

SAMPLING NINA SIMONE'S MUSIC IN MODERN HIP-HOP

by

Charles Walker

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Departmental Honors in
the Department of Music
Texas Christian University
Fort Worth, Texas

6 May 2019

SAMPLING NINA SIMONE'S MUSIC IN MODERN HIP-HOP

Project Approved:

Supervising Professor: William Gibbons, Ph.D.

School of Music

Gina Bombola, Ph.D.

School of Music

Frederick Gooding, Ph.D.

John V. Roach Honors College

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes two popular rap tracks from the 2010s that both sample jazz musician and social activist Nina Simone's music but with opposite purposes. The lyrics of the two rap tracks and the methods with which the Simone songs were sampled exemplify a dichotomy in the ways that hip-hop musicians can choose to handle samples of civil-rights music: build on the meaning of the sampled lyrics or ignore history and intentionally misread the lyrics. Jay-Z's "The Story of O.J." contains samples of Simone's "Four Women" that are used to add depth and history to his own track. Lyrically, Jay-Z addresses two themes present in "Four Women": double consciousness and a call to the black community to embrace their heritage. In partnership with producer No I.D., Jay-Z ties the two songs together musically by sampling all of the individual sounds from "Four Women" as well as cutting and splicing vocal samples to highlight the original racial themes. While this particular practice of sampling a civil rights artist is new for Jay-Z, it is a technique that has been used before by a variety of other artists.

Kanye West's "Blood on the Leaves" contains samples of Simone's cover of "Strange Fruit" that Kanye uses to create controversy. Lyrically, "Blood on the Leaves" ignores the racism discussed in "Strange Fruit" and instead portrays women as gold-diggers, going against the tenets of Simone's feminist activism. Similarly to "The Story of O.J.," "Blood on the Leaves" samples all of the individual sounds from "Strange Fruit" and keeps most words and phrases intact, but places Simone's words next to Kanye's in a way that changes their meaning. Kanye is aware of Simone's history and legacy, but chooses to be inflammatory for this track. "Blood on the Leaves" is a particularly obvious example of ignoring the context of civil rights songs through sample, and likely sampled Simone for the same reasons of legacy and history that Jay-Z did. However, he uses her legacy to provoke his audience rather than engage them.

INTRODUCTION

Few musicians have as iconic a sound and as far reaching an impact as Eunice Waymon, better known as Nina Simone.¹ The North Carolina pianist and singer released 33 albums over her nearly six-decade career and is famous for her unique variety of musical influences, including classical piano, gospel, blues, and traditional African American folk songs. Simone, too, has a distinctly husky voice that is almost impossible to mistake. Her music is often labeled as jazz, but her diverse influences lend to a sound that defies categorization. Nina Simone was not just unique, but also incredibly talented. Even jazz trumpeter Miles Davis noted that he was amazed at Simone's ability to improvise complex counterpoint during a blues solo and play two different songs at once.² To even further add to her sound, Simone has a distinctly husky voice that is almost impossible to mistake.

Both in her music and in her personal life, Nina Simone was a political activist. Although she originally did not like writing or covering political songs because she said that "it stripped the dignity away from the people it is trying to celebrate,"³ Simone soon changed her mind and inextricably linked her music to social issues. Her live album, *Nina Simone In Concert* (1964), contained her first four recordings of political songs, including one of the most famous original songs in her career, "Mississippi Goddam." She would later write and record more racially conscious tracks such as "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" (1970), "Why? (The King of Love is Dead)" (1968) — and the two foci of this paper, "Four Women" (1966) and a cover of

¹ The name Nina Simone arose when Waymon began playing in nightclubs to make extra money but did not want her parents to find out. She created a stage name for herself, "Nina" coming from the Spanish word for "little girl," "niña," and "Simone" from the French actress, Simone Signoret. From here on, she will be referred to as Nina Simone.

² *What Happened Miss Simone*, dir. Liz Garbus (United States: Netflix, 2015), streamed on Netflix.

³ Richard Elliott, *Nina Simone* (Bristol, CT: Equinox Publ., 2013), 55.

