Beyoncé's mother, Tina Lawson, reiterated her hesitance at the political and cultural nature of her daughter's performance. She expressed that she was "afraid that the predominately white audience at Coachella would be confused by all of the black culture and Black college culture because it was something that they might not get."¹ In response to her mother's comments Beyoncé told her that she "[has] worked very hard to get to the point where [she] has a true voice, and at this point in her career, [she] has a responsibility to do what's best for the world and not what is most popular."² Beyoncé's hope was that following the show

¹ Tina Knowles, "Tina Knowles on Instagram: "Saw This Written above Photo and Commentary By: Alisa Adamson Profit and Thought I Would Share It with You..."", Instagram, April 16, 2018, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bho-WDiBzpV/?taken-by=mstinalawson>.

² Tina Knowles, "Tina Knowles on Instagram: "Saw This Written above Photo and Commentary By: Alisa Adamson Profit and Thought I Would Share It with You..."", Instagram, April 16, 2018, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bho-WDiBzpV/?taken-by=mstinalawson>.

“young people would research this culture and see how cool it is, and young people black and white would listen to “Lift Every Voice and Sing” and see how amazing the words are for us all and bridge the gap.”³

While Beyoncé’s hopes for her attendees may incite viewers to think she is speaking about her increasingly political voice on issues such as racial inequality, police brutality, and gender equality, Beyoncé’s musical work speaks to a slightly different narrative. It adds something new to the conversation that is being held about Beyoncé’s Blackness. Through her visual album *Lemonade*, Beyoncé tells a story concerning her identity as a Black Woman, but she also tells a story of her discovery and her usage of syncretic religion and how it intertwines with her other identities. She has been very public with her political and social identities, yet her practice with syncretic religion was discreet. It was only through research and analysis, where I was able to identify the nuances of the work she put out on display to understand the syncretism I was seeing.

I soon realized that the work I was preparing to delve into fit within a larger conversation about syncretic religion that various scholars had joined before the start of my project. Their work provided a strong structural framework that allowed me to understand and analyze what I was seeing throughout *Lemonade*.

The type of syncretic religion I was viewing within *Lemonade* was one that I had limited experience with, as it is not as connected to what I was used to seeing back in Senegal where I live. In order to delve into syncretic practice, I began with academic scholarship. Georgetown University Professor Joseph M. Murphy’s *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African*

³ Tina Knowles, "Tina Knowles on Instagram: "Saw This Written above Photo and Commentary By: Alisa Adamson Profit and Thought I Would Share It with You..."", Instagram, April 16, 2018, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bho-WDiBzpV/?taken-by=mstinalawson>.

Diaspora is a work that I referenced in my thesis.⁴ Professor Murphy is a theology professor at Georgetown University who has made a point of studying applied West African syncretic religion in the Americas and Caribbean. In this book, Murphy traces the threads connecting five contemporary religious practices in the USA. These practices include Cuba's Santería, Brazil's Candomblé, Haiti's Vodou, Revival Zion and the Black Church in the United States. Murphy argues in his book that there is a level of reciprocity between the communities and the spirits from these religious ceremonies, which essentially link the faith back to the African continent. He also explores each religion's history, rituals, and its relationship to the spirit. Murphy's work was important, but I found his perspective as a White man to be limited, because he was an outsider looking at a practice with which he had no historical connections. I thus found it necessary to delve into scholarship that touched upon the intersections of syncretic religion and Black Women to further strengthen my knowledge on actual practitioners and the historical representations of it in US culture.

Angela Denise Watkins' "*Mambos, Priestesses, and Goddesses: Spiritual Healing Through Vodou in Black Women's Narratives of Haiti and New Orleans*" was another work that proved to be valuable to my research.⁵ Watkins uses contemporary novels written by Black Women to answer the research question: "How have Black Women writers contributed to the narrative and continued cultural significance of Voodoo?" Through her dissertation, she uses various literary works written by Black Women writers to re-examine the negative connotation given to voodoo, and argue how it has had a significant influence socially, culturally and

⁴ Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003).

⁵ Angela Denise Watkins, *Mambos, Priestesses, and Goddesses: Spiritual Healing through Vodou in Black Women's Narratives of Haiti and New Orleans*, PhD diss., University of Iowa, Summer 2014.

politically, and how it became a strategy of survival. Watkins uses Zora Neale Hurston to establish a historical framework for the novels that she presents in her dissertation. While Watkins provided a perspective needed to understand some Black Female interpretations of syncretism, I felt there was a need to ground my research in real life examples or concepts concerning Black Women. While much of my understanding of the lived experiences of Black Women has been through my own personal experiences, I knew that I needed to delve into more scholarly texts as support.

Patricia Hill Collins's text *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* provided the knowledge and understanding of Black Feminist theory that strengthened my ability to critique structures in place.⁶ In this text, Collins provides a basis for the social construction of Black Feminist thought. Throughout the book, she explores themes of oppression, family, work, sexual politics, and more while showcasing the injustice that Black Women were historically facing and still continue to face. She references various theorists such as bell hooks and Kimberlé Crenshaw, as well as various literary authors such as Alice Walker, Dorothy West and more to draw home her point. These texts provided an understanding to the theoretical framework of how Black Women are viewed societally.

Despite the work of all of these scholars and more, I found myself still struggling to make sense of *Lemonade* in the way that I knew I could. Beyoncé has historically used her music to enter complex conversations and make statements on issues passionate to her. In a video journal series released shortly after her self-titled album, *Beyoncé*, dropped, Beyoncé outlined her desire for her self-titled album to be an experience wherein everyone could “see the whole picture” of

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2000).

her music “and to see how personal everything is to [her].”⁷ It is important for her fans to “hear the songs with the story that is in [her] head, because that is what makes [them hers].”⁸ This desire incentivized Beyoncé to recreate various aspects of her personal life as she envisioned them through her songs, and that is what made *Beyoncé* such a remarkable album.

What initially attracted me to *Lemonade* as an object for study was the representation and focus on the lives of Black Women and Girls. Beyoncé’s choice to recount her story of pain, while bringing Black Women of varying shades to the forefront of her piece is remarkable. As someone who has criticized Beyoncé for profiting off of her image and privilege of being a light-skinned Black Women, Beyoncé does an effective job of celebrating the diversity and uniqueness of Black Women within the diaspora. With each screening, I found myself connecting to the piece more and more, and it was only through self-reflection that I was able to identify why *Lemonade* resonated with me. Additionally, as a first-generation Black Women in the United States with roots from Senegal and Ivory Coast, my exposure to traditional religious practices has permeated most of my life. While cultural differences influence the usage and function of the practice across West Africa, these practices continue to remain despite the increasing westernization of these traditional societies. While watching and attempting to understand all of the artistry that Beyoncé put into the work, it occurred to me that she too was using traditional forms of West African religious practice throughout the entire piece. In exploring the presence of this religious practice through *Lemonade*, I was able to recognize that Beyoncé was expanding the way in which she was engaging with Black Women. *Lemonade* truly became a piece for Black Women by a Black Woman.

⁷ "Self-Titled": Part 1. The Visual Album <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcN6Ke2V-rQ> , 3:20.

⁸ "Self-Titled": Part 1. The Visual Album <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcN6Ke2V-rQ> , 0:45.

Upon further exploration into *Lemonade*, I realized I was able to recognize the semblance of syncretic faith because of my personal lived experiences. Had I no connection to syncretic religious practice, I would have overlooked much of the symbolism and representation throughout the film. While Beyoncé channels some religious figures and practices, she does it in a way so that people who are unfamiliar will not feel like they are being indoctrinated into an unfamiliar practice. This led me to ask the questions “Why did Beyoncé choose to highlight syncretic religious practice throughout *Lemonade*?” and “Why did she make the appearance of syncretic religious practice subliminal throughout *Lemonade*?”. These questions led to the start of this research project, and allowed for me to further delve into the historical and modern contributors that have shaped the reception of *Lemonade* and syncretic religion today.

In pursuit of the answers to my research questions, I had to develop a methodology that was interdisciplinary in nature. This was due to the varying lenses I had to put on, in order to engage with my varying texts. My research is a combination of film studies, history, anthropology and cultural studies so it was important that I understood those subject areas of discussion in order to comprehend the texts I engaged with.

The first part of my research involved gathering a solid foundation of what syncretic religion was and understanding the various forms that may be practiced within the United States. In order to develop a sound understanding on this topic, I primarily read works by Joseph M. Murphy, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University and a widely-cited scholar. I knew that his work is well-respected, and I would be able to ask follow up questions in person if I needed to. I read three texts titled *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora*, *Osun*

Across the Waters, and *Santería: African Spirits in America*.⁹ These three books addressed syncretic religion in different ways, and while some books were more specialized than others, common themes appeared across the texts that showcased their overlaps. While reading and analyzing these texts, I made sure to ask myself the same set of questions in order to find overlapping themes. Some of the questions I asked included:

- What are the varying forms of syncretic religion?
- How are the various forms of syncretic religion used by practitioners?
- What are some common themes present across the usage of syncretic religion?
- Is there a large presence of women who practice syncretic religion, and if so, why do they?

These questions allowed me to identify four threads that informed the analysis of my thesis: community, female leadership, everyday life, and spiritual healing. These identified threads became themes that I knew I would be looking for when I later analyzed my primary and principal sources. My primary source was *Lemonade* and my principal sources were Marie Laveau as a historical figure and Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*. In expanding my knowledge of what syncretic religion was, I came to realize how diverse the practice is within the United States, and I was unsure as to how I would focus. It was through reading *Envisioning Black Feminist Voodoo Aesthetics: African Spirituality in American Cinema* by Kameelah L. Martin, that I was able to get further clarity and put words to the visual representations of syncretic religion in visual and written media. I came to understand and put words to issues I was grappling with throughout this research process. These issues were: 1. identifying the broad term

⁹ Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003); Joseph Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001); Joseph M. Murphy, *Santería: African Spirits in America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993).

to define the magical processes in which these Black women engage with and 2. the general term of how to frame the usage of these processes in a consumable format and a term that could be used to explain the visualization of voodoo in media.

In addressing the first issue, Martin states that “[in] the American mind all forms of African spirituality found across the Black Atlantic equates to Voodoo,” and as a result she makes the conscious choice to use “Voodoo” as a catchall phrase throughout her text to maintain consistency with the “American bastardization” of the term.”¹⁰

In addressing the second issue, Martin coined the term Voodoo Aesthetics. The term Voodoo Aesthetics will be used in this thesis to define the appearance of voodoo in visual mediums. In regards to the overall inception of the term, Martin says:

The inscription of African ritual cosmologies on the black female body...*voodoo aesthetics*, has been deployed in visual media for varying purposes. Voodoo aesthetics become manifest in the performance of ceremony, the inclusion of sacred objects or accoutrements on the body, the use of the body as a vessel for Spirit, and various other associations between persons of African descent and African religious iconography.¹¹

The term broadly describes all the visual representations of syncretic religion I saw in *Lemonade*, and helped me to understand Marie Laveau and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men*.

When developing my initial methodology, I chose to look at Marie Laveau, Zora Neale Hurston and Beyoncé because of their racial identities and their ties to syncretic religion. Marie Laveau is a well-known Voodoo Priestess in New Orleans. Zora Neale Hurston was an Anthropologist who had conducted fieldwork and had been inducted into the Voodoo priesthood, and Beyoncé used syncretic religion throughout her visual album *Lemonade*. These three women

¹⁰ Kameelah L. Martin, *Envisioning Black Feminist Voodoo Aesthetics* (London: Lexington Books, 2016), xx.

¹¹ Martin, xvi-xvii.

and their perceived works inform the body of my thesis, as I analyze how they engaged with syncretic religion in their lives and what syncretic religion meant for them. Re-evaluating my then primary sources is what later led to the next, and perhaps most crucial, part of my methodology at this stage: re-evaluating and re-developing my research question. The initial research question I developed when I submitted my proposal was: “*How have West African religious traditions figured into the lives and cultures of African-American Women in Louisiana?*”. I soon realized, with the help of my professors, that I was less interested in the specific syncretic religious traditions, but more so in the utility of syncretic religious traditions for these Black Women. This revelation incited the process in which I had to figure out what I was looking to explore. I asked myself whether I was looking to understand the public opinion towards the product of these women’s usage of syncretic religion or if I wanted to explore the type of personal relationship these women may have had with their usage of syncretic religion, and what it signifies for them. I knew immediately that I wanted to pursue the route in which I would be able to explore the personal utility of syncretic religion. I realized in identifying these two possible thesis pathways, the former route encompassed all three of my then identified primary sources, and the latter route encompassed only Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men* and Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*. Unlike Hurston and Beyoncé, Marie Laveau never personally produced a physical product showcasing how syncretic religion impacted her life. Her memory, which was something that was placed upon her, is all we truly have left of her. At that point in my research I knew I had to learn more about Marie Laveau in order to understand how she might later fit into my overall project.

The next phase of my methodology involved conducting research on Marie Laveau. I had initially planned on doing research on Laveau closer to my trip to New Orleans, but I knew the direction of my thesis depended on the information I would find then. In order to learn more about

Laveau, I chose to rely on two of the best historical texts written on Laveau: *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux: A Study of Powerful Female Leadership in Nineteenth Century New Orleans* written by Ina Johanna Fandrich and *A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* written by Carolyn Long.¹² I also looked at obituaries written by various newspapers from 1881, one of which came from the New York Times.¹³ While reading through these texts I asked myself the following questions:

- How did Marie Laveau influence Voodoo culture in the past?
- How does she influence Voodoo culture in present-day New Orleans?
- Did Marie Laveau produce a physical product showcasing syncretic religion's utility for her, as a result of her usage of the religious practice?

These questions helped reconfigure Laveau's place in my thesis, while she was not used as a primary text- she certainly played a huge part in establishing the influence of syncretic religion within Louisiana, and how her role as a Voodoo Priestess contributed to the development of women's leadership and autonomy in New Orleans.

