

# Double Consciousness

## Understanding the Layers of Beyoncé's "Hold Up"

**Consider:** How do we draw meaning from something that is conveyed on multiple platforms? Which has a stronger impact on our interpretation: verbal components (the lyrics), visual components (the music video), or subconscious components (allusions to a collective literary/cultural consciousness)?

**Directions:** After watching/listening to Beyoncé's "Hold Up" from her 2016 album, *Lemonade*, answer the questions and demonstrate critical thinking. Think about all of the theoretical implications we discussed. Think about the significance of the black body (especially the female black body) within the exceptionalism of America's settler colonial history. Think about what W.E.B. DuBois said about double consciousness. Think about the notions of indigeneity and diaspora. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeonBmeFR8o>)

**Background Knowledge:** DuBois explained "double consciousness" in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), stating, "The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world... This double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt or pity. One even feels his two-ness- an American and a Negro- two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (9).

1. What notions does the album title, *Lemonade*, resurrect? What aphorism (tied to lemons) is perpetuated in society? When life hands you lemons...
2. Break down the title. Think about the denotative and connotative meanings of the words 'hold' and 'up.' What does the connection between these two words potentially symbolize? How might the preposition without its object of the preposition be significant? Think about this title in context of the opening scene. Though the title is 'Hold Up,' the opening image is Beyoncé submerged downward into water. In context of the title, the notion of double consciousness, the historic position of the 'African American,' and the history of transatlantic slavery, why might water be symbolic (in Western literary consciousness)?
3. In the supporting documents, find the Warsan Shire poem, "Denial." Read and annotate the poem.
4. From which point-of-view is the poem spoken? Why is this significant (in relation to the Althusserian notion of interpellation- the 'subject' position)? Who holds power in first-person narration?
5. How does the power of the first-person narration (a rhetorical choice) create a tension between the speaker (the subject of the spoken word) and the meaning/semantics of the words themselves (e.g. "closed my mouth more") (the literary choice)?
6. What relationship do the linked together words create? ('closed mouth' = nonverbal, 'softer,' 'prettier,' 'less awake')

7. What Western connection/philosophy/religion is alluded to through the indications of fasting, wearing white, avoiding mirrors, and abstinence?
8. Which Biblical reference does 'swallowed a sword' refer to?
9. Define levitated. Think about the title. Significance?
10. Confession, baptism, amen- these are associated with which faith/religion?
11. "I whipped my own back." Break. This. Down. Think about all the implications here. Think about Hegel's master/slave dialectic. Think about chattel slavery. Think about the speaker taking the subject position. Think about what all this means.
12. After all of this, that 'your' (second person point-of-view) finds its way in the poem- an unidentified 'your feet.' This is ambiguous. What are some potential subjects that might qualify for the 'you' position in this poem?
13. Think about the two ways that this line could be read and how a lack of grammatical correctness (no comma or full stop) complicates/enhances the meaning: "I crossed myself in thought I saw the devil." Is it "I crossed myself in thought." Then, "I saw the devil." OR is it "I crossed myself in." Then, "Thought I saw the devil." How do each of these translations change the meaning?
14. "Plugged my menses with pages from the Holy Book"- break that down. Especially in context of I drank the blood. What does blood symbolize in this poem?
15. Think back to your potential answers to number 12. Who is 'you'?
16. Why is all of this recited underwater, in a bedroom with the Victorian design?
17. What is the significance of the above water scene? Why the ivory pillars? Why the oak and ornate doors? Why the steps up? Why the double French doors? Why the closed windows?
18. Though no words indicate this shift, Beyoncé walks down the stairs wearing a yellow dress, no shoes, surrounded by water. Which African goddess does this represent? Why is this allusion important? Is the juxtaposition important as well?
19. Why is the American Flag in the background of the third scene significant? This was filmed in New Orleans. Consider the settler colonial history of NOLA.
20. In the next shot, Beyoncé walks past a young boy (wearing headphones and modern-day clothes) possibly buying an apple from a man (wearing blue jean overalls and a straw hat) running a street stand selling all fruit. Why is fruit symbolic? Why is an apple even more symbolic? Why is the relation between the boy and the man (considering their clothes) symbolic... especially since the boy hands the man the apple (the consumer hands the merchant the apple)... he doesn't hand him money, but an apple--- and then, the transaction is never complete? SO MUCH HAPPENING. Analyze it.
21. Who hands Beyoncé the Louisville Slugger (baseball bat)? Why is a baseball bat symbolic? Why is the child significant? Think about baseball being the American tradition- an all-American sport... but a completely