“Strange Fruit” (1965), a song first popularized by Billie Holliday in 1939. In addition to her musical activism, Simone also led a politically engaged life. She was present at the marches in Selma, Alabama and was a known supporter of Malcolm X’s black nationalist ideology.

Simone’s music also frequently touched on black feminism. Songs such as “Four Women” and “Images” (1966) express black women’s struggles against white society’s standards of beauty, and Simone “identified ‘sisterhood’ as a critical catalyst to her politicalization around race.”⁴

Simone’s musical and political legacies are apparent in the twenty-first century, but can be felt particularly in the frequency with which her music is sampled in rap. Traditional sampling from its inception in the 1970s through the turn-of-the-century was funk-based and focused more on aesthetics. In his book on sampling, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, Joseph Schloss asserts that sampling in this era was almost entirely for aesthetic purposes and rarely if ever for any historical or deeper meaning that the sample might contain.⁵ He also states that hiding the identity of a sample was a central tenant in the ethics of beat-making. In the afterword from 2014, Schloss clarifies that the approaches to sampling changed after he wrote his book. Rap music through the 2000s and 2010s often makes sample sources obvious and relies on the audience’s ability to identify the history and themes that come with those samples. Sometimes a rap song contains a direct addition to a topic in the lyrics sample, and other times a song is more reliant on general “black” sounds from a sample that the artist establishes a cultural connection with. Modern sampling is still used for aesthetics, though, as the sound of a rap song remains central to its identity.

This shift in sampling to focus more on the sample itself lends to many rap artists

⁴ Ruth Feldstien, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 106.

⁵ Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2014).

sampling music that is easy to identify and that carries historical and cultural significance like Simone's. Studies of rap songs that sample Simone's music already exist, such as Modell's graduate thesis and Tillet's essay in *American Quarterly*, but musicians are constantly releasing new music that necessitates continued discussion.⁶ This study focused on two songs of the 2010s: "The Story of O.J." by Jay-Z (2017) and "Blood on the Leaves" by Kanye West (2013).⁷ At the time this thesis was written (2019), these songs were already two and six years old respectively, but their relative recency allows for a better application to the current climate of rap music than tracks released from the early and mid-2000s. These two songs also set up a perfect dichotomy of how artists can choose to handle the history of a sample: 1) they apply the themes of the sample to modern-day issues, or 2) ignore and or purposefully contradict the topic of the original song. Looking at the differences between these two tracks that both sample Simone allows for a close comparison and a deeper analysis encompassing the intersection of race and gender.

AWARENESS OF HISTORY IN CONSCIOUS RAP: "THE STORY OF O.J."

Beyoncé Knowles-Carter is perhaps one of the most influential and famous musicians of the twenty-first century. After rising to fame in the 1990s as the front-woman of Destiny's Child, she has since become even more famous as a solo artist. On April 23, 2016, she officially released the entirety of her most recent album, *Lemonade*. More than just an album drop, *Lemonade* was a massive, hour-long multimedia collaboration between a multitude of people

⁶ Amanda Renae Modell, "'You Understand Me Now': Sampling Nina Simone in Hip Hop" (M.A. thesis, University of South Florida, 2012), <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=5364&context=etd.>; Salamishah Tillet, "Strange Sampling: Nina Simone and Her Hip-Hop Children," *American Quarterly* 66, no. 1, 2014. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/540902>.

⁷ Jay-Z, "The Story of O.J.," recorded 2017, track 2 on *4:44*, BMG Monarch, digitally streamed on Tidal.; Kanye West, "Blood on the Leaves," recorded 2013, track 7 on *Yeezus*, Def Jam, digitally streamed on Tidal.

across different sectors of the entertainment industry, complete with poetry narrations, twelve original songs, and stunning cinematography. Moreover, this “visual album” aired on HBO following the release of a new episode of the popular program *Game of Thrones* instead of directly dropping on a streaming platform. After the film ended, *Lemonade* became available for streaming in both audio and visual forms on Tidal, the music streaming service run by Beyoncé’s husband, Jay-Z.