As a result of the changes I had made to the role of Marie Laveau as one of my primary sources, I did not want to make the same error or assumption with Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*. This started the next stage in my methodology wherein I would read and analyze *Mules and Men*, and determine how she would fit within my overall research.¹⁴ In addition to reading *Mules and Men*, I read a biography on Hurston titled *Zora Neale Hurston & American Literary Culture*

¹² Ina Johanna Fandrich, *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux: A Study of Powerful Female Leadership in Nineteenth Century New Orleans* (New York: Routledge, 2005).; Carolyn Morrow. Long, *A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007).

¹³ "The Dead Voudou Queen," *The New York Times*, June 23, 1881, accessed October 24, 2017.

¹⁴ Zora Neale. Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).

written by Margaret Genevieve West.¹⁵ The former text helped me understand Hurston's usage and interpretation of syncretic religion; the latter text helped me understand *Mules and Men* and Hurston as a whole in relation to her other works. The questions I developed to analyze her work were:

- How is Zora Neale Hurston portraying syncretic religion in her work?
- Are there any noticeable changes in Zora Neale Hurston as result of her usage of syncretic religion?
- Are any of the previously identified themes of community, female leadership, and spiritual healing present in her work?

These questions were developed in order to gain a more holistic understanding of how syncretic religion may have affected Hurston's life. These questions, allowed me to gather enough information that informed my decision to remove Hurston as a principal source, and to solely focus on Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. While Hurston was no longer a principal source, she served a crucial part in my overall thesis, as I used her work to draw parallels to the scenes in which Beyoncé showcased the "Voodoo Aesthetics" present throughout *Mules and Men*.

The next part of my methodology involved analyzing Beyoncé's *Lemonade*. This was another important aspect of my research as *Lemonade* is my principal source, meaning much of the evidence I use to support my claim, came from this text. At this point in my research, my research question was: "Why did Beyoncé choose to use syncretic religion throughout *Lemonade*?" This informed the types of questions I would later ask when watching and analyzing *Lemonade*. These questions were:

- How does Beyoncé use syncretic religion in *Lemonade*?

¹⁵ Margaret Genevieve West, *Zora Neale Hurston & American Literary Culture* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005).

- How do my secondary sources engage with *Lemonade*?
- How do the various components present within *Lemonade* (the visual, the poetry, the song lyrics, and overarching story) form a narrative about Beyoncé’s usage of syncretic religion?

These questions allowed me to engage with the text in a different way than I had previously done before, because I was looking at themes that connected to ideas that were present in my primary and secondary sources. I also was able to put words to the “Voodoo Aesthetics” present in *Lemonade*, and showcase how Zora Neale Hurston and Marie Laveau may have influenced Beyoncé’s work. My analysis of this work essentially tied together all of my research, and then provided the perfect basis to progress into the development of my claim.

The final stage of my research involved my trip to New Orleans to research and study/observe how syncretic religion is used by Black Women. While I had developed a loose itinerary of what I wanted to do in the city, I was open to modifications based on who I met. While I was in the city I met Dr. Ibrahima Seck, who is the official Historian at the Whitney Plantation; he connected me with Ina Frandrich, author of *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux: A Study of Powerful Female Leadership in Nineteenth Century New Orleans*, and Priestess Sula, a Priestess in New Orleans. Through Priestess Sula, I was able to attend an event titled: “An Intimate Night with Chief Yuya: Manifest YOU- A Spiritual Transformation,” where I got to hear about Chief Yuya’s experiences with syncretic religion, and what led him to being initiated to the Priesthood. This session in particular was very informative. While the presenter was a man, Chief Yuya reiterated many of the same themes that I found to be true in my research. I also discussed a bit of my research with Chief Yuya, Priestess Sula, and the audience that was present, and I was able to gather information from real-life practitioners that serve as

great critiques towards the overall argument I made. I visited various Voodoo Shops around the city, and the New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum that reiterated how Voodoo is exaggerated.

Some of the questions I asked while I was in New Orleans were:

- How is Voodoo/syncretic religion portrayed in New Orleans?
- How do Black Women engage with syncretic religion?
- Is Voodoo an accurate term to describe the syncretic religion present in my thesis?

Collectively my time in New Orleans proved to be incredibly valuable and was timely to my research. Had I gone sooner, I would not have understood many of the themes that I had stumbled upon over the course of the semester.

My research was extensive, but it provided the necessary information that allowed me to fully understand what I was encountering in *Lemonade*. I learned how the historical and modern misrepresentations of Voodoo damaged its social standing within the United States. This in effect caused syncretic religious practices to develop negative connotations that end up misrepresenting the overall utility of syncretic religion for specific communities in the United States. In this thesis I argue that Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, alongside the works of other Black Women, rejects the "American bastardization" of voodoo, and showcases the positive, healing utility of voodoo.¹⁶

In order to effectively relay my argument, this thesis is divided into four chapters, plus the introduction, conclusion, and appendix. I have chosen to structure the thesis in this way because I believe providing background knowledge will strengthen the arguments and the points that I make about how Beyoncé has changed the perception of syncretic religion within American culture.

¹⁶ Martin, xx.

The first chapter provides some background and historical knowledge on the overall topic of syncretic religion. The chapter delves into its origins from West and Central Africa, and how it was spread into the Americas by way of the Atlantic Slave Trade. In providing this background knowledge, I hope to provide adequate support to illustrate the strong female leadership present within the practice. Using Marie Laveau as a starting point, this chapter briefly explores the presence of syncretic religion in New Orleans via the avenue of Laveau, Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, and will end in connection to the primary source for this paper, *Lemonade*.

The next chapter centers on how *Lemonade* demonstrates the importance of community and community development for Black Women. This chapter will begin with a chronological analysis of key scenes in *Lemonade* that demonstrate how and why this visual album is for Black Women. While I will be highlighting specific scenes, I show how these specific scenes connect to the overarching prevalence of Black women as a backdrop to Beyoncé's message in *Lemonade*. The first half of the chapter focuses on the previous information, and the latter half of the chapter delves into the Yoruba deity Osun, and Beyoncé's representation of her in *Lemonade*. I then explore real responses from real life followers of Osun, and their desires to find a "form of spirituality that felt consistent with their beliefs and constitutions."¹⁷ This chapter connects into my argument by revealing the significance of community, and how syncretic religion allows for seemingly different people with different lived experiences to coexist and bond amongst each other.

The following chapter focuses on how *Lemonade* normalizes and incorporates voodoo practice into everyday life. This chapter begins with a chronological analysis of key scenes that depict Beyoncé using Voodoo in seemingly normal scenes such as praying, bathing, and undergoing a cleanse. Once having bolstered the normalcy of Voodoo, I then cite a scene from *Daughters of the*

¹⁷ Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters*, 174.

Dust, a filmic representation of syncretic religion from the early 90s directed by Julia Dash, to illustrate how a Black Woman has normalized Voodoo into daily life. In using this, I hope to showcase how other Black Women complement Beyoncé's portrayal of Voodoo. This chapter will demonstrate how consumable Voodoo is, and how, despite the negative stigmas associated with it, it can be a part of one's normal day and routine.

The penultimate chapter focuses on how *Lemonade* celebrates the spiritual healing aspect of Voodoo. This chapter begins with an analysis of the key scenes that illustrate how despite adversities Beyoncé was able to heal through the process of undergoing ritual and believing in syncretic religion. I then return to the history behind Voodoo in the New World, and how the mere presence of it was used as a tool for enslaved people to grapple with their hardships. This chapter will ultimately emphasize one of the most important aspects of voodoo: spiritual healing, and how Voodoo can be used as tool to heal rather than harm, as negative portrayals have often demonstrated.

The conclusion argues that *Lemonade* reveals an important aspect of American culture. I reiterate the importance of syncretic religion for African-American women in the United States, while re-emphasizing the points I argued in the thesis. I also address critiques of my argument through real life practitioners of syncretic religion in the United States, and respond to them. Next, I present topics or areas where future scholars may expand upon my research. Ultimately, the conclusion reiterates my findings and re-emphasizes the work Beyoncé has done for not only herself, but for the lives of many Black Women in the United States and around the world.

The Origin Story

In order to understand the significance of the appearance of syncretic religion in *Lemonade*, it is important to have a baseline understanding of what syncretic religion is, its origins, and broad mainstream representations of the practices in the United States via the avenue of Marie Laveau.

Syncretic religion is not a new idea or concept. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, syncretism is defined as the “combination of different forms of belief or practice.”¹⁸ The Encyclopedia Britannica further elaborates on this concept and connecting it to religion, provides examples of syncretic religion citing faiths such as Christianity and Judaism as examples of more well-known representations of it.¹⁹ The idea of religious syncretism is not one that should be frowned upon as the “fusion of cultures that was effected by the conquest of Alexander the Great (4th century BC), his successors, and the Roman Empire tended to bring together a variety of religious and philosophical views that resulted in a strong tendency toward religious syncretism.”²⁰ I make the point to acknowledge the historical origins of the idea of syncretism to highlight how the colonial religion of Christianity has its origins in the ideas of syncretism. This will provide a comparison for how colonizers constantly demonized the syncretic religions created by enslaved peoples in the Americas.

For the context of this paper, we will be exploring syncretism/syncretic religion within the Americas and the Caribbean. Within these locations, examples of syncretic religion include

¹⁸ "Syncretism," Merriam-Webster, accessed April 17, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syncretism>.

¹⁹ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Religious Syncretism." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 22, 2018. Accessed April 17, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/religious-syncretism>.

²⁰ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Religious Syncretism." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 22, 2018. Accessed April 17, 2018. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/religious-syncretism>.

Voodoo (both New Orleans and Haitian), Cuban Santería, and Brazilian Candomblé. New Orleans Voodoo is actually “the only Afro-Catholic religion to emerge in North America.”²¹

In general, these faith practices originated from a combination of African religious and cultural traditions originating from within West and Central Africa, derived specifically from the “Fon and Yoruba people of West Africa and the Kongo of Central Africa” in combination with Catholicism.²² In her book, *A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess*, in discussing the origins of syncretic practice, author Carolyn Marrow Long says that:

...all of these African nations recognized a supreme creator and believed in the existence of spiritual entities who acted as intermediaries between human beings and the highest god. These minor deities controlled human creativity, sexuality and reproduction, warfare, commerce, agriculture, disease, healing and death. In the Fon religion they were called *vodu*—hence the name Voodoo. Among the Yoruba, similar deities were called *orisha*...²³

These practices are organized religions that have “a complex theology, a pantheon of deities and spirits, a priesthood, and a congregation of believers.”²⁴ They developed in the Americas by way of the slave trade. When arriving to the mainland, many African slaves were forced to give up their faith practice and convert to the dominant practice of their colonizer which in many ways was Christianity, specifically Catholicism.²⁵ It makes sense that Catholicism was the foundational religion for the aforementioned practices, because of colonialism and the imposition of the Catholic faith on the enslaved they brought to the Americas and the Caribbean. For

²¹ Long, 93.

²² Long, 94.

²³ Long, 94.

²⁴ Long, 93.

²⁵ "From Africa to America," The Pluralism Project, accessed April 17, 2018, <http://pluralism.org/religions/afro-caribbean/afro-caribbean-traditions/from-africa-to-america/>.

example, in Cuba “to justify the terrible sufferings of slave life, Spanish law insisted that slaves be baptized as Roman Catholics as a condition of their legal entry into the Indie.”²⁶

The traditions Santería and Candomblé may share similarities to the Voodoo prevalent in the American South, New Orleans, but they are different in their practice and how their spirits are worshiped. In fact, Dr. Joseph M. Murphy, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University said in his book *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora*:

...the religious traditions of the African diaspora are alike in that each shares a social history of enslavement and racial discrimination. Each tradition became the focus for an extraordinary struggle for survival against and triumph over brutal systems of exploitation. They share an elevated sense of solidarity against injustice and a commitment to the protection and advancement of their communities.²⁷

Dr. Murphy’s claims can be best supported through the example of the Bois Caïman ceremony that launched the Haitian Revolution in 1791. The Bois Caïman ceremony was a Voodoo ceremony initiated by a voodoo priest and a voodoo high priestess, which is considered to be the event that sparked the revolt against the French, which ultimately led to Haitian independence in 1804.²⁸ The success of the Haitians in their revolt resulted in the criminalization and the demonization of voodoo. Once it was discovered that the French had been overthrown by the Haitians, and that it was connected to their practice of Voodoo, “[there] was a concerted effort by western powers to construct a narrative that would forever cast the Black Republic [of Haiti] as derelict, failed experiment of the Antilles and [Voodoo] as the ungodly hand that brought it to ruin.”²⁹

²⁶ Murphy, *Santeria*, 27.

²⁷ Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 2.

²⁸ Kona Shen, "Haitian Revolution Begins August–September 1791," *The Haitian Revolution 1791*, October 27, 2015, accessed April 17, 2018, <https://library.brown.edu/haitihistory/5.html>.

²⁹ Martin, xxi.

Contrary to Haiti, New Orleans did not have as strong a foundation and the strength in numbers of practitioners and followers of voodoo. This was a result of the demographic of the population. In Haiti, Black people “heavily outnumbered both the whites and the free coloreds,” wherein there was a “10 to 1” ratio of black slaves to free white people in Saint Domingue during that time period.³⁰ This is a stark contrast to the ratio of slaves to whites in the American South. In a census conducted by the United States in the 1790s, the ratio for whites to slaves was approximately 2 to 1.³¹ I bring up these points to highlight that the reason why voodoo in Haiti thrived amongst the people was because there was a larger black population, and more of a united community of Black people in Haiti despite the fact that many of them were enslaved. By comparison in the American South, while there was a level of community among Blacks, many slaves were influenced by their owners and customs. Despite there being a prevalence of voodoo among older generations of Black people in New Orleans, voodoo was not practiced as prominently most likely because of the population makeup. In contrast to Haiti, many slaves in the United States were born on US soil which contributed to their lack of connection to syncretic practice.³² In Haiti, many of the slaves were born in Africa, and as a result, they may have had a stronger connection.³³ Voodoo’s rise to prominence among the Black community in New Orleans only really took off after the Haitian Revolution. With the Haitian Revolution and the uprising in then Saint Domingue (now modern-day Haiti), came an influx of Black people who

³⁰ Jeremy Popkin, "The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804): A Different Route to Emancipation," *The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804): A Different Route to Emancipation*, 2003, accessed April 18, 2018, http://www.uky.edu/~popkin/Haitian_Revolution_Lecture.htm.