patriarchal sport- with not only a sexist, but a historically racist background. However, instead of saying 'Louisville slugger,' the bat says, 'Hot Sauce.' Analyze young scholars.

22. What does Beyoncé do with the baseball bat? Why is this form of destruction significant? (What does a car symbolize in Western cultural consciousness?)
23. Who sees this? Why is a female's expression used? How does this subvert the traditional male gaze? Notice the decal of the surveillance camera. Remember this.
24. What is the second thing that she destroys? It is yellow. Symbolism?
25. It has Mardi Gras beads on it. What is the history behind Mardi Gras- in France and in NOLA.
26. The window advertises Yakamein. What is that? What are the backstories behind that?
27. After she busts the fire hydrant. The background demonstrates a gate, an orange and white road work block, a 'No Trespassing' sign, a 'For Lease' sign, and graffiti. Symbolism? Significance?
28. The trash swirling around in the background (like Michael Jackson's 'Billie Jean' music video), the street band playing, the breakdancing, the guy wearing the 'In Memory of When I Gave a \*\*\*\*' with a crucifix on the four-wheeler, a woman dancing with her hair being done, the sign 'Home Stores,' etc. Pick a detail and explain what it might be critiquing/symbolizing/subverting.
29. After destroying the car windows and breaking the fire hydrant, what does she break using the bat? Think back to what I had you remember in #23. Was that foreshadowing? What would a surveillance camera represent?
30. Personal opinion: what's worse: looking jealous or crazy?
31. When she busts out the next store front window, it shows a pink wig on display. Why is that symbolic?
32. All of the signs say 'open.' What might that mean?
33. Why is the fire symbolic?
34. At the very end, Beyoncé hits the camera that records the music video, drops the bat, and walks away. A young kid comes up and places his hand on the bat and looks at camera. Significance?
35. The last line is 'What's up.' Tie this to the title. Analyze away.
36. How does this music video demonstrate (visually speaking) what DuBois called double consciousness? Which two cultural consciousnesses are embedded in the music video, poem, and lyrics?
37. How does the theme of "breaking" prevail within the music video? How does the "breaking"- whether it's a car, a hydrant, a store window, a form of dance, a surveillance camera, or maybe even herself- act as a renewal or an act of defiance that creates progressive change? How is it 'lemonade'?
38. What am I overlooking?

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**Consider:** Culture Jamming- (a.k.a. guerrilla communication) is a tactic used by many anti-consumerist social movements to disrupt or subvert media culture and its mainstream cultural institutions, including corporate advertising. It attempts to "expose the methods of domination" of a mass society to foster progressive change. (Wikipedia Definition- Because why not.)

**Directions:** After watching/listening to Beyoncé's "Hold Up" from her 2016 album, *Lemonade*, think about, discuss, and analyze how her compilation- the visuals, Warsan Shire's spoken word poetry, and the lyrics "jam the cultural machinery," disrupt, or subvert mainstream cultural institutions and expose "methods of domination" (e.g. patriarchy, white privilege, capitalist consumerism, male gaze, Western religion, etc.).

**Consider:** In "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine," Luce Irigaray (a feminist theorist) explains, "The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the subject or the object, but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal" (796).