Lemonade immediately stunned viewers and listeners. It seemed to focus heavily on disrespect toward women with extra emphasis on cheating, containing both visual and lyrical allusions to women’s empowerment and dealing with a partner’s infidelity.⁸ But did this mean that Jay-Z had cheated on Beyoncé? There definitely had been some speculation about it prior to the album’s release. Solange, Beyoncé’s sister, publicly attacked Jay-Z at a Met Gala afterparty in 2014, and rumors about an affair had been widely circulated before that.⁹ The release of *Lemonade* more or less confirmed those rumors. Beyoncé’s lyrics alone were enough to convey what had happened, but the visuals of her walking around a busy street smashing the windows of cars and dancing in an enflamed parking garage with interspersed narrations of Warsan Shire’s poetry over intense electronic scoring hammered home the extent of the issue.

Lemonade is divided into eleven parts, marked in the visual album with title cards that are not the titles of the following songs.¹⁰ A particular moment of interest for this project shortly follows the eighth title card, “Forgiveness.” The first two-thirds of the album are emotionally

⁸ Jillian Mapes, “Beyoncé: Lemonade,” *Pitchfork*, April 26, 2016. <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21867-lemonade/>.

⁹ Rebecca Hawkes, “Beyoncé’s New Album: Why Is It Called Lemonade, What Do the Lyrics Mean, Plus All You Need to Know,” *The Telegraph*, April 24, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/news/beyoncs-new-album-why-is-it-called-lemonade-plus-everything-else/>.

¹⁰ These more or less resemble the Kübler-Ross “Five Stages of Grief” model. Instead of “denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance,” Beyoncé used eleven title cards, “Intuition, Denial, Anger, Apathy, Emptiness, Accountability, Reformation, Forgiveness, Resurrection, Hope, and Redemption.” A lot can be read into about the

turbulent and aggressive at times, but this moment marks a transition in the mood of the album to a more tranquil feel. Shortly following the appearance of the “Forgiveness” title card and black-and-white footage of Beyoncé on a cypress tree-studded lakefront, there is a transition to a warm, but dimly lit house. A fireplace crackles and the camera follows a pair of bare feet as Beyoncé recites Shire’s poetry about the exertion of childbirth. The feet are followed into the house as a sample of Simone’s “The Look of Love” plays in the background.

The sample only appears in the visual album; it is not actually a part of the following song, “SANDCASTLES.” However, because this album is meant to be viewed as much as it is meant to be listened to, the sample is significant. Perhaps Beyoncé is emulating yet another black woman in an album full of such tributes.¹¹ She also could be setting the tone for the next song, a piano ballad of her own, with a sample of a softer, piano-driven sound. It would be remiss, though, to ignore the other theme of the album: overcoming relationship strain. Based on the position of this sample within the album—immediately following the “Forgiveness” title card and before a song that seems to be about the beginnings of healing—this sample could also be read as an allusion to Jay-Z and his music. Nina Simone samples can be heard several times in Jay-Z’s discography. Even a general search for all Nina Simone samples on *whosampled.com* brings up a few Jay-Z songs as top hits.¹² It is pretty clear that there is something about either Simone’s music or the artist herself that he is drawn to. Beyoncé, then, could be using this sample here as a mark of making peace with the past and symbolizing that she does not want to

development of the film and the choice in title cards since they are not the titles of the songs, but that is outside the scope of this project.

¹¹ Victoria M. Massie, “6 Black Women Beyoncé Channels in Lemonade—from Warsan Shire to Zora Neale Hurston,” *Vox*, August 29, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/4/26/11501466/beyonce-lemonade-warsan-shire>.

¹² “Tracks That Sampled Nina Simone,” *WhoSampled*, accessed October 1, 2018, <https://www.whosampled.com/Nina-Simone/sampled/>.

end things with her husband. At the very least, it seems that his association with Simone is close enough that knowledgeable listeners would understand the allusion.