³¹ United States Census Office, *A Century of Population Growth from the First Census of the United States to the Twelfth, 1790-1900*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1909), 139.

³² "Slavery in the United States," Economic History Association, , accessed April 19, 2018, <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/slavery-in-the-united-states/>.

³³ Popkin, “The Haitian Revolution.

took refuge in New Orleans who had brought their customs and their strong syncretic religious faith of Haitian Voodoo with them.³⁴ With the rising presence of voodoo being practiced within New Orleans, many Anglo-Americans had a profound fear of the practice. In addressing this claim, Carolyn Marrow Long in *A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess* said that the Anglo Americans:

...were [all] well aware of the perceived role of this religion in the Haitian Revolution, and they saw [Voodoo] as potential breeding ground for slave rebellion and a threat to public safety. They also considered this “savage” African practice to be an offence against Christian morality—a horrifying brew of sorcery, devil worship, interracial fraternization, and sexual license.³⁵

These worries, while having manifested themselves in slightly different ways, have remained true for many Americans today when thinking of the practice of voodoo. Throughout much of the 19th century there were raids and the voodoo community was harassed in circumstances of communal gathering.³⁶ This fear of the practice is a disservice to the religion as there is much that can be taken from the practice.

Dr. Murphy said it best when he said that the “relegation of “voodoo” to the horror genre reflects mass America’s real horror of independent black power. If voodoo was powerful enough to free the slaves, might it not free their descendants?”³⁷ The attempts at smearing and discrediting the religious practice continue into mainstream culture today, as it has become difficult for those who are unfamiliar with syncretic religion broadly to become more accepting of the positive utility of the practice. What most do not know about Voodoo is how it can be used as a tool of liberation from the

³⁴ Long, 96.

³⁵ Long, 97.

³⁶ Long, 107.

³⁷ Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, x.

adversities of life demonstrated through the Haitian Revolution. According to a historical timeline of the Haitian Revolution found on Brown University's library website:

Despite rigid prohibitions, voodoo was indeed one of the few areas of totally autonomous activity for the African slaves. As a religion and a vital spiritual force, it was a source of psychological liberation in that it enabled them to express and reaffirm that self-existence they objectively recognized through their own labor ... Voodoo further enabled the slaves to break away psychologically from the very real and concrete chains of slavery and to see themselves as independent beings; in short it gave them a sense of human dignity and enabled them to survive.³⁸

This quotation highlights the importance of what syncretic religion signified for practitioners of the faith practice within the Americas. Voodoo, and syncretic religion at large, allowed the enslaved to cope with extreme times of physical, mental, and emotional turmoil. As a result of its impact, voodoo has managed to persist into subsequent generations. Focusing specifically on the United States, the prevalence of voodoo culture has been reinforced by independent practitioners and followers, but also through the historical memory of cultural figures in New Orleans.

The most recognizable historical figure connected to voodoo in American culture is Voodoo Priestess Marie Laveau. While there were many Priests and Priestesses who had circulated within New Orleans during the 19th century, none have had the lasting impact or presence that Laveau had upon the city, despite all of the criticisms of voodoo within the city. Marie Laveau (1801-1881), was New Orleans' most famous Voodoo Queen, and had a powerful influence over the local practice throughout the city.³⁹ Much of what we know about Laveau is a product of what was said of her by others including journalists, popular historians, members of her community, and many more.⁴⁰ Laveau was the daughter of Louisiana natives, Charles

³⁸ Kona Shen, "Haitian Revolution Begins August–September 1791," The Haitian Revolution 1791, October 27, 2015, accessed April 17, 2018, <https://library.brown.edu/haitihistory/5.html>.

³⁹ Frandrich, 1.

⁴⁰ Long, xix.

Laveau and Marguerite Darcantel, both free Creole people of color.⁴¹ She was also a member of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴² Historically, Laveau had a very mixed reputation. According to informants of the Louisiana Writers' Project, Laveau was said to have practiced "less beneficent magic."⁴³ She was said to "kill ... break up love affairs, and to spread confusion."⁴⁴ The Louisiana Writers' Project (LWP) was a local branch of the Federal Writers' Project, "created during the Great Depression...to provide employment for journalists, create writers, and other white-collar workers."⁴⁵ These images of Laveau have not stopped the overarching lasting and positive influence she has had on the city, culture, and tourism of New Orleans. In fact, it is no surprise that Laveau continues to have such a strong presence in New Orleans to this today, whether it be commercialized or through personal practice. She is a commercialized figure because much of the tourism in the city and the voodoo lore in New Orleans surrounds the story of her livelihood. There is a Voodoo shop named after her, and many tourists will visit her gravesite in the Saint Louis Cemetery. In addition to these more visible influences, she is also remembered in song and stories. She has a song written about her by legendary Jazz musician "Papa" Oscar Celestin titled "Marie Laveau."⁴⁶ Laveau is a figure for personal consumption as she has a large following of both men and women who cite her as sources for inspiration and

⁴¹ Frandrich, 152.

⁴² Frandrich, 153.

⁴³ Long, 109.

⁴⁴ Long, 110.

⁴⁵ Long, xvii.

⁴⁶ Frandrich, 181-183.

strength.⁴⁷ In particular, Laveau's connection to women provides a basis for our understanding as to how syncretic belief was so attractive for many women.

Laveau was a model for female leadership within New Orleans, and that is strongly due to the female influence of the West African religious traditions that combined with Catholicism. Robert Tallant, one of Louisiana's most famous authors, and a staunch critic of voodoo within New Orleans, wrote about how voodoo "was a matriarchy from the outset."⁴⁸ Ina Johanna Frandrich, author of *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveau* further expands on this idea by tracing its origins to the African continent. In particular, she discusses the prevalence of women societies that were created for the purpose of establishing an African Sisterhood of sorts. She said that "the African legacy of promoting female power, providing female spirituality, and offering strong female bonding did continue in the New World."⁴⁹ Frandrich highlighted the work of Roger Bastide, a French sociologist and anthropologist who studied Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean religions, who claimed that "women of color in the New World sought refuge in the spirit world of their ancestors to ward off the *machismo* attitudes of their male environment."⁵⁰ While Bastide's research stems from his experiences in Brazil with the religious practice of Brazilian Candomblé, Frandrich's research in New Orleans reveals that Voodoo also shares similar characteristics. Syncretic religion allowed Black Women to have autonomous control over their spiritual lives. In having that control, it replicated an environment similar to the ancestral lives of their African ancestors.

⁴⁷ Frandrich, ix.

⁴⁸ Frandrich, 37.

⁴⁹ Frandrich, 54.

⁵⁰ Frandrich, 55.

Frandrich states in response to the strong female affiliation with voodoo in New Orleans that voodoo serves as the:

elective affinity” between the structural situation of African-American women and elements of the West African worldview (that is the genderless language, female, or androgynous divinities, female priesthood, positive attitude toward nature and the body, high regard for women as spirit mediums and herbal healers (and West African women’s gender roles (self-assertive, independent, strong female bonding, economically self-sufficient) that lies at the basis of the feminization of the voodoo tradition in New Orleans.⁵¹

This relatability about syncretic religion not only attracted Black Women to the practice, but it managed to make it more inclusive for other women in New Orleans. Laveau was a disrupter of the established order within her time, and her practice of Voodoo made her stand out even more so. Voodoo offered a model ““of” and for” female behavior that explicitly contradicted the ideal vision of “true womanhood” of the dominant groups in New Orleans, i.e., the white, Catholic, French-Spanish Creoles, and the white Protestant North Americans.”⁵² Her legacy was upheld through her family and through her followers in the city.

Even sixty years after her death, Laveau remained a figure important for Black Women. Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston wrote about Laveau and her impact on the Voodoo tradition in New Orleans in the 1930s. Hurston studied Anthropology at Columbia University under renowned anthropologist Franz Boas. She was born in Alabama, but moved to Eatonville, FL with her family when she was young.⁵³ Some research brought Hurston to Louisiana, and while she was there she explored the role Voodoo played in the culture there. She was also interested in

⁵¹ Frandrich, 206.

⁵² Frandrich, 1-2.

⁵³ "About Zora Neale Hurston," The Official Website of Zora Neale Hurston, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://zoranealehurston.com/about/index.html>.

learning more about Laveau. In a letter she wrote to her friend, Langston Hughes, Hurston said “I have landed here in the kingdom of Marie Laveau and expect to wear her crown someday.”⁵⁴ In saying this, Hurston essentially foreshadows her later involvements in the practice, where she is later initiated in the Voodoo priestess hood. This initiation process connects Hurston to *Lemonade*.

Beyoncé came to reference some of the initiation process that Hurston underwent in her visual-album, *Lemonade*. It is not surprising that Beyoncé chose to employ syncretic religion within her text. Her mother’s creole origins in New Orleans, Louisiana, and her childhood in Houston Texas, fostered an environment where she would have been exposed to this at a young age. She most likely took after her grandmother in her own belief, as her grandmother was raised in a time in New Orleans when Marie Laveau was ever so present. Her creole background, and her ties to New Orleans were emphasized strongly throughout *Lemonade* and events leading up to the release of the visual album. On February 6, 2016, Beyoncé dropped the music-video for “Formation” which served as a precursor for *Lemonade*’s eventual release. The music video was set in New Orleans, and throughout the video Beyoncé makes visual references to various aspects of New Orleans culture. She references Hurricane Katrina, she uses a voiceover of a famous New Orleans bounce rapper Messy Mya, and there is an appearance of a Mardi Gras Indian. Her usage of the Mardi Gras Indian foreshadows the importance of syncretic religion in *Lemonade*. Mardi Gras Indians. Mardi Gras Indians “are groups of African-Americans, referred to as "tribes" and organized by neighborhood, who dress up and parade during Mardi Gras, St. Joseph's Day and Super Sunday.”⁵⁵ These explicit references to her creole culture in *Formation*,

⁵⁴ Carla Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (New York: Anchor, 2003), 18.

⁵⁵ Leah Donnell, "The Mardi Gras Indian Of 'Lemonade'," NPR, April 27, 2016, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/04/27/475588107/the-mardi-gras-indian-of-lemonade>.

set the thematic direction for *Lemonade*. The subsequent chapters will delve into the roles that these women have had in *Lemonade*, and the overall discussion of syncretic religion at large within the United States.

Community in Action

Black Women have been, and continue to be, in the forefront of social justice movements within the United States. From the likes of Harriet Tubman and her role in transporting slaves via the underground railroad through the start of the Black Lives Matter movement by Aliza Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, Black Women remain unafraid to push the boundaries of what is right and will often sacrifice much of themselves in honor of what is right. The most recent example is the unfortunate loss of Erica Garner, the daughter of Eric Garner, who passed at 27 years old as a result of an unexpected heart attack⁵⁶. When it comes down to it, Black Women continue to hold it down for what is right even if their options are not ideal, as illustrated in the Alabama Senate election on December 12, 2017. According to exit poll results taken from this election, 98% percent of Black Women voted for the Democratic candidate Doug Jones, in comparison to 34% of White women who voted for Doug Jones.⁵⁷ Black Women ultimately had a strong influence on the special election because they turned out in numbers. Black Women's solidarity is reflected in much of Beyoncé's music, but was emphasized beyond measure the moment the music video for "Formation" dropped. With lyrics such as "okay, ladies, now lets get in formation," Beyoncé recognized the value in celebrating the power of Black Women uniting together because they provide strength in numbers. Again, this idea is reinforced through the release of *Lemonade*. While voodoo is often considered to be a solitary practice that is often used for malicious intent, *Lemonade* demonstrates the contrary. One way in which *Lemonade*

⁵⁶ Laurel Wamsley, "Erica Garner, Who Became An Activist After Her Father's Death, Dies," NPR, December 30, 2017, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/30/574514217/erica-garner-who-became-an-activist-after-her-fathers-death-dies>.

⁵⁷ "Preliminary Exit Poll Results: How Different Groups Voted in the U.S. Senator Election in Alabama," The Washington Post, , accessed April 18, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/politics/alabama-exit-polls/?utm_term=.ea38c71e9d3d.

showcases the positive, healing utility of voodoo is that it illuminates the importance of community and community support in the lives of Black Women. Through various sequences throughout *Lemonade*, and in referencing the unifying power that Marie Laveau had on not just Black Women, but many Women in general, we may explore the ideas that support this claim.

Black Women have often stood in the forefront of social justice movements, but continue to get the short end of the recognition stick. This idea reemerges time and time again throughout history, and Beyoncé made sure to emphasize this early on in *Lemonade* through her audio samples, visual imagery and song lyrics.

The emotional and societal perils of what it is like to be a Black Women in the United States, can be demonstrated in the scene titled ‘Anger’ which corresponds with the overall song and video for “Don’t Hurt Yourself.” Throughout the opening of the scene prior to the start of the song, you see varying clips of Black women in groups moving fluidly and in unity. The first set of women are majorettes, a dancer and baton twirlers in Marching Bands, strutting down the street performing this synchronized routine as if they are marching in protest. The next group of women that appear is a collection of women in white, intertwined amongst each other’s sleeves. They are a cohesive unit – with no beginning or end.⁵⁸ Beyoncé sets the stage with her poetry in the background, ending her monologue with “why can’t you see me, everyone else can.” This ending is very important as the appearance and the fluctuating clips of Black Women throughout this scene showcases Black Women as a source of strength, and the importance of being visible. In this particular clip, compared to other scenes in *Lemonade*, Beyoncé is less passive. She is delving more into her emotions, and recognizing her autonomy, but also how her worth does not

⁵⁸ *Lemonade*, directed by Beyoncé Knowles, performed by Beyoncé, (Parkwood Entertainment, 2016), 12:30.

rely on what a man can provide for her. This is demonstrated in the overall ambiance of the scene. The scene is dark and serious, with Beyoncé having more confident and pointed interactions with the camera. Her value comes from herself, and having a network of Black Women throughout this scene emphasizes this message. This is what makes the opening stanza of “Don’t Hurt Yourself” so powerful. Beyoncé starts with:

who the fuck do you think I is/ you ain’t married to no average bitch boy/ you can watch my fat ass twist boy/ as I bounce to the next dick boy/ and keep your money, I got my own/ get a bigger smile on my face, being alone/ bad motherfucker, God complex/ motivate your ass call me Malcolm X.⁵⁹

Her words are brash, and uncensored. She is demonstrating her ability and her independence. Throughout these scenes, we see Black Women behind her as if they were the ones giving her strength to push through and recognize her capabilities. This exploration into the realm of her anger is important because a common trope that is often placed upon Black Women is that of the “Angry Black Woman.”⁶⁰ The “Angry Black Woman” is a trope that “seeks to restrain [Black Women’s] expression of anger by negatively labeling it.”⁶¹ Beyoncé’s choice to delve not only into her dissatisfaction, but her anger as demonstrated throughout this video rebels against society’s expectations and desires for how Black Women should behave. In exploring her anger, she demonstrates the importance of what it means to break that mold of self-censorship. In that, she has her community of Black Women standing right behind her as support. As the song

⁵⁹ *Lemonade*, 13:12.