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### Hold Up

Beyoncé

Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Slow down, they don't love you like I love you  
Back up, they don't love you like I love you  
Step down, they don't love you like I love you  
Can't you see there's no other man above you?  
What a wicked way to treat the girl that loves you  
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Oh, down, they don't love you like I love you  
Something don't feel right  
Because it ain't right  
Especially comin' up after midnight  
I smell your secret, and I'm not too perfect  
To ever feel this worthless  
How did it come down to this?  
Scrollin' through your call list  
I don't wanna lose my pride, but I'ma fuck me up a bitch  
Know that I kept it sexy, and know I kept it fun  
There's something that I'm missing, maybe my head for one  
What's worse, lookin' jealous or crazy?  
Jealous or crazy?  
Or like being walked all over lately, walked all over lately  
I'd rather be crazy  
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Slow down, they don't love you like I love you  
Back up, they don't love you like I love you  
Step down, they don't love you like I love you  
Can't you see there's no other man above you?  
What a wicked way to treat the girl that loves you  
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Slow down they don't love you like I love you  
Let's imagine for a moment that you never made a name for yourself  
Or mastered wealth, they had you labeled as a king  
Never made it out the cage, still out there movin' in them streets  
Never had the baddest woman in the game up in your sheets  
Would they be down to ride?  
No, they used to hide from you, lie to you  
But y'all know we were made for each other

So I find you and hold you down  
Me sing se  
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Slow down, they don't love you like I love you  
Back up, they don't love you like I love you  
Step down, they don't love you like I love you  
Can't you see there's no other man above you?  
What a wicked way to treat the girl that loves you  
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Slow down they don't love you like I love you  
Hey, this such a shame  
You let this good love go to waste  
I always keep the top tier, 5 star  
Backseat lovin' in the car  
Like make that wood, like make that wood  
Holly like a boulevard  
What's worse, lookin' jealous or crazy?  
Jealous and crazy?  
Or like being walked all over lately, walked all over lately  
I'd rather be crazy  
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Slow down, they don't love you like I love you  
Back up, they don't love you like I love you  
Step down, they don't love you like I love you  
Can't you see there's no other man above you?  
What a wicked way to treat the girl that loves you  
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you  
Oh, down, they don't love you like I love you  
I hop up out the bed and get my swag on  
I look in the mirror, say, what's up?  
What's up, what's up, what's up  
I hop up out the bed and get my swag on  
I look in the mirror, say, what's up?  
What's up, what's up, what's up

Source: [LyricFind](#)

Songwriters: Antonio Randolph / Beyonce Gisselle Knowles / Brian Chase / Deandre Cortez Way / Doc Pomus / Emile Haynie / Ezra Koenig / Joshua Michael Tillman / Karen Lee Orzolek / Kelvin McConnell / Mort Shuman / Nicholas Joseph Zinner / Sean Ryan Rhoden / Thomas Wesley Pentz / Uzoechi Osisioma Emenike  
Hold Up lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Warner Chappell Music, Inc, Universal Music Publishing Group, Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd., BMG Rights Management

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Poet and activist Warsan Shire grew up in London. She is the author of the collections *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (flipped eye, 2011), *Her Blue Body* (flipped eye, 2015), and *Our Men Do Not Belong to Us* (Slapering Hol Press and Poetry Foundation, 2015). Her poems have appeared in journals and magazines, including *Poetry Review*, *Wasafiri*, and *Sable LitMag*; in the anthologies *Salt Book of Younger Poets* (2011), *Long Journeys: African Migrants on the Road* (2013), and *Poems That Make Grown Women Cry* (2016); as well as in Beyoncé's visual album *Lemonade* (2016). According to Alexis Okeowo in the *New Yorker*, Shire's work "embodies the kind of shape-shifting, culture-juggling spirit lurking in most people who can't trace their ancestors to their country's founding fathers, or whose ancestors look nothing like those fathers. In that limbo, Shire conjures up a new language for belonging and displacement." Shire's poems connect gender, war, sex, and cultural assumptions; in her work, poetry is a healing agent for the trauma of exile and suffering. In an interview, Shire noted, "Character driven poetry is important for me—it's being able to tell the stories of those people, especially refugees and immigrants, that otherwise