In 2017, Jay-Z released his first album after a four-year hiatus, *4:44*.¹³ This was also his first album since *Lemonade* was released, so there is some debate on whether this album should be seen as a response to *Lemonade*. There certainly are several references to his infidelity and feelings of regret about his actions throughout, but the album is very emotionally open and personal on a number of issues, leading many critics and listeners to hesitate limiting the scope of the album to one topic.¹⁴ Even so, there are several notable allusions to his wife's album. Although *4:44* is not a cohesive "visual album" in the way that *Lemonade* is, music videos were released for every song except one. Jay-Z also seems to be subtly apologizing to Beyoncé through songs like "Smile" that recognize the hardships that black women in America face in particular—a common theme in *Lemonade*. Perhaps as an extension of that same idea, *4:44* has two songs that obviously sample Nina Simone, "The Story of O.J." and "Caught Their Eyes," as well as a music video for the song "4:44" that opens with a clip of a young boy singing Simone's "Feeling Good" (1965). Whether these are broad allusions to Beyoncé and her activity as a black feminist or some other sort of connection leaves room for discussion, but the use of these samples seems intentional and purposeful.

4:44 begins with a self-aware opener, "Kill Jay-Z," in which Jay-Z acknowledges some of his disagreeable past actions, such as cheating on Beyoncé and stabbing Lance Rivera ("Un"), as well as his desire to change his life course or "kill" his old self. The severity of this first track and the abrasive directness of the titular opening line sets the tone for an entire album that tackles tougher issues. The second track, "The Story of O.J.,"—in which Jay-Z samples

¹³ Pronounced "four, four, four."

¹⁴ Sheldon Pearce, "Album Review: *4:44*," *Pitchfork*, July 5, 2017, <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/jay-z-444/>.

Simone—continues this theme but focuses more on the broad societal issue of racism rather than introspective criticism.

“The Story of O.J.” samples Simone’s original song, “Four Women.” The first recorded version of “Four Women” appeared on Simone’s 1965 album, *Wild is the Wind*.¹⁵ The song tells short stories about four different women from the first person, and each woman gets her own verse. The verses follow a standard narrative pattern of describing a few of the women’s physical features, giving a little bit of background information about them, and ending with the line “my name is _____.” The four women are all black, but have different skin tones, hair, and body shapes. They also have faced unique hardships. Simone has said that she intended the track to be a reflection of how many black women see themselves and their awareness of how others see them.¹⁶

Richard Elliott’s biography of Nina Simone provides an in-depth analysis of “Four Women” and asserts that the lyrics are about “double consciousness.”¹⁷ Double consciousness is a phenomenon faced by many black Americans in which they see themselves both through their own perception of a black identity and through the more critical external view of how they believe white people see them.¹⁸ “Four Women” addresses double consciousness through each character describing their physical appearances, but ending their short descriptions of themselves with “what do *they* call me,” indicating that there is an overwhelming sense of outside judgment.

Jay-Z’s own explanation of “The Story of O.J.” seems to also be describing double

¹⁵ Elliott, *Nina Simone*, 56.; “Four Women” was clearly written and performed before its release because the album cover features the title of the song more prominently than the title of the album itself as a way to advertise a song that listeners were likely already familiar with.

¹⁶ Elliott, *Nina Simone*, 57.

¹⁷ Elliott, *Nina Simone*, 58.

¹⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Strivings of the Negro People,” *The Atlantic*, August 1897, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1897/08/strivings-of-the-negro-people/305446/>.

consciousness, but from the perspective of a successful, black rap mogul. In an interview with Dean Baquet, executive editor for *The New York Times*, Jay-Z stated that “The Story of O.J.” is “specifically speaking to [black people] about who we are and how to maintain a sense of self while pushing it forward and holding us to have a responsibility for our actions.”¹⁹ He also touches on how the song appeals to the black community to come together to make a difference in America. These themes appear throughout Jay-Z’s lyrics in “The Story of O.J.,” and are underscored by the juxtaposition of his words and the samples of “Four Women.” Jay-Z’s alignment of his lyrics with Simone’s lyrics and beliefs is apparent throughout the track and is intentional. While some of his lyrics are fairly straightforward, others might not be immediately understood by the broader public. An in-depth analysis of Jay-Z’s lyrics reveals more about what he means and how his words relate to “Four Women.”