⁶⁰ W. Ashley, "The Angry Black Woman: The Impact of Pejorative Stereotypes on Psychotherapy with Black Women.," *Social Work in Public Health.*, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24188294>.

⁶¹ J. Celeste Walley-Jean. "Debunking the Myth of the “Angry Black Woman”: An Exploration of Anger in Young African American Women." *Black Women, Gender Families* 3, no. 2 (2009): 68-86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/blacwomegendfami.3.2.0068>.

progresses, *Lemonade* names various ways in which Black Women have been collectively censored and/or disrespected. We see that through Beyoncé's sampling of a Malcolm X speech.

Women are censored when they attempt to speak up for themselves. A recent example of this is demonstrated through the #MeToo movement with Lupita Nyong'o and Harvey Weinstein. Despite all the previous women who had spoken up about their experiences with Weinstein's abuse of power, when Nyong'o wrote her op-ed in the New York Times articulating her experience of sexual harassment, Weinstein attempted to discredit her. Weinstein claims that he had a "different recollection of events," which were his attempts at undermining her story.⁶² Weinstein's need to invalidate Lupita Nyong'o's claim, illustrates a lack of respect and his views towards Black Women, as if Lupita is not someone who would be worth his time.

This is illustrated even more so as we begin to consider the idea of intersectionality and how the division of power is spread throughout society. Black legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term Intersectionality in her 1989 essay "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics."⁶³ In her piece Crenshaw argues that Black Women are "discriminated against in ways that often do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either "racism" or "sexism"—but as a combination of both racism and sexism."⁶⁴ This discrimination fails to

⁶² Amy B. Wang, "Harvey Weinstein, Accused by Dozens, Specifically Disputes Lupita Nyong'o's Harassment Claims," The Washington Post, October 21, 2017, , accessed April 18, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/10/21/harvey-weinstein-accused-by-dozens-specifically-disputes-lupita-nyongos-harassment-claims/?utm_term=.7ea123ff5610.

⁶³ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989, 139–67.

⁶⁴ Sharon Smith, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality," Black Feminism and Intersectionality | International Socialist Review, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality>.

recognize the intersections which Black Women encounter and experience in their lives. In comparing Black Women to white Women, Crenshaw argues that white Women often do not have to think about their race in conjunction with discriminations they face as a result of their gender. She says “for them there is no need to specify discrimination as white [Women] because their race does not contribute to the disadvantage for which they seek redress. The view of discrimination that is derived from this grounding takes race privilege as a given.”⁶⁵ This also translates into discussions of race and racism, as more often than not, when we think of racism we think of Black men, never how Black Women experience racism.⁶⁶

These ideas make the significance of the following scene with Malcom X’s monologue that much more important. Beyoncé cuts to a mélange of video snippets panning through different Black Women with an audio clip of an excerpt from a speech Malcom X gave on May 5, 1962 titled “Who Taught You to Hate Yourself.” This speech was spoken at the funeral of Ronald Stokes, a black man who was killed by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).⁶⁷ During his speech, Malcolm X spoke to a mixed crowd composed of both Black men and Black Women. In a previously recorded video from the event, the videographer focuses on the camera on the Black Women in attendance, as if to emphasize the target demographic of the speech.⁶⁸ In the excerpt of the speech sampled in *Lemonade* Malcolm X says: “The most disrespected woman

⁶⁵ Crenshaw, 144-145.

⁶⁶ Sharon Smith, "Black Feminism and Intersectionality," Black Feminism and Intersectionality | International Socialist Review, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality>.

⁶⁷ "Malcolm X – Who Taught You to Hate Yourself?" Genius, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://genius.com/Malcolm-x-who-taught-you-to-hate-yourself-annotated>.

⁶⁸ "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself - Malcolm X," YouTube, June 28, 2016, accessed April 18, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCSOiN_38nE.

in America, is the black woman/ The most un-protected person in America is the black woman /The most neglected person in America, is the black woman.”

This sample unifies two ideas. The first idea is that regardless of the part of the Black Diaspora Black Women come from, they collectively share very specific and similar struggles that no other group of people will fully understand. Black Women continue to be vilified and subject to unfair scrutiny, and despite that, they continue to show up when needed. Second, while Malcolm X’s words rang true in 1962, over 50 years later his words remain relevant to the conversation concerning Black Women in 2016 when *Lemonade* was released, and currently in 2018 as this thesis is being written. Former First Lady Michelle Obama, one of the most educated First Ladies of the United States with an undergraduate degree from Princeton University and a Law Degree from Harvard University, was subject to not only unfair scrutiny on her initiatives, but endured many racist and sexist attacks on her character and appearance. She has been called an “ape in heels,” and has been demeaned as “Obama’s Baby Mama” despite her own personal accomplishments.⁶⁹ These demeaning words were only some of the few that many critics, particularly those who self-identified as Republican, had to say about Michelle. In contrast to how Michelle was treated, current First Lady Melania Trump has been lauded by the Trump base for her class, despite her questionable immigration and work history as a model.⁷⁰ Melania made a career off of her risqué photo shoots and modeling gigs, most notably her nude photo shoot with British GQ, and despite this, Trump supporters continue to praise her with high

⁶⁹ Two different citations needed in this section... base of reference to find is here. Mikki Kendall, "22 times Michelle Obama Endured Rude, Racist, Sexist or Plain Ridiculous Attacks," The Washington Post, November 16, 2016, , accessed April 18, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/16/22-times-michelle-obama-endured-rude-racist-sexist-or-plain-dumb-attacks/?utm_term=.5c1a35ecd181.

⁷⁰ Joseph Tanfani and Brian Bennett, "Trump's Wife Melania Faces Questions about Her Own Immigration History," Los Angeles Times, August 04, 2016, , accessed April 18, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-melania-trump-visa-20160804-snap-story.html>.

reverence. This example demonstrates that despite how qualified Michelle Obama was when she served as First Lady, she was still unfairly criticized despite her capabilities and accomplishments. Though unfortunate, Michelle Obama's criticisms are not shocking, and she was forced to deal with them as she made the sacrifice for her husband's political aspirations. Black Women are often forced to face and work through any adversity thrown their way because that is what is expected of them.

Beyoncé does a great job of unifying the experience of Black Women in the scene 'Anger,' but that is not her only example. In the scene 'Resurrection,' which features the song "Forward," Beyoncé uses the real-life experiences of known Black Women to highlight her point. The video clip features a set of Black Women holding what appears to be a memorial photo of some Black men. [See Appendix Figure 2] Three of the women are Sybrina Fulton, the mother of Trayvon Martin, Gwen Carr, the mother of Eric Garner, and Lezley McSpadden, the mother of Michael Brown. Alongside these women are others who also lost fathers or sons. The haunting nature of this scene forms a powerful statement: Black Women are expected to be resilient, and to rely on their faith to get them through whatever hurdles are thrown their way, even if it is the loss of a child. In a way, this form of exposure is similar to that of Mamie Carthan, the mother of Emmett Till. Emmett Till was a 14-year old African-American boy from Chicago who was lynched in Mississippi for allegedly flirting with a married white woman at a grocery store in 1955.⁷¹ Till's body was found mutilated beyond recognition, and when Till's body was returned to Chicago, his mother chose to have an open casket funeral with his body on

⁷¹ "The Murder of Emmett Till - Civil Rights History Project," The Library of Congress, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/murder-of-emmett-till/>.

display for five days.⁷² She chose to have an open-casket funeral to make a point about the racism and the violence the system fostered. The system fostered racial injustice for Black people within the United States, and allowed for a 14-year old boy to be murdered by a group of men without second thought for the ramifications. Despite the difficulty of seeing his body, she wanted to “let the world see what has happened, because there is no way [she] could describe this.”⁷³ Mamie Carthan set the tone for reclaiming the narrative that had been spoken about in regards to the type of boy her son was, and ultimately her choice to have the open-casket funeral reclaimed her son’s narrative. In having a proper photo of Till displayed next to his casket, viewers are forced to see what they may want not to see and recognize: that the image of Till in his casket was not the proper one.

This, in a sense, is what the mothers who were highlighted in *Lemonade* were trying to replicate, and their choice to display only portrait shots was as strategic as Mamie Carthan’s. Similar to the past, but even more so today with advances in technology and how news is dispersed, the news media has historically demonized and portrayed Black men and boys who have died as a result of police brutality as criminals. In showing portraits of their choosing, they are trying to dispute the narrative that the media has chosen to tell about their sons.⁷⁴ Rather than criminals subject to violence because of misbehavior, the mothers try to portray them, their sons, as who they are in their respective communities: a son, a brother, and/or even a father. Similar to the mothers

⁷² "The Murder of Emmett Till - Civil Rights History Project," The Library of Congress, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/articles-and-essays/murder-of-emmett-till/>.

⁷³ "Interview with Mamie Till-Mobley, 1996." Emmett Till Murder. Accessed April 18, 2018. <http://www.emmettillmurder.com/new-page-53/>.

⁷⁴ *Lemonade*, 44:30.

featured in *Lemonade*, Emmett Till's chooses to both expose the violence of his murder through the open-casket, but also tries to allow him to exist as her child. These women face the crimes that resulted in the loss of their loved ones, but rather than hide their pain, they choose to share it with the world so others may share the pains alongside them.

This entire scene, in conjunction with Emmett Till's murder and his mother's handling of his funeral, further advances a conversation on the idea of black womanhood and black legacy. What defines black womanhood, and in what way does black womanhood become a unifying experience? It appears in this context, and even in previously cited examples, black womanhood involves pain, suffering, and the ability for one to overcome the harsh adversity of loss. Children are innately one of the many legacies that many Black Women choose to leave behind when they move on from this earth, but what if the legacy is unjustly taken away from you? What does that legacy become? In this context, legacy becomes the actions one will take to move forward and make an impact. For all of these women, it was through the reclamation of a narrative, and through the formation of a community wherein they are able to heal collectively and incite change that will make a difference for other women moving forward.

These historical and modern day examples set the stage for the discussion on how community development relates to both *Lemonade* and syncretic religion. Early on in the visual album, Beyoncé exits a building wearing a yellow dress drenched in water, as the water continues to pool around her feet and crashes down the stairs.⁷⁵ These are some examples of voodoo aesthetics present within the visual-album. In this scene, Beyoncé channels the Yoruba Goddess and deity, *Ósun*. Beyoncé's channeling of *Ósun* is crucial to understanding the positive connotation associated with voodoo. [See Appendix Figure 1] *Ósun* is a figure who carries much

⁷⁵ *Lemonade*, 6:10.

clout, as she is one of the most well-known and well respected Òrìsàs. Òrìsàs are “are spiritual powers associated with royal lineages, forces of nature, and, often, the saints of popular Catholicism” originating from Yoruba religious tradition in Nigeria.⁷⁶ As previously alluded to the previous chapter, the Òrìsà religion was spread into the Americas by way of the Atlantic Slave Trade.⁷⁷ Alongside the aforementioned Ósun, other Òrìsà deities include *Ogún*, *Oyá*, and *Shangó* to name a few.⁷⁸ Refocusing back on the principal deity of discussion Ósun, Ósun’s name means source, and source can be interpreted in a variety of ways.⁷⁹ Most importantly of those interpretations, she is deemed as the source of water, therefore life, and as a result, a representation of life, “as without her without her the other òrìsà are powerless and human life is impossible.”⁸⁰ Two practitioners of syncretic religion who I met in New Orleans argued that Ósun is in fact Beyoncé’s patron deity, and that Beyoncé’s choice to channel Ósun is her own self-acceptance of and recognition towards her connection to Ósun. These claims of Ósun serving as Beyoncé’s patron deity were reinforced when it was announced that Beyoncé was expecting twins, as Ósun and her partner *Shango*, who the Priest and Priestess claimed is Jay-Z’s patron deity, gave birth to the *Ibeji* twins, who for Beyoncé and Jay Z are Rumi and Sir Carter. Jay-Z has made reference to himself as *Shangó*, or *Changó*, in Drake’s song “PoundCake” wherein he is featured. He says “My saint's Changó, light a candle” which

⁷⁶ "Sacred Arts of Orisha Traditions," Georgetown University Library, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.library.georgetown.edu/exhibition/sacred-arts-orisha-traditions>.

⁷⁷ "Sacred Arts of Orisha Traditions," Georgetown University Library, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.library.georgetown.edu/exhibition/sacred-arts-orisha-traditions>.

⁷⁸ "The Orishas," The Orishas, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://www.orishanet.org/ocha.html>.

⁷⁹ Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters*, 2.