wouldn't be told, or they'll be told really inaccurately. And I don't want to write victims, or martyrs, or vacuous stereotypes ... my family are really amazing—they'll tell me, 'I have a new story for you,' and I'll get my Dictaphone and record it, so I can stay as true as possible to the story before I make it into a poem." Shire is poetry editor of *Spook Magazine* and guest edited *Young Sable LitMag*. Shire has read her work in South Africa, Italy, Germany, and the United States. In 2013, she won Brunel University's first African Poetry Prize. In 2014, she was named the first Young Poet Laureate for London and chosen as poet-in-residence for Queensland, Australia. (from the Poetry Foundation)

### Denial

*I tried to change. Closed my mouth more, tried to be softer, prettier, less awake. Fasted for 60 days, wore white, abstained from mirrors, abstained from sex, slowly did not speak another word. In that time, my hair, I grew past my ankles. I slept on a mat on the floor. I swallowed a sword. I levitated. Went to the basement, confessed my sins, and was baptized in a river. I got on my knees and said 'amen' and said 'I mean.'*

*I whipped my own back and asked for dominion at your feet. I threw myself into a volcano. I drank the blood and drank the wine. I sat alone and begged and bent at the waist for God. I crossed myself and thought I saw the devil. I grew thickened skin on my feet, I bathed in bleach, and plugged my menses with pages from the holy book, but still inside me, coiled deep, was the need to know ... Are you cheating on me?*

*Cheating? Are you cheating on me?*

*Warsan Shire*

### Annotations

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# Double Consciousness

## Understanding the Layers of Beyoncé's "Hold Up"

### Oshun- Yoruba Water Goddess

Stuff from Wikipedia (since it's blocked here)

**Oshun** (known as ***Ochún*** or ***Oxúm*** in Latin America) also spelled **Ọṣun**, is an orisha, a spirit, a deity, or a goddess that reflects one of the manifestations of the Yorùbá Supreme Being in the Ifá oral literature and Yoruba-based religions. She is one of the most popular and venerated orishas. Oshun is an important river deity among the Yorùbá people, divine feminine, fertility, beauty and love.<sup>[1][2]</sup> She is connected to destiny and divination.<sup>[3]</sup>

During the life of the mortal Oshun, she served as queen consort to King Shango of Oyo. Following her posthumous deification, she was admitted to the Yoruba pantheon as an aspect of a primordial divinity of the same name.

She is the patron saint of the Osun River in Nigeria, which bears her name. The river has its source in Ekiti State, in the west of Nigeria, and passes through the city of Oshogbo, where Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, the principal sanctuary of the deity, is located.<sup>[1]</sup> Oshun is honored at the Osun-Osogbo Festival, a two-week-long annual festival that usually takes place in August, at the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove on the banks of the river.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

Oshun is syncretized with Our Lady of Charity, patron saint of Cuba, and Our Lady of Aparecida, the patron saint of Brazil. In Trinidad she is associated with St. Philomena and the Hindu deity Ganga Mai or Mother Ganges.<sup>[6][7][8]</sup>

#### Primordial Oshun

According to the Ifa Literary Corpus, Ọṣun was the only female Irunmole (primordial spirit) sent to assist Shango to create the world by Olodumare. The other spirits that were sent began the work and ignored Ọṣun. Ọṣun went to her partner Shango for guidance. Although the female spirits were tempted to take matters into their own hands, they knew nothing can be done without masculine leadership. Anything they attempt to do without the male spiritual leadership would fail. Shango forced the other spirits hand to respect Oshun as they would him. Once Oshun saw the power that Shango possessed, she honored him and dedicated to serve as his wife. Through her loyalty, the Gods granted her the powers of a Goddess.<sup>[9]</sup>

#### Mortal Oshun

While still a mortal, Oshun is said to have gone to a drum festival one day and to have fallen in love with Shango. Since that day, Shango has been married to Oba, Oya, and Oshun, though Oshun is said to be his favourite.<sup>[10]</sup> Other stanzas in the Ifa Literary Corpus say that she was also married to Orunmila, who later became the Orisha of Wisdom and Divination.