Jay-Z enters with his first lyrics, the hook, after several bars of a backing track primarily comprised of samples from “Four Women.” The hook is repetitive but effective in establishing the purpose of “The Story of O.J.” and one of the general themes of the song. He says:

Light nigga, dark nigga, faux nigga, real nigga
 Rich nigga, poor nigga, house nigga, field nigga
 Still nigga, still nigga

Jay-Z uses these pairs of contrasting adjectives, each in front of a common noun, to establish that regardless of what else in life a black person is, they are still a part of the black community. This sets up the theme in the song that a black person in the United States cannot and perhaps should not be separated from their identity as black. It also seems to mirror the pattern in “Four Women” of describing each woman’s appearance and background before ending with a common “my name is _____.”

¹⁹ Jay-Z, “Jay-Z and Dean Baquet, in Conversation,” interview by Dean Baquet, *The New York Times*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbuQAbG2AZ0&t=631s>.

After repeating the hook a second time, Jay-Z drops the source for the title of the song and continues the theme of the chorus by repeating an alleged quote from the former NFL player accused of murdering his wife, O.J. Simpson. Jay-Z quotes Simpson and says, “I’m not black, I’m O.J.!” He then responds to O.J.’s assertion by placing an extended and intentionally awkward pause of a few beats before dismissively saying “okay.” No record exists of Simpson actually saying those words, but the quote is somewhat widely attributed to him.²⁰ It seems to imply that Simpson believed he had somehow escaped his blackness and was able to ignore the “black” part of his double consciousness. Real quote or not, it directly opposes the ideas about black identity and double consciousness established by Jay-Z in the hook and in “Four Women.” The inclusion of Simpson’s words sets up a foil that Jay-Z can then refute for the duration of the song.

The beginning of the first verse starts by alluding back to the hook, focusing primarily on the “house” and “field” lines. He expands on that contrast to create a distinction between black people who express similar sentiments to the O.J. quote and black people who still identify closely with the black community. Jay-Z compares those groups to slaves who worked in houses and slaves who worked in fields. Interestingly, Jay-Z aligns himself with the “field” group even though he has become a very successful celebrity.

House nigga, don’t fuck with me
 I’m a field nigga, go shine cutlery
 Go play the corners where the butlers be
 Imma play the corners where the hustlers be

²⁰ Kayla Hawkins, “Did O.J. Simpson Say ‘I’m Not Black, I’m O.J.’? ‘American Crime Story’ Shows His Complicated Relationship With Race,” *Bustle*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.bustle.com/articles/142063-did-oj-simpson-say-im-not-black-im-oj-american-crime-story-shows-his-complicated-relationship>.

The division between “house” and “field” is a reference to Malcolm X’s 1963 “A Message to the Grassroots” speech in which Malcolm X outlined the differences between the two groups.²¹ He began by comedically describing the “house negro” as a black slave who loved his master more than himself and the “field negro” who hated his master. Malcom X then explained that the “house” and “field” distinction never went away and that black people still try to either get as close to white people as they can or remain true to the black community. While not directly quoting Simone at all, Jay-Z indirectly connects his song to her through echoing a black nationalist sentiment. Simone herself was a very outspoken black nationalist, and Jay-Z’s focus on this reference sets up an ideological consistency between the lyrics and the history behind the sample.²²

In the second half of the first verse, Jay-Z transitions to the second theme of the song, calling on the black community to together to make a change. While not directly discussed in “Four Women,” Simone does express a similar idea of unity by giving each woman’s story a similar structure and making clear that they have all seen hardships because of their race, even if they are fairly different. Jay-Z’s approach to unity in the black community is more direct and focuses on how wealth should be handled. He assumes the role of an advisor and instructs an unknown person on how to handle his wealth gained from illicit activities:

I told him, “please don’t die over the neighborhood
That your mama rentin’
Take your drug money and buy the neighborhood
That’s how you rinse it”

Who “him” refers to is not clear, but specificity is likely not important to the message here. Jay-Z is speaking from a position of experience and using what he told this one person as a message

²¹ “Malcolm X - Message to the Grassroots,” *YouTube*, December 06, 2012, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ku2JzolPt50>.

²² *What Happened Miss Simone*.

addressed to an entire community. He warns against getting too involved in street life and instead suggests that the better investment is taking advantage of any wealth gained from illicit activities and giving it back into a struggling community.