⁸⁰ Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters*, 2.

showcases how he self-aligns with the patron deity. *Shangó* is an *órisà* who rules over “rules over lightning, thunder, fire, the drums and dance.”⁸¹

For many, *Ósun* is a relatable deity as she is holistic and complex in her representations. In his book, *Ósun Across the Waters*, author Joseph M. Murphy says that “this ability for *Ósun* to be many things allows devotees to hold their religious lives in complexity.”⁸² For example while *Ósun* has representations of beauty and grace, in *Lemonade*, specifically with the song “Hold Up,” we encounter a “scorned” representation that highlight her frustrations as a result of Jay-Z’s infidelity.⁸³ Her appeal extends far beyond just women, as she has many men who follow her and her practice. This idea is interesting in itself because there are not too many women, outside of the Virgin Mary, who serve as deity figures who are revered in the way *Ósun* has been in the more common Western, Abrahamic religious practices. For many Black Women, this devotion/attraction to Yoruba based religion responded to a deep need to find spirituality that was more closely aligned with their beliefs. It is common knowledge that Beyoncé is a practicing Christian, but her channeling *Osun* seemed to give her more autonomy and wider breath of emotions in *Lemonade* than what I have seen in her previous works. In channeling *Ósun*, she delves into African religious traditions so unfamiliar to many Americans and also remains true to her Christian routes, through the connection of Catholicism.

Beyoncé once again demonstrates her connections and channeling of *Ósun* in the very beginning of “Hold Up.” The scene starts with Beyoncé coming out of her full body submersion and subsequent cleanse from the previous scene. Through this imagery, we see Beyoncé trying to

⁸¹ "The Orishas," The Orishas, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://www.orishanet.org/ocha.html>.

⁸² Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters*, 7.

⁸³ *Lemonade*, 6:20-9:45.

heal the pain she is feeling from her husband’s infidelity. “*Ósun* is the òrìsà who heals with cool water.”⁸⁴ *Ósun* has served a person that has helped many communities of women learn more about their internal strengths, and has brought them together under a unified form of belief. “The nurturing and self-affirmation *Ósun* passed on to these women upon claiming them as her daughters has helped sustain each through a variety of hardships—from physical illness and the loss of children...to depression.”⁸⁵ For many non-practitioners within the Black community, the idea of *Ósun* is a bit of a novelty because the practice of syncretic religion is deemed to be unholy within the grand scheme of organized Western religion within the United States. Despite this, Beyoncé is able to change the scope through which many view this practice. She celebrates a practice with a devout following of women who draw strength and support from a powerful female figure. She employs her artistic capabilities to present *Ósun* in a way that invites new audiences to learn about her cultural and religious significance.

Marie Laveau was a unifying figure across color lines within New Orleans, and she certainly contributed to the overall feminization of the practice of voodoo within the United States. According to Ina Johanna Fandrich, author of *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveau*, this feminization of the tradition can be attributed towards the “elective affinity” of many African-American women towards the tradition because of the strong female leadership within the religion, ie. *Ósun* and how it has been able to connect with the idea of community in the lives of Black Women. Enslaved African and African-American women, were “attracted to her because she represented a familiar form of leadership. By preserving and practicing the

⁸⁴ Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters*, 8.

⁸⁵ Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters*, 166.

African traditions, she reestablished their violated sense of cultural identity.”⁸⁶ Free women of color, were attracted to her because “she was one of them. They respected her especially because she gained this position of power by fully exploiting all the possibilities open to her as a free woman of color.”⁸⁷ White Creole women, were drawn to [Laveau] “and her religion because she provided a powerful female role model – a role model that did not exist in their Christian tradition.”⁸⁸ Practicing voodoo, a form of syncretic religion within New Orleans, was monumental because in a time where women had scant religious power in the United States, Marie Laveau gave hope and strength towards the formation of communities. These communities of women were able to successfully follow a practice because they found someone who succeeded at being a leader in a male led society.

The benefits of community echo through *Lemonade* to the lived experiences of Black Women and Girls around the United States and around the world. This is why throughout this chapter and in subsequent chapters, I choose to address Black Women as a title in comparison to white Women and Black men. To be a Black Women is a unique identity that requires an understanding of the intersections that one shares, and most often than not, one has to be a part of the community to understand the full implications of that. On February 3, 2018, Senator Kamala Harris posted this message on her social media:

My advice to Black girls everywhere: Whenever someone tells you your dreams aren't achievable, whenever you feel alone or under pressure, whenever you find yourself in a room where there aren't a lot of people who look like you — be it a classroom, or a

⁸⁶ Frandrich, 206.

⁸⁷ Frandich, 206.

⁸⁸ Frandrich, 206.

boardroom, or a courtroom — remember that you have an entire community in that room with you, all of us encouraging you and cheering you on. – Kamala Harris⁸⁹

A message seemingly simple, but in the grand scheme of how Black Women and Girls are able to break barriers and succeed, community truly matters. As demonstrated throughout *Lemonade* and through the legacy that Marie Laveau left behind, it is important to recognize how communities contribute to the growth and success of its members. In the case of Black Women and Girls in particular, the formation of these communities serve as a life-line of support in knowing that whenever one will fall, there will be a Black Woman standing right behind her ready to pick her up.

⁸⁹ Kamala Harris, "Kamala Harris on Instagram: "My Advice to Black Girls Everywhere: Whenever Someone Tells You Your Dreams Aren't Achievable, Whenever You Feel Alone or under Pressure,..."," Instagram, February 2, 2018, , accessed April 18, 2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/BetAqkkBm0Y/?utm_source=ig_embed.

The Everyday

The Voodoo Priestess is a highly public, but obscure figure in mainstream culture. She is highly public because of her vast representations through the mediums of literature, TV, film, and pop culture. Despite these vast representations, voodoo and the Voodoo Priestess continues to be exoticized and demonized. This othering proves to be counterproductive in regards to the overall narrative surrounding those who practice the faith, and that is demonstrated through historical and modern representations.

One of the most historical depictions of the voodoo priestess or a practitioner of witchcraft was Tituba. Tituba was an enslaved woman convicted of witchcraft in the Salem Witch trials of 1692.⁹⁰ Her story has traveled through history through the literary and visual mediums, for example through the play *The Crucible*. *The Crucible* is a well-known play written by Arthur Miller that details a dramatized and partially fictionalized retelling of the Salem Witch Trials. Throughout the play, Tituba is used as a scapegoat and depicted as a person who has corrupted young white Puritan women. We never truly hear from Tituba herself, and this provides a one-sided narrative which continues to influence her depictions today. Even today, she is still described by some as “a dark icon of American mythology.”⁹¹ Some historians argue that Tituba should be ““blamed for the start of the trials” and her perceived ignorance evokes accusations of Satanism.”⁹² While Tituba was only accused of practicing witchcraft/voodoo, these negative connotations continue to follow Black

⁹⁰ Stacy Schiff, "Unraveling the Many Mysteries of Tituba, the Star Witness of the Salem Witch Trials," Smithsonian.com, November 01, 2015, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/unraveling-mysteries-tituba-salem-witch-trials-180956960/>.

⁹¹ Bernard Rosenthal, "Tituba," *Magazine of History*, vol.17, no.4, 2003, 50.

⁹² "The Crucible: A Dramaturgy Notebook by Evan Wetzel," *The Crucible*, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://sites.dartmouth.edu/thecrucible/critical-analysis/>; Quentin D. Miller, "The Signifying Poppet: Unseen Voodoo and Arthur Miller's Tituba," *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 43, no. 4, (October 2007): 438, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fmls/cqm065>.

Women in mainstream media who depict themselves in such a manner. From the representations of voodoo practitioners in the works of *Angel Heart*, *The Skeleton's Key*, the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, and more, we see the product of how the Voodoo Priestess character is depicted through these visual mediums. Regardless of their role in the film, they are deemed as outsiders and exoticized in their appearance and actions relation to more “normal presenting” characters. This is where *Lemonade* enters the conversation.

Beyoncé's *Lemonade* demonstrates not only focuses on community and community development in showcasing the positive, healing utility of voodoo, but it also demonstrates the everyday, mundane usage of voodoo that allows for it to be normalized. This normalization provides an image of voodoo that permits it to be accepted in daily life, and illustrates how misinformed many people are as a result of inaccurate representations.

In modern-day New Orleans, where the idea and practice of voodoo is accepted as a result of commercialization, the commodification of voodoo culture has caused a very narrow sided perspective of voodoo to spread across the United States and across the world. In New Orleans, one can take part in a variety of voodoo tours, where attendees can hear about famous voodoo Priestess Marie Laveau and hear about the prevalence of voodoo in New Orleans. Tourists can also visit the “New Orleans Historic Voodoo Museum or Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo,” where attendees can have a more “tactile” or more tangible experience with Voodoo.⁹³ Despite all of the commercialization, there are practitioners who remain true to their practice, and in “commercial voodoo shops” they “can find the oils, icons, and *gris-gris* they need for their ongoing ceremonies

⁹³ Shawn Fink, "This Is How to Experience New Orleans' Voodoo Culture," The Huffington Post, December 07, 2017, accessed April 18, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/where/this-is-how-to-experience_b_5984866.html.

and worship.”⁹⁴ A common thread between all of these visual, literary, and pop-culture depictions of voodoo presented above, are that they have been molded and developed by White people. This in itself provides a very one-sided gaze wherein there may be some cultural misunderstandings. These cultural misunderstandings may cause a person to view a practice as deviant and wrong, which incites further issues. Voodoo could be seen as deviant because it was misunderstood in the past by those who did not take the time to understand the purpose of the practice. *Lemonade* collectively does a good job of taking this practice, and reframing how we engage and view it.

Lemonade immediately introduces syncretic religion to viewers in seemingly mundane practices of daily ritual. In the opening of *Lemonade*, Beyoncé kneels solo on stage as the camera switches back and forth from this vision to that of an image of Beyoncé in a field. As she commences the song, and expresses her intuition on the subject her husband’s infidelity, she begins “[praying] to catch [him whispering],” [praying] to catch her listening” and more as if she is seeking out the influence of a higher power to interfere in this relationship.⁹⁵ Beyoncé’s isolation in this scene is quite interesting as it appears as if she needs support to help her work through this problem at hand, and her kneeling in the opening scene could be seen as a sign of submission commencing the process of relinquishing herself over to whoever she is praying to. Her voice appears to be meek, and she seems powerless to the emotions she is feeling. In this scene, prayer allows Beyoncé to connect syncretic religion with audience members immediately. For many Americans, and even those around the world, prayer is a ritualistic part of their daily lives. From the Christian practice of praying before meals, attending Bible study, and church on

⁹⁴“New Orleans Voodoo’s African Origins,” NewOrleansOnline.com, accessed April 18, 2018,<http://www.neworleansonline.com/neworleans/multicultural/multiculturaltraditions/voodoo.html>.

⁹⁵ “Pray You Catch Me,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed November 9, 2017, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/prayyoucatchme.html>.

Sunday, to the Muslim practice of praying five times per day, to name a few examples, expressing devotion, thanks, and inquiring to a higher power is a practice that even secular believers can understand. Beyoncé's usage of prayer to inquire about her husband's possible infidelity, is her attempt at connecting with a higher power for guidance. She needed clarity and direction on how best to move forward. Alongside her request for guidance and answers, she appears to be seeking out companionship of some sort. Her emotional state has led her to a certain level of isolation and loneliness from those around her.

As the next scene "Intuition" begins, it appears as if part of her prayers have been answered. She is no longer isolated. The audience sees a community of women, all wearing various shades of white, gathered together. This scene is significant in that Beyoncé is now supported by a community of Black Women, rather than dealing with this issue in isolation. This idea connects with themes discussed in the previous chapter as "the spirit of ... [voodoo] ... grows out of community in action."⁹⁶ The scene reverts back to Beyoncé again, and rather than being alone in the field/on stage, she is a tub of water in a room with candles behind her.⁹⁷ Voodoo "adapts itself like Christianity to its locale, reclaiming some of its borrowed characteristics to itself ... [such as] the belief in the power of water to sanctify as in baptism."⁹⁸ So in this we can see the foundational basis of why water is important. Beyoncé then recounts the same lyrics as in the first scene, but her words are more confident and less meek, as if her community of women have given her strength to overcome any adversity she may have. This contrasts the opening scene. In the opening scene when Beyoncé is singing, she is singing in total

⁹⁶ Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 110.

⁹⁷ *Lemonade*, 03.25.

⁹⁸ Hurston, 193.

isolation with no background vocals or singers, while in the current chapter, “Intuition,” there are audibly louder voices in the background. This presence of additional voices, those of which are chanting “whisper,” contribute to the idea of Beyoncé’s growing community. In this scene, one should also take notice of what the tub and candles signify. Beyoncé in the tub directly signifies her connection to water, but her slight submersion symbolizes her growing connection to Osun as the source of life, Osun “as a fierce defender.”⁹⁹ The candles represent the start of the ritual. Even the pace of the song increases. Beyoncé becomes more empowered, as she eventually makes the conscious decision to dive into water.¹⁰⁰

This scene parallels a scene described in *Mules and Men* in which Hurston has to acquire materials for her initiation bath. In the particular chapter that is being compared to *Lemonade*, Hurston is recounting the process in which she is being initiated into the priestess-hood by a Voodoo Priest. Hurston traveled down to New Orleans to study syncretic religious practices, and encountered the nephew of Marie Laveau, Dr. Turner. In *Mules and Men*, Hurston tells of how the Priest had come to her house to prepare the bath, “the tub was half-filled with warm water and Pierre put in all of the ingredients” she had gathered for her ritual.¹⁰¹ Connecting to the aforementioned scene in *Lemonade*, through Hurston, we can see how Beyoncé is preparing for her initiation into the priestess-hood, and is demonstrating her devotion. This again demonstrates Beyoncé’s attempt at normalizing syncretic religious practice bathing and the addition of candles provides a soothing aspect as those objects are often used as symbols of relaxation.

⁹⁹ Murphy, *Osun Across the Waters*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ *Lemonade*, 04:37.

¹⁰¹ Hurston, 216.