It is also said that Oshun was the first woman to be referred to as an lyalode.

#### Ceremonies and Ritual Colors

Oshun is the orisha of the river. Her devotees leave her offerings and perform ceremonies at bodies of fresh water such as rivers, streams and canals.

She is associated with the colours gold/deep yellow in most of the diaspora and in Nigeria, white, yellow and green. In Trinidad, she is associated with the colour pink.<sup>[11]</sup>

#### Abèbè

The abèbè is the ritual object most associated with Ọṣun. The abèbè is a fan in circular form. In Afro-Brazilian religion, it is made of brass or gold, sometimes with a mirror in the center. The abèbè (or abebé in Portuguese) is used in the rituals of Candomblé, Xangô do Nordeste, Xambá, Batuque, and Omolokô.<sup>[5]</sup>

#### Brazil

Oxum (Ọṣun in Portuguese) is a female orixá adopted and worshiped in all Afro-Brazilian religions. She is the orixá of the fresh water of rivers and waterfalls; of wealth and prosperity; of love; and of beauty. Followers seek help for romantic problems from Oxum; the



orixá is also responsible for marriage and other relationships. As the orixá of financial life, she is also called the "Lady of Gold". This referred to copper at one time for being the most valuable metal of the time. Oxum is worshiped at rivers and waterfalls, and more rarely, near mineral water sources. She is a symbol of sensitivity and is identified by weeping.<sup>[5]</sup>

The qualities or manifestations of Oxum include:

- Iabá-Omi
- Oxum-Abaé
- Oxum-Abalô
- Oxum-Abotô
- Oxum-Akidã
- Oxum-Apará, who is syncretized by Saint Lucy (Santa Luiza)
- Oxum-Ioni
- Oxum-Lobá
- Oxum-Ninsim
- Oxum-Pandá (Iyepòndàá or Ipondá), the mother of Logunedé, a boy orixá. Both dance to the sound of the *ijexá* rhythm, which takes its name from its region of origin.
- Oxum-Timi
- Oxum-Kare, who wears red and yellow, the color of gold. Oxum-Karé is an older, authoritarian manifestation of Oxum who is warlike and aggressive. Oxum-Kare lives with Oxóssi (Ọ̀ṣọ̀ṣi); offerings to Oxum-Kare must also include an offering to Oxóssi.<sup>[5]</sup>

Candomblé

In Candomblé Bantu Oxum is called Nkisi Ndandalunda, the Lady of Fertility and Moon. Hongolo and Kisimbi have similarities with Oxum, and the three are often confused.

In Candomblé Ketu Oxum is the deity of fresh water; the patron of gestation and fecundity; and receives the prayers of women who wish to have children and protect them during pregnancy. Oxum also protects small children until they begin to speak; she is affectionately called "Mamãe" ("Mama") by her devotees.<sup>[5]</sup>

Plants associated with Oxum in Brazil are aromatic, sweet, and often yellow, reflecting the qualities of the Orixá. They include mints (*Lamiaceae*). Oxum is associated with the folha-de-dez-réis (Hydrocotyle cybelleta), a plant of the pennywort family. Many species are brilliant yellow, reflecting Oxum's association with gold and wealth. She is also associated with folha-da-fortuna, or *Kalanchoe pinnata*.<sup>[12]</sup>

Santería

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**Osun (Ozun)** is another major Orichá distinct from Oshun in the Santería religion of the Caribbean (Cuba and Trinidad) brought over by West African slaves during the transatlantic slave trade. Traditionally, Osun is an agent of the other Orichás, protecting the orí (head) of Santería practitioners. He is syncretized with Saint John the Baptist.<sup>[13]</sup>

Violín for Ochun

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A violín is a type of musical ceremony in Regla de Ocha performed for Ochún. It includes both European classical music and Cuban popular music.<sup>[14]</sup>