For the rest of the first verse and all of the way through the end of the second and final verse, Jay-Z fixates on how black people should be fiscally responsible so that they are capable of giving that money back to their neighborhoods and families, continuing the focus on unity within the black community. The remainder of the first verse describes Jay-Z's feelings of regret for spending his money recklessly on luxury items like cars rather than investing in an up-and-coming area, DUMBO (Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass), near where he grew up in Brooklyn, NY.²³ This would have been the better cultural investment since it is near his childhood home and coincidentally would have multiplied in monetary value.²⁴

I bought every V-12 engine
Wish I could take it back to the beginnin'
I coulda bought a place in DUMBO back before it was DUMBO
For like 2 million
That same building today is worth 25 million
Guess how I'm feelin'. Dumbo

A repetition of the hook, which keeps the theme of black identity and double consciousness in play, precedes the second interlude and verse in which Jay-Z returns his focus to financial responsibility. The second interlude slights reckless spending again, this time focusing on strip clubs, and insularly stereotypes Jews as a model for frugality.²⁵

²³ Of note, Jay-Z's vocal quality changes for the last four lines from a smooth, almost sung style of rapping to a more spoken style, perhaps signaling an emphasized seriousness or to draw particular attention to the words.

²⁴ Courtney Connley, "3 Money Lessons from Jay-Z's '4:44,'" *CNBC*, June 30, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/30/3-money-lessons-from-jay-zs-444.html>.

²⁵ Jay-Z, "Jay-Z and Dean Baquet, in Conversation," interview by Dean Baquet, *The New York Times*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbuQAbG2AZ0&t=631s>.; Sam Kestenbaum, "Is Jay-Z 'Going Anti-Semitic' On New Record?" *The Forward*, June 30, 2017, <https://forward.com/fast-forward/376036/is-jay-z-going-anti-semitic-on-new-record/>.; Unsurprisingly, Jay-Z has taken some criticism for these lines, many denouncing them as anti-Semitic. Jay-Z has stated that he thinks that those claims are "hypocritical" because the generalizations he

You wanna know what's more important than throwing away all of your money at a strip club?
 Credit
 You ever wonder why Jewish people own all the property in America?
 This how they did it

Jay-Z then enters the second verse, the last section of new material. The first half of the second verse describes an investment in artwork that Jay-Z sees as a smart move because it has now multiplied in value, and he can better provide for his family.

Financial freedom my only hope
 Fuck living rich and dying broke
 I bought some artwork for one million
 Two years later that shit worth two million
 Few years later that shit worth eight million
 I can't wait to give this shit to my children

The back half of the second verse is more of a message to other rappers and entrepreneurs as Jay-Z switches back and forth from personal accounts of success to challenges against becoming indebted to record labels and flaunting wealth on social media.

Y'all think it's bougie, I'm like, it's fine
 But I'm tryin' to give you a million dollars worth of game for \$9.99
 I turned that two to a four, four to an eight
 I turned my life into a nice first week release date
 Y'all out here still takin' advances, huh?
 Me and my niggas takin' real chances, uh
 Y'all on the 'Gram holdin' money to your ear
 There's a disconnect, we don't call that money over here

Jay-Z is explicitly stating that black people will always be a part of the black community regardless of whatever public status they may rise to, and so they have a duty to be financially responsible to help lift their families and communities out of poverty. Shortly following the release of *4:44*, Jay-Z released a video exclusively for Tidal users, titled "Footnotes for 'The

makes about Jewish people are alongside stereotypes that he makes about his own race, citing the watermelon-eating caricature in the music video. Regardless, his choice in stereotyping here comes across as insensitive and negligent.