The next scene “Denial” features the most direct parallels to Hurston’s *Mules and Men*. Throughout this entire scene, the viewer is dealing with Beyoncé’s submersion into water which parallels to Hurston’s own initiation process into the voodoo priesthood. Beyoncé “fasted for 60 days, wore white, abstained from mirrors, abstained from sex, slowly did not speak another word.”¹⁰² She “slept on a mat on a floor,...confessed [her] sins and was baptized in a river, got on [her] knees and said Amen and said Amine, [she] whipped [her] own back and asked for dominion at your feet.”¹⁰³ Paralleling much of this language Hurston elaborates on her own initiation process in which she had to “abstain from mirrors,” “wear white” and she was told to remain five days without sexual intercourse such as Beyoncé in *Lemonade*.¹⁰⁴ Even Beyoncé’s is influenced by voodoo aesthetics. When she jumped into water she was wearing all Black which is a symbol of darkness, and then through undergoing the ritual she disrobed, and ended up wearing white which represents purity. Alongside the visual imagery, the spoken word Beyoncé recites while she is explicitly undergoing initiation into the priestess-hood, draws parallels to Christian practices. The process in which she “confessed her sins and was baptized in a river,” and when she “drank the blood and drank the wine” parallel Christian practices.¹⁰⁵ When taking Communion, Christians will symbolically drink the blood of Christ. This entire scene demonstrates the process of ritualistic cleansing, and the idea of detoxing to remove impurities from one’s life.

¹⁰² *Lemonade*, 05:08.

¹⁰³ *Lemonade*, 05:20.

¹⁰⁴ Hurston, 214-218.

¹⁰⁵ *Lemonade*, 05:33; *Lemonade*, 05:45.

In general, these three scenes in *Lemonade* allow Beyoncé to highlight the subtle ways in which syncretic religion has impacted her life. She does a very good job of demonstrating the more consumable aspects of the practices, such as through ritual, cleansing and detox. She also showcases how it is not too far off from much of the Abrahamic faith practices such as Islam, Judaism, and Christianity that much of the western world is used to experiencing. While *Lemonade* does an exceptional job of highlighting the utility of this practice, it is not the first visual medium to do so. I would argue that one of the best visual representations of syncretic religion done with African-Americans is through Julia Dash's 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust*.

Daughters of the Dust is a movie that tells the story of a Gullah Geechee community, specifically known as the Peazant family who live on Ibo Landing on St. Simon Island, off of the Georgia coast. The film follows the family as they prepare to migrate to the North on the mainland. The Gullah "are a distinctive group of Black Americans from South Carolina and Georgia in the southeastern United States."¹⁰⁶ They are unique in that because of their geographic isolation and strong community life, they "have been able to preserve more of their African cultural heritage than any other group of Black Americans."¹⁰⁷ This isolation is the main reason why the Peazant family in *Daughters of the Dust* remained so connected to the various customs and traditions present within the African continent. The family matriarch, Nana Peazant, serves as the family's connection to their enslaved ancestors and the practice of syncretic

¹⁰⁶ "The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection," The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection | The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://glc.yale.edu/gullah-rice-slavery-and-sierra-leone-american-connection>.

¹⁰⁷ "The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection," The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection | The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://glc.yale.edu/gullah-rice-slavery-and-sierra-leone-american-connection>.

religion.¹⁰⁸ She is very reluctant for the family to move to the mainland because she believes the spiritual ties to the family ancestors are rooted within the islands in which they inhabit. “She spiritually communes with these ancestors, who are perceived in Gullah as ‘guardians of tradition and protectors of the family.’”¹⁰⁹ Her desire and reminder to remain connected to one’s ancestors is passed along to the younger generations, as she constantly reminds them to heed the importance of memory. Right before Eli Peazant, her grandson, leaves, Nana Peazant tells him to “call on [his] ancestors,” and to “let them guide” him.¹¹⁰ She stresses the importance of “never [forgetting] who we,” his family, “is, and how far [they] done come.”¹¹¹ This scene connects with the idea of memory and memorialization, and the importance of remembering one’s history and origins. In using her spiritual ties to the islands and her ancestors, Nana Peazant’s uses of syncretic religion “as a way of resisting the disruptions caused by slavery.”¹¹² Much of the way Nana Peazant enacts this memory of the culture to her family members, is through the process of narrating the film alongside the Unborn Child as it progresses. The Unborn Child is the future daughter of both Eli and Eula, his wife. The Unborn Child co-narrates alongside Nana Peazant

¹⁰⁸ William B. Parsons, *Teaching Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011), 145.

¹⁰⁹ Dara Greaves, "Gullah, African Continuities, and Their Representation in Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*," *The English Languages: History, Diaspora, Culture 1* (2010): 9, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/elhdc/article/view/14302>.; Judith Weisenfeld, "My Story Begins Before I Was Born": Myth, History, and Power in Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*," in *In Representing Religion in World Cinema* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2003), 48.

¹¹⁰ *Daughters of the Dust*, dir. Julie Dash (United States: American Playhouse Theatrical Films in Association with WMG: Geechee Girls Production, 1991), online, 23:15.

¹¹¹ *Daughters of the Dust*, dir. Julie Dash (United States: American Playhouse Theatrical Films in Association with WMG: Geechee Girls Production, 1991), online, 21:47.

¹¹² Greaves, 9.

represents the future of the Gullah people on the island, while Grandma Peazant represents the past and the present.¹¹³

Syncretic religion informs Nana Peazant's crafting of a charm as her family plans to travel north. A character assures Nana Peazant that "the Lord will carry us through. Trust in Jesus. Nana, we don't need no charms of dried roots and flowers."¹¹⁴ Despite these words, Nana Peazant continues to craft the charm while adding some strands of her mother's hair and some strands of her own personal hair to the charm. Once the charm is completed, she states:

There must be a bond. A connection between those that will go North and those who will remain. Between us who are here and us who are across the sea. A connection! We are as two people in one body. The last of the old and the first of the new. We will always lead this double life you know. Because we are from the sea. We came here in chains, and we must survive!¹¹⁵

In crafting this charm, Nana Peazant is trying to forge an endless connection between her ancestors and the younger generation, as they will surely lose their connection when leaving the island. This charm is both a religious symbol and a magical symbol, that provides an avenue to remain connected their ancestors. In remaining connected, their ancestors will provide "a source of strength" and according to Marcelitte The Third, PhD Candidate at Emory University in her piece "Daughters Of Aje: Daughters Of The Dust, Aje And Black

¹¹³ Richard Brody, "The Return of Julie Dash's Historic "Daughters of the Dust"," The New Yorker, June 19, 2017, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-return-of-julie-dashes-historic-daughters-of-the-dust>.

¹¹⁴ *Daughters of the Dust*, 1:27:52.

¹¹⁵ *Daughters of the Dust*, 1:28:26.

Feminism,” the charm serves as a physical representation that can be “carried as both a source of power and a tool of remembering one’s roots.”¹¹⁶

This instance where a charm was made for protection is not new. In many traditional West African communities and even in various practices of syncretic religion, this type of charm is known as a *gris-gris*¹¹⁷. A *gris-gris* is a type of charm or talisman of sorts that can have protective and healing purposes. While some *gris-gris* can be used to inflict harm upon others, for the content of this paper, we will be focusing on the positive nature of *gris-gris*. In general, *gris-gris* are not uncommon as we may think. We surround ourselves with modern representations of *gris-gris*. Such examples include family heirlooms, necklaces, protective angels, and significant items passed through generations. In particular, religious’ symbols such as angels are one of the most overlooked *gris-gris*. They are inherently tied to Christian faith, and if we think of what *gris-gris*’ are defined as, they fit into the model. Angels serve to deliver messages from God and serve as protective figures.

What makes *Daughters of the Dust* such a remarkable film in comparison to that of *Lemonade* is the mere idea that Julia Dash is a Black Woman, and she is telling a story inspired by her own patrilineal heritage. According to Kameelah Martin, Dash has “[proven herself] committed to ideals of challenging and re-appropriating the image of the priestess of African diasporic religion in an overtly conscious way.”¹¹⁸ Through her work we are reminded of the importance of generational inheritance, and remaining connected to where you come from. These

¹¹⁶ Marcellite The Third, "Daughters of Aje: Daughters of the Dust, Aje and Black Feminism," Marcellite The Third, , accessed April 18, 2018, https://www.marcellitethird.com/writings/2018/1/9/daughters-of-aje-daughters-of-the-dust-aje-and-black-feminism#_ftn44.

¹¹⁷ Frandrich, 41.

¹¹⁸ Martin, 76.

ideas are some that reemerge for many African-Americans in their search for internal gratification, as they make attempts to discover their origins. Nana Peazant's practice, while seemingly trivial, brought her family together and reminded her descendants of their origins. Nana Peazant as a character was not one who was questioned or disbelieved as an individual despite her practice. While her family members may have doubted her choice to practice syncretic religion, she was very much a person of their family. She is a mother, a wife, and a grandmother, and contributor to the community. This highlights the normality of Nana as a practitioner; she is not considered a witch or anything negative in her community. Just as Beyoncé did in her work in *Lemonade*, Nana Peazant as a figure demonstrated the ways in which syncretic religion can be used as a practical and important part of daily life practice in the Gullah community on St. Simon island.

Beyoncé and Julia Dash do a remarkable job of highlighting the normalcy in their respective art pieces. While their work comes from a place of truth as they draw inspiration from their own personal life experiences or that of their relatives, there lacks a certain authenticity as audiences are viewing the practice on a screen rather than in daily applications. This missing authenticity is one that can be found with practitioners and regular followers of the practice, as not to confuse appreciation and celebration with an appropriation of a religion and culture. Author Rachel Elizabeth Harding writes in her essay titled "What Part of the River You're In: African American Women in Devotion to *Òsun*," featured in *Osun Across the Waters: A Yoruba Godden in Africa and the Americas*, on the real life daily impacts of syncretic religion on the lives of Black Women in the United States. Harding's essay "is a collective reflection on the presence of the deity *Òsun* and the meaning of Orisha religion in the lives of six African

American women.”¹¹⁹ While the essay addresses the many ways in which *Òsun* has proved to be valuable in these women’s’ real lives, I would like to highlight the way in which she has served as a maternal figure.

Òsun is “known for her role as mother.”¹²⁰ She shares the twin deities The Ibeji, from her union with Shango. Harding writes that often “women who wish to conceive and bear children appeal to her especially in her form as *Òsun* Oshogbo.”¹²¹ One of the Black Women interviewed for Harding’s essay, Majile, describes seeing the influence of *Ósun* in her own personal life as a mother to her eight children. When asked about the influence of *Ósun* in her daily life, Majile responds that she is “still a mom – so her [*Ósun*’s] presence is strong in [her] family life.”¹²² This demonstrates the discreet ways in which *Òsun* passes on her maternal and nurturing abilities unto her followers. Osungunwa is another woman who was interviewed about her following of *Òsun* for Harding’s essay. For Osungunwa, she entered the practice into the *Ósun*’s priesthood soon after a very difficult surgery. It was through “*Ósun*’s presence and summons in that [particular] moment” that helped her progress and move forward in her healing.¹²³ Osungunwa states:

This is her area. She saved my life. I’ve always had trouble having children. I’ve lost a lot of children. But I’ve had some strong spiritual experiences as a result – my sight increased. But it was very traumatic.¹²⁴

For Osungunwa, *Ósun* provided a level of maternal care and concern that helped her overcome the adversity and pain that she was experiencing; the care and concern that is so closely

¹¹⁹ Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 165.

¹²⁰ Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 168.

¹²¹ Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 168.

¹²² Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 169.

¹²³ Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 169.

¹²⁴ Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 169.

associated with motherhood. Majile comments on how *Ósun* impacted her personal view of herself. As a young girl, Majile was self-conscious and had “frequent experiences with disturbing spirits and visions” that plagued how she navigated the world as an insecure girl.¹²⁵ In the essay she says:

... When I came to [Òsun] I was tired of life. Nobody seemed to see life like me. She bathed and healed me ... She showed me that I was so beautiful. As a child growing up, I thought I was ugly. Òsun came into my life and opened my eyes and said, “Look at yourself through your own eyes, not someone else’s.”¹²⁶

This level of intimacy once again demonstrates the level of care *Ósun* has provided for Majile, and collectively the care that *Ósun* provides for her constituents. As a mother and mother figure, *Ósun* reminds her followers to head their own self-care in times where they need it. She reminds her followers to love themselves and to love others in the way that she loves them. Those are themes and ideas that ring true to our daily lives. More often than not, maternal figures have influenced and impacted the lives of many in some way, and through the experiences of these Black Women in this essay, we can see how normalized the following of *Ósun* can become.

This chapter does the work of taking stigmas, and pre-conceived notions, and altering the way audiences may engage. It allows three unique examples and demonstrates the ways in which voodoo and syncretic religion broadly can be incorporated in daily life practices. In *Lemonade*, this chapter presented the practicality of syncretic religious practice, while also emphasizing the importance of ritualistic practice in one’s own life. Through *Daughters of the Dust*, this chapter visits the importance of ancestry and connecting with one’s own roots. Finally, through “What Part of the River You’re In: African American Women in Devotion to *Ósun*,” this chapter demonstrates the value of syncretic religion and its connection to motherhood. These three

¹²⁵ Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 169.

¹²⁶ Murphy, *Osun in the Water*, 169.

examples, normalize syncretic religion can be used in daily life. This normalizing of the practice provides a way in which popular representations can be altered to be more realistic to the practice. Through Beyoncé, viewers are encouraged to find their own normal in a strange practice.

Healing for Survival

Broadly speaking, the term “voodoo” has accrued negative connotations across the Black Diaspora. These sentiments are shared with many people across the Black Diaspora; the same sort of hesitance that I have encountered living in West Africa, draws striking similarities to that shared by many of my friends from different backgrounds within the Black Diaspora. Even discussing my thesis and the research I was conducting, no matter how much I tried to explain the realities and true nature of syncretic religion, it continued to fall on deaf ears. This ignorance is harming as it belittles the value and the importance that syncretic religion has bestowed on the lives of those who practice it.

This dismissal of syncretic religion draws striking parallels to the stigma against mental health services among many African-Americans in the United States. According to the Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, “African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population.”¹²⁷ There are a variety reasons why this percentage is so high. Some include a “lack of information and misunderstanding about mental health,” a reliance on “faith, family & social communities” and a reluctance and inaccessibility of mental health services.¹²⁸ These factors often serve as a detriment to the ability for many African-Americans to receive the adequate help they require and disservice. This information draws parallels to many of the reasons why many within the Black Diaspora choose not to follow syncretic religious practice as well. There is a disconnect with the factual information on what the practice actually is and how it can service the users. There are also many stigmas that come from the familial

¹²⁷ "NAMI," African Americans | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-Americans>.

¹²⁸ "NAMI," African Americans | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness, , accessed April 18, 2018, <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-Americans>.

community and also the faith community that they are a part of. According to the U.S. Religious Landscape Study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2014, around 71% of African-Americans identify as Protestant, while 5% identify as Catholic.¹²⁹ These figures are important because they draw attention to an important correlation with Blacks and syncretic religion. Considering that syncretic religion in the United States derived from an association with Catholicism, many who had ancestors who were not practicing Catholics in the South would have less chances of being exposed to the practice. This provides a very strong reason as to why syncretic religious practice has such a bad reputation for many African-Americans in the United States, and it sets the stage for the importance of Beyoncé's work. Many do not know to turn to syncretic religion for aid in times of distress or sickness. The most important aspect of why Beyoncé chose to use syncretic religion through *Lemonade* is the utility it has in aiding Black Women to overcome adversity.

Lemonade demonstrates the power that syncretic religion has had in the healing in Beyoncé's relationship with her husband. It ultimately changed the trajectory of their relationship in a more positive way by allowing Beyoncé to finally heal. Through *Lemonade*, audiences are able to glimpse the intimate healing processes that Beyoncé's practice of syncretic religion was able to provide in her route towards her own self-liberation from her pain. By the end of *Lemonade*, Beyoncé achieves "Redemption." The chapter "Redemption" informs the overall meaning of the piece by serving as a reminder of the resiliency of Black Women.

Lemonade as a visual album is composed of 11 chapters, and within each chapter, Beyoncé explores emotions as she copes with her husband's infidelity. The chapters are titled: "Intuition," "Denial," "Anger," "Apathy," "Emptiness," "Accountability," "Reformation,"

¹²⁹ David Masci, "5 Facts about the Religious Lives of African Americans," Pew Research Center, February 07, 2018, , accessed April 18, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/02/07/5-facts-about-the-religious-lives-of-african-americans/>.

“Forgiveness,” “Resurrection,” “Hope,” and “Redemption.” These chapters are stages in Beyoncé’s healing process. The beauty of this visual album is that the lyrics, spoken word, and imagery form a visual narrative of Beyoncé’s experience, which speaks to issues that Black Women have faced and continue to encounter. While *Lemonade* is a prime example of Beyoncé’s healing process, it is not the only way one can heal, and that is the beauty of practicing syncretic religion. Syncretic religion connects with each person in a different way, but the overall path to get to healing is replicated across each participant. Beyoncé’s connection to voodoo is outlined through *Lemonade*’s multi-faceted musical, lyrical, and cinemographic imagery.

Lemonade is broken up into three to four themed sections. The first section includes chapters “Intuition,” “Denial,” “Anger,” “Apathy,” and “Emptiness.” These chapters share a collective theme of despair. In the first chapter “Intuition,” Beyoncé begins to suspect her husband’s infidelity. She sings how she can “taste [his] dishonesty,” and hopes that he catches her spying on him, in the hopes that he will stop.¹³⁰ Beyond the lyrical development, the imagery is that of Beyoncé praying and exposing a state of vulnerability and isolation because she is still trying to work through her emotions. In chapter two, “Denial,” Beyoncé attempts to rationalize her husband’s deceit, and understand why he would cheat on her especially if they “were made for each other.”¹³¹ In this chapter, we see Beyoncé wrestling with her feelings trying to decide what would be the best course of action in confronting her man: “What's worse, lookin' jealous

¹³⁰ “Pray You Catch Me,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/prayyoucatchme.html>.

¹³¹ “Hold Up,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/holdup.html>.

or crazy? ... Or like being walked all over lately, walked all over lately?”¹³² In chapter three, “Anger,” Beyoncé exposes her anger at her husband’s infidelity and warns him that if he “[tries] this shit again, [he] gonna lose [his] wife.”¹³³

In chapter four, “Apathy,” Beyoncé is displaying a more carefree attitude and indifference to her husband’s attempts at reconciliation. She sings “Now you want to say you're sorry / Now you want to call me crying / Now you gotta see me wilding / Now I'm the one that's lying / And I don't feel bad about it / It's exactly what you get / Stop interrupting my grinding / I ain't thinking 'bout you” and the lyrics are meant to display how, despite his infidelity, she will not let him stop her grind and she will not feel sympathy for him.¹³⁴ Black men are often forgiven too easily, and through this song, we see take a stand to teach Jay Z a lesson without remorse for her actions towards his infidelity.

In chapter five, “Emptiness,” the song serves as a form of a feminist anthem wherein Beyoncé celebrates the financial grind and diligence of a hard-working woman. While much of the lyrical content present within this scene alludes to that of a woman who engages in sex work, the lyrics “She fights for the power, keeping time/ She grinds day and night/ She grinds from Monday to Friday/ Works from Friday to Sunday” reiterates a reoccurring theme of diligence and hustle.¹³⁵ These traits are not unique to women who voluntarily engage in sex work, but also

¹³² “Hold Up,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/holdup.html>.

¹³³ “Don’t Hurt Yourself,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/donthurtyourself.html>.

¹³⁴ “Sorry,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/sorry.html>.

¹³⁵ “6 Inch,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/6inch.html>.

those who are in the work force and are actively working to support themselves. This demonstrates autonomy and independence from anything a man could seemingly provide.

The next section includes chapters “Accountability,” “Reformation” and “Forgiveness.” In these chapters, Beyoncé comes to terms with the men who have disappointed her. In chapter six “Accountability,” serves as moment of self-reflection into her life and her relationship with her father. Like Jay-Z, Beyoncé’s mother was cheated on by Beyoncé’s father, and much of the song is Beyoncé reiterating lessons her father would pass on to her. This chapter is one in which Beyoncé is forced to face her relationship with her husband, indirectly through that of her father. If she was able to forgive her father for his infidelity, “can she also forgive her husband?”.¹³⁶ In chapter seven, “Reformation” we encounter Beyoncé trying to understand what happened in their relationship that led to his cheating, she asks him to “tell [her], what did [she] do wrong?,” so they can work on their relationship.¹³⁷ In chapter eight, “Forgiveness,” we encounter Beyoncé in a vulnerable moment between her and her husband. In this moment, Beyoncé is gradually forgiving her husband, as he has shown remorse for his actions.

In the last section, which includes chapters “Resurrection,” “Hope,” and “Redemption.” Through this section, Beyoncé has taken steps towards her own spiritual healing, but also in moving forward with her life. In chapter nine, “Resurrection,” we see Beyoncé making amends with her husband and moving “Forward” in their relationship.¹³⁸ In chapter ten, “Hope” we see Beyoncé channeling her own inner strength, and taking the autonomy to make changes for

¹³⁶ “Daddy Lessons,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/daddylessons.html>.

¹³⁷ “Love Drought,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/lovedrought.html>.

¹³⁸ “Forward,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/forward.html>.

herself. She sings” I break chains all by myself / Won't let my freedom rot in hell / Hey! Imma keep running / Cause a winner don't quit on themselves” and through these lyrics we see Beyoncé pushing through her tribulations.¹³⁹ This song is an homage to black women, as black women have never stopped pushing through even if they have been held back by “chains.” The last chapter “Redemption” shows Beyoncé expressing her love for her husband and how they are making strides towards improving and repairing their relationship. Lyrics such as “They say true love's the greatest weapon / To win the war caused by pain” show how love can conquer pain. In a way, Beyoncé is reinforcing the complexities of her emotion by revealing how love and pain can coexist with each other over the same event.

The point of outlining *Lemonade* as a collective piece is to demonstrate not only the nuance of emotion present throughout Beyoncé’s healing process, but also to recognize it as a tool to understand syncretic religion. Beyoncé’s understanding of Voodoo allowed her to craft this piece that demonstrated the healing capabilities of this practice that, in similar fashion to those who were enslaved, allowed her to survive and move past the very difficult time in which she was living in at the time of Jay-Z’s infidelity. If we think back to *Ósun* as a character in this piece and as a spiritual deity, she represents *Lemonade*. She represents the coexistence of love and pain, anger and happiness. One cannot reach a level of happiness and appreciation for life without exploring the nuances of pain and anger. This is why the summary of the piece was important. As Beyoncé delves into her emotions, she partakes in rituals and cleanses herself, channels *Ósun* for the purpose of becoming her source of inspiration, and brings along a community of women and girls in her journey towards recovery. All of these components, like

¹³⁹ “Freedom,” *AZ Lyrics*, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/beyonceknowles/freedom.html>.

her visual-album, combine and provide an antidote to pain.

In *Lemonade*, the chapter ‘Redemption,’ arguably one of the most important scenes in this visual album, demonstrates Black women’s resiliency. This scene starts off with Beyoncé reciting the recipe to make lemonade. During the recitation of the recipe, audiences witness varying imagery of Black women and girls gathering.¹⁴⁰ These women and girls range in age from young Black Girls who are playing, exhibiting their carefree nature running and playing, to more teenaged and mature women who are still very much carefree, but collected. They gather around a dinner table and begin talking and interacting. Beyoncé speaks:

Grandmother, the alchemist, you spun gold out of this hard life, conjured beauty from the things left behind. Found healing where it did not live. Discovered the antidote in your own kitchen. Broke the curse with your own two hands. You passed these instructions down to your daughter who then passed it down to her daughter.¹⁴¹

Beyoncé referencing her grandmother is important because it emphasizes the importance and strength of her maternal lineage. Beyoncé’s grandmother, Agnèz Beyincé, was a Creole woman who was born and raised in Louisiana in 1909.¹⁴² She would have lived in Louisiana around the time that Zora Neale Hurston immersed herself in voodoo. She faced racism, endured inequality, and was exposed to voodoo. She bequeathed this heritage to her children. As Beyoncé says in *Lemonade*, her grandmother “passed [the] instructions down to [her] daughter who then passed it down to her [daughter,] who we know to be Beyoncé.¹⁴³ Alongside passing on the syncretic belief generationally, Beyoncé’s passed along the lemonade recipe that is spoken about prior to this speech.¹⁴⁴ The effect

¹⁴⁰ *Lemonade*, 50:29.

¹⁴¹ *Lemonade*, 50:29.

¹⁴² "Broussard Ancestors of Beyoncé Giselle Knowles," Genealogy.com, accessed April 18, 2018, <http://www.genealogy.com/forum/surnames/topics/broussard/753/>.

¹⁴³ *Lemonade*, 51:20.

¹⁴⁴ *Lemonade*, 50:29.

of this recipe is felt in Beyoncé's connection to her present and her past. Food often serves as a conduit of culture, and it also facilitates intergenerational memory. Every time she makes lemonade, Beyoncé is carrying with her the lessons and the spirit of her grandmother, even if she never formally met her.

Following the speech, the imagery cuts to a more personal clip of Hattie White, Jay-Z's grandmother celebrating her 90th Birthday, and reading a speech. She says: "'I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade.'"¹⁴⁵ These two pieces demonstrate a level of intergenerational connectivity. The stories that elders have lived are passed through the subsequent generations alongside the various lessons learned from their respective triumphs and struggles. Despite what was thrown their way as Black Women, they were able to make something out of nothing, and were able to heal themselves in a way that no one else could do for them. This model of healing is replicated through the art form of *Lemonade*, the visual album. Beyoncé found healing in her art, her practice of syncretic religion, and through the intergenerational strength that was passed down from the Black Women in her life. This strength and the lessons she has learned are what continue to help her push through whatever is thrown her way. In taking lemons and making lemonade, Beyoncé draws from this rich tradition of syncretic religion which has provided resources for Black Women to overcome their adversities. This recipe is to grieve and to persevere. Passing on this recipe from generation to generation reiterates this intergenerational connectivity, as the solutions of the past, carry on and help those in the present.

This strength is what makes the lemonade recipe truly symbolic of the struggles of Black Women and Girls. The water and sugar, represent life and sweetness that forms the foundation of a

¹⁴⁵ *Lemonade*, 51:40.

woman; the “juice of eight lemons” and the “zest of half a lemon” represent adversity.¹⁴⁶ Pouring the mixture from “one jug... into the other several times,” is representative of the mixing of all the components. The imperfect mixture between two jugs represents an individualized recipe. Each time a batch of lemonade is made it will not replicate the previous; each person has her own life and experiences unique to herself, and it is important to recognize that uniqueness that comes with one’s own personal recipe of lemonade. The process of straining the mixture through the napkin is almost as if the individual person is being tried and pressured through their adversity, and while it may have taken a lot of work to get through the process, by the end of that straining there is a sweet and tart mixture of lemonade that ends up being delicious despite the process that it took to get to that point. This, in a way, stands for a Black Woman, as her life and her experiences are unique to the ratio of water, sugar, and lemon juice that is provided. Black Women are a bittersweet mixture.

Beyoncé’s connection with *Ósun* is synonymous with lemonade. *Ósun*’s representation as a Black Woman in yellow parallels lemonade. She is a bittersweet; she represents happiness and joy, but she also can feel pain and anger. She is a deity that connects with water, and with water being a foundational ingredient in lemonade, collectively she forms a spiritual representation of lemonade. These are examples of the voodoo aesthetics present within the film.

Despite all the pain that Beyoncé experienced with her husband’s infidelity, despite all the pain that older generations of Black Women experienced in times of oppression, despite all the pain that Black Women and Girls will face come the future, they remain pillars of strength in American culture. The strength that has gotten them through their adversities is built off of the idea of love. As Beyoncé said “My grandma said, nothing real can be threatened... [true] love

¹⁴⁶ *Lemonade*, 50:29.

brought salvation back into me...with every tear came redemption and my torturers became my remedy.”¹⁴⁷ At face value, the lyrics in the monologue appear as if Beyoncé is referencing her relationship with her husband. His infidelity was a pain, but together they worked through their issues and were able to overcome the troubles with their relationship. While this interpretation of these words may be correct at face value, viewing the words alongside the visuals augments the meaning into so much more.

The scene is set up in black and white. The first visual encountered is that of Beyoncé standing alone amongst some trees, during this scene she says “My grandma said, nothing real can be threatened.”¹⁴⁸ Next, the words “true love brought salvation back into me,” are spoken and then there is a visual of an albino Black Woman using her hands to reference to herself.¹⁴⁹ [See Appendix Figure 3] Finally, when Beyoncé says “with every tear came redemption and my torturers became my remedy” there is an image of two women knee length in a body of water simultaneously tugging on a rope in unison trying to keep balance.¹⁵⁰ [See Appendix Figure 4] These visuals collectively reimagine the scope for how we can think of her final monologue. Rather than focusing on her relationship with Jay-Z, the visuals also acknowledge the adversities and pain encountered by Black Women. Encountering these women in different forms, reminds the audience who this piece is targeted towards. Love provided Beyoncé and the aforementioned women with strength to overcome adversity and continue believing in themselves. The ideas of salvation and redemption are broadly, religious, but within the context of this paper, have deep ties to the Christian faith. The tension of the

¹⁴⁷ *Lemonade*, 51:45.

¹⁴⁸ *Lemonade*, 51:58.

¹⁴⁹ *Lemonade*, 52:06.

¹⁵⁰ *Lemonade*, 51:45.

two women tugging on the rope, alludes to a tension often caused by the adversity encountered by Black Women. While initially inflicting pain, the adversity will later make the Black Woman stronger, thus becoming her remedy. She will prosper, despite it all. Following this scene, the visuals shift and are vibrant in color. Rather than unique isolated instances of Black Women, there is a group of women working together in a garden wherein Beyoncé says “So we're gonna heal. We're gonna start again.”¹⁵¹ The garden represents growth and regeneration. After a prosperous season, plants die, and when the new season comes back around, they are given life and grow. They heal and they start again. This monologue serves as a final address towards the pains and the subsequent healings. It is an ode to the strength and the resiliency of people who are too often forgotten. It is a reminder to recognize the beauty of being a Black Woman, even when circumstances tell them otherwise.

Lemonade is a story of pain, but it is also a story of learning how to overcome the pain that one has suffered. In particular, the audience is exposed to the nuances of Black Female pain. The danger of the society we live is how often we contain narratives of Black Women into one box or way of thought. *Lemonade* aids in breaking down those barriers to reveal the breadth and the individualization of pain. This innately provides a way to rethink how a person can heal, because healing is not a monolithic experience. Non-traditional methods of healing in the United States, such as syncretic religion can be used. This is what *Lemonade* emphasizes in large. *Lemonade* humanizes the practice of syncretic religion, and illustrates how it helped Beyoncé through times of weakness. She took the sourest lemons of her life, and made sweet *Lemonade*. She reminds us of the importance of grieving adequately, but also reminds us to find an avenue where one can move forward and beyond the grieving state. *Lemonade* changes the narrative projected on Black Women, ultimately reconfiguring Black Women view their needs. Rather

¹⁵¹*Lemonade*, 52:37.

than sacrificing themselves for the greater good of society and its health, Black Women are putting themselves in the forefront and addressing their health first and foremost. As it should have been from the very beginning.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Through all the research I had completed over the course of this year and through all of my viewings of *Lemonade*, there was one scene that I struggled to decipher. Following the video for the song “Forward,” there is scene with an unidentified woman. She is walking around an empty dining room “masked” as a Mardi Gras Indian, while periodically shaking her tambourine.¹⁵² In the dining room, the room is dimly lit candles atop a dining table and two armoires. [See Appendix Figure 5] A seemingly simple scene, but one that I knew held undiscovered meaning.

I delved into trying to understand the broad meaning of the Mardi Gras Indian, and discovered that Mardi Gras Indians “emerged as a way to pay homage to the Native Americans who sheltered runaway enslaved persons on their journeys to freedom.”¹⁵³ Beyond other historical pieces of information and general ties to Louisiana, I could not identify the purpose the woman served to play. There was something innately spiritual and mystical that I could not decipher.

In the final days of my editing, I stumbled upon a book called *Jazz religion, the second line, and black New Orleans: after Hurricane Katrina* written by Richard Brent Turner that answered the unsolved mystery I had resolved to lay to rest. Turner elaborated on the utility of Mardi Gras Indians explaining that they “used their secret societies to resist the city government’s attempts to de-Africanize the spirituality and culture of New Orleans.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *Lemonade*, 45:15.

¹⁵³ Emily Ramirez Hernandez, "Mardi Gras Indian Queens in New Orleans," GoNOLA.com, February 08, 2018, accessed April 18, 2018, <https://gonola.com/things-to-do-in-new-orleans/mardi-gras-indian-queens>.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Brent Turner, *Jazz Religion, the Second Line, and Black New Orleans: After Hurricane Katrina* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017), 42.

Additionally, I learned of “masking’s” ties to syncretism. Turner said that ““masking Indian” was a performance strategy related to the spiritual world of [Voodoo], for “masks” were “spirit faces of the ancestors, of deities.”¹⁵⁵ He also elaborated upon the connections that the costumes of Mardi Gras Indians have with Haitian culture, the emphasis that these tribes have on community and ancestral ties, and their subtle channelings of Yoruba deity, Ogun. He delved into the usage of music as a healing tool, then emphasized the “healing and coping strategies that mend dysfunctional relations in family and community” that serve as a “hallmark of [Voodoo’s] power as a living tradition.”¹⁵⁶

The Mardi Gras Indians presence was subtle, but represented much of what *Lemonade* argued for and represented throughout the film. The culture of Mardi Gras Indians is one of resistance, community, and healing, and through that, they were able to keep up their culture and their presence across generations. Beyoncé’s usage of a Mardi Gras Indian is salient, because it used to be and still is “uncommon to see women in Mardi Gras Indian regalia.”¹⁵⁷ When they are, they are recognized as “Queen.”¹⁵⁸ Despite this title, women’s roles in the tribes were trivialized in relation to their male counterparts.¹⁵⁹ Her inclusion makes a statement to emphasize the important role that women have in Mardi Gras Indian society, as they serve as peacemakers

¹⁵⁵ Turner, 54.

¹⁵⁶ Turner, 74.

¹⁵⁷ Donatella, “The Mardi Gras Indian Of 'Lemonade'.”

¹⁵⁸ Donatella, “The Mardi Gras Indian Of 'Lemonade'.”

¹⁵⁹ Alison Fensterstock, "Mardi Gras Indian Queens Stake Their Claim to an Essential Role in a Singular New Orleans Tradition," MardiGras.com, March 03, 2014, , accessed April 19, 2018, http://www.mardigras.com/news/2014/03/mardi_gras_indian_queens_stake.html.

and protectors of their tribe.¹⁶⁰ This makes it the perfect addition to the visual-album, and demonstrates once again, Beyoncé's strategic eye for meaning in even the subtlest of demonstrations.

Throughout this entire paper, I have demonstrated the various ways in which Beyoncé has taken her piece *Lemonade* and as used it as a tool to celebrate her discovery and practice of syncretic religion. *Lemonade* has showcased the ways in which syncretic religion has encouraged community building and support, the representation of the normalcy of syncretic religion practice, and the ways in which syncretic religion can be used as a tool for healing and overcoming adversities encountered in one's life. Through the acts of community building, *Lemonade* reminds viewers how the formation of communities has provided a unifying tool that unites the shared experiences of Black Women. This unification provides a certain resiliency that has helped Black Women push through the most unfortunate circumstances. Through the act of demonstrating the normalcy of syncretic religious practice, *Lemonade* rejects the misconstrued representations of syncretic religion, and provides an avenue for Black Women to openly explore what syncretic religion may mean for them. Finally, *Lemonade* demonstrates the healing and motivational opportunities that the practice of syncretic religion can provide which ultimately makes a statement for why this practice has persisted for so long. Studying *Lemonade* led me to explore the city where the manifestations of syncretic religious practice are so ingrained within the culture of the city.

In December 2017, I took a trip to New Orleans. My goal in New Orleans was to explore the role syncretic religion, specifically voodoo, played in the lives of those who lived in the city.

¹⁶⁰ Fenderstock, "Mardi Gras Indian Queens Stake Their Claim to an Essential Role in a Singular New Orleans Tradition."

I also wanted to learn more about Marie Laveau, New Orleans most famous Voodoo Priestess. While there, I was fortunate enough to meet real life initiated practitioners of voodoo. Through my connections, I was able to attend an event titled “An Intimate Night with Chief Yuya: Manifest YOU- A Spiritual Transformation,”, and I was able to listen to a presentation by a Priest. During his session, Priest Yuya expressed how he came into the practice, what the practice did for him, and how he has used it to help others. This was all very informative, as even though he was speaking from a man’s perspective, he still highlighted themes I discovered for myself. There was a point towards the end of the presentation, where attendees were able to ask questions. In the midst of gathering my research and organizing it in a productive way for class, I inquired on their opinions on Beyoncé’s *Lemonade*, and what they thought of her attempts to showcase their practice in her piece. Much to my surprise, Priestess Sula and Priest Yuya, disagreed and criticized Beyoncé’s portrayal of syncretic religion throughout *Lemonade*. They articulated how her representations were very superficial, and failed to touch upon the real meaning and the overall importance of the practice. They emphasized that I look into Julia Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*, for a better filmic representation of syncretic religion and how it relates to the lives of Black Women. They also articulated some of the conclusions I had found for myself, reiterating how Beyoncé’s drew parallels to the deity of *Ósun* and Jay-Z to *Ósun*’s partner, *Shangó*. Thankfully, having already delved into Julia Dash for my paper, I understood what they were alluding to. They continued to emphasize that they believed Beyoncé had no realistic background knowledge in the artistic process, and that they believed she probably had a creative consultant conduct all the research for what to include in *Lemonade*.

While I understood where they were coming from, I disagree with their critiques. While Beyoncé’s representation of syncretic religion in *Lemonade* were more dramatic than Julia

Dash's representation in *Daughters of the Dust*, I would argue that Beyoncé's usage of syncretic religion in *Lemonade* fits the generation for which she is performing to. Not to deny the artistry that Julia Dash provides, but she is not as well-known as Beyoncé. In fact, due to the release of *Lemonade*, Julia Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* has resurfaced, and has been used in discussions alongside *Lemonade*.

Lemonade is a work that appeals to this generation and our unique struggles of the political context in which we live in. It has the artistic and cultural influences that allow for audiences of varying educational levels to engage in constructive conversations around the piece, and interpret as they may. *Lemonade* provides a gateway for those who are interested in the practice to receive a baseline introduction into syncretic religious practice in a consumable and relatable way. Beyoncé provides a roadmap for viewers to delve further into the practice, and understand the ways in which it can impact their own respective lives. While the critiques of Priestess Sula and Priest Yuya had substance, and were valid critiques, I believe that they failed to recognize the cultural zeitgeist that *Lemonade* was released in, and how it may impact those with little to no knowledge or exposure of the practice.

My research opens up new questions that I believe future writers can explore. I struggled with identifying how to accurately specify what practice of syncretic religion to focus on. There are varying practices within syncretic religion, and it is hard to box the practice into one mold of what it should be. I do not believe that Beyoncé delves into one practice, she appears to be intermixing between New Orleans Voodoo, Cuban Santería, and more that I probably have not identified in this paper. This is why throughout this thesis I use syncretic religion broadly, while also using voodoo interchangeably.

Following that suggestion, I believe that conducting an anthropological study similar to the work that Zora Neale Hurston did in the 1930s, would provide a lot of information towards understanding the practice, specifically within New Orleans today. While Dr. Joseph M. Murphy conducted research on the various types of syncretic religion, he is innately an outsider in these communities. As a white man, despite whatever intentions, he occupies a space that is informed by his identities. Black Women, and subsequent people-of-color could provide a more accurate perspective and analysis. Conducting an ethnographic study, could provide new insights that modernize our perceptions of those who practice syncretic religion.

Additionally, it would be worth exploring the impact of syncretic religion and *Lemonade* on men. Based on my experiences with Priest Yuya, I came to realize that men experience voodoo in similar ways to women. Specifically, with Black men who follow the practice, I wonder how their identities are impacted by the strong leadership of women? While there are male deities present, there does not appear to be the same form of masculine community formation, as emphasized for women.

Lastly, I wonder whether or not *Lemonade* has done the work of sparking a new generation's interest in voodoo as an authentic practice. This is important to delve into because of the fine line of cultural appropriation that Beyoncé walks along with this piece. While I believe her intentions are genuine and she follows the practice, her exposure invites uninformed people into a space that was not made for them. This can lead to a misuse that trivializes the importance of sacred symbols and figures. The best way to exemplify this is when non-Native American people wear traditional Native American headdresses. More often than not, they wear these headdresses for fashion which completely bypasses the cultural significance of the headdresses.

The beauty of *Lemonade* is its ability to touch whatever audience is viewing it in a unique way. While some may appreciate Beyoncé's political voice and how she has used it to speak up against police brutality and in support of general social justice movements, others may read *Lemonade* as a piece that is purely musical in nature, an ode to her southern roots, if that. In my case, *Lemonade* has allowed me to grapple with and reimagine the way I deal with my own personal pain. In viewing my healing from the lens as a Black Women, I have been able to break through my internalized stigmas against a practice that I have a loose understanding and familiarity with. Beyoncé has produced a work that challenges the stigmas of not only syncretism, but reminds audiences that there is no one way to heal, that there is no one way to engage with Black Women, and finally, that there is no one way to watch and make *Lemonade*.

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Appendix

Figure 1: “Beyoncé channeling Osun in “Hold Up,”” *Lemonade*, Directed by Beyoncé Knowles, Performed by Beyoncé, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, 06:12.



Figure 2: “Lezley McSpadden, mother of Michael Brown, holding a photo of his Senior Portrait in “Forward,”” *Lemonade*, Directed by Beyoncé Knowles, Performed by Beyoncé, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, 45:03.



Figure 3: “Two Black Women tugging on a rope,” *Lemonade*, Directed by Beyoncé Knowles, Performed by Beyoncé, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, 52:11.



Figure 4: “Two Black Women tugging on a rope,” *Lemonade*, Directed by Beyoncé Knowles, Performed by Beyoncé, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, 52:14.



Figure 5: “Mardi Gras Indian walking around dining room in “Forward,”” *Lemonade*, Directed by Beyoncé Knowles, Performed by Beyoncé, Parkwood Entertainment, 2016, 45:40.