Story of O.J.’,” to accompany and further explain the meaning behind his lyrics.²⁶ “Footnotes for ‘The Story of O.J.’” features a number of black celebrities (Will Smith, Chris Rock, Michael B. Jordan, Trevor Noah, Kendrick Lamar, and others) giving accounts of their experiences with racism and what it is like to balance being black and being accepted in the “white world” of celebrity status. Each interviewee approaches the issue from a slightly different angle, but they all express the sentiment that it was a hard fight to get where they are and are aware that their status could be stripped from them if white people deem them as “too black.” This reflects Simone’s aforementioned description of “Four Women” in which she claims that her song is about how the women view themselves and their awareness of outside opinion.²⁷

The lyrics in rap music are almost always the focus, and Jay-Z obviously put a lot of effort into making lyrical ties between “Four Women” and “The Story of O.J.” However, the backing music itself can be similarly important, and the beat for “The Story of O.J.” was specifically designed to allow for Jay-Z to make those lyrical ties. For the majority of rap, the person whose voice is heard is not the same person that is creating the beats. The rapper often has creative input and may even do a little beat-making themselves, but a producer will typically do most of the work. The producer is also responsible for communicating with the rapper their vision and making it come to fruition while also trying to help the rapper unlock their creative potential. Despite little attention and name recognition from the general public, producers are responsible for a majority of an album’s sound and vital to an album’s success.

For the entirety of *4:44*, Jay-Z worked with the producer, No I.D. No I.D. first worked with Jay-Z in the mixing process of Jay-Z’s second studio album, *Volume 1*. His first credit as a producer with Jay-Z was for “All Around the World” on *The Blueprint 2* from 2002. Since then,

²⁶ “Footnotes” videos were also made for “Kill Jay-Z,” “MaNyfaCedGod,” and “4:44” (the song).

²⁷Elliott, *Nina Simone*, 57.

there have been several more collaborations between the two including for *The Blueprint 3*, which went on to win a Grammy.²⁸ Although the two had never before collaborated as extensively as they did on *4:44*, Jay-Z and No I.D.'s partnership on the album makes sense when considering their long history together. They also have both been in the business since the 1990s and likely have similar creative influences and histories. The one unusual aspect of this collaboration, though, is that No I.D. is more or less the only producer that Jay-Z worked with on *4:44*. Other producers provided some input, but No I.D. is the only one credited on the album, indicating that the others were minimally involved. Having just one producer work on a major release is a pretty rare practice in rap altogether, and *4:44* is the only single-producer album in Jay-Z's career to date.

This partnership is important for "The Story of O.J." because the source of the sample is so obvious and prominently heard. Sampling historically has been the foundation of rap and hip-hop, but has slowly been falling out of popularity since the 2000s, partially due to an increased cost from copyright laws and a change in aesthetic preferences. Nonetheless, the technique is still practiced. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*'s Elias Leight, No I.D. discussed some of the decisions behind *4:44* and what the one-producer creative process was like.²⁹ He discussed his "Five-hundred Idea" strategy where he forced himself to create five-hundred unique, sample-based beats over several years before he allowed himself to return to working on albums. While perhaps a bit extreme, he claimed that the extensive practice helped him get more comfortable with his personal style and allowed him to be more creative with samples. No I.D. also talked

²⁸ Andy James, "A Complete History of JAY-Z & No I.D.'s Collaborations," *DJBooth*, June 19, 2017, <https://djbooth.net/features/2017-06-19-jay-z-and-no-id-collaboration-history>.; No I.D. also works extensively with Kanye West and even served as his mentor during his teenage years, but notably dropped out of Kanye and Jay-Z's 2011 project, *Watch the Throne*, due to creative differences.

²⁹ Elias Leight, "'4:44' Producer No I.D. Talks Pushing Jay-Z, Creating '500 Ideas,'" *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/444-producer-no-i-d-talks-pushing-jay-z-creating-500-ideas-253045/>.

about how his concept of a producer's function has evolved to focus more on helping rappers better express themselves. During the writing and recording process of *4:44*, he concentrated on getting to know Jay-Z personally. No I.D. even coerced Jay-Z to create a playlist of his favorite music so he could create samples that Jay-Z would be familiar with. No I.D. stated that his reason for creating beats based on samples of Simone's music on *4:44* was largely due to Jay-Z including her music in that playlist. "That's the score to his life. That's the core reason for using them. There's a million things to sample that could sound good."³⁰

No I.D. has not said much about how exactly he constructed the beat for "The Story of O.J." from "Four Women." However, he has talked about a technique in an interview on Hot 97's "Ebro in the Morning" show in which he intentionally chops up the words in the sample to create new words or phrases.³¹ Despite how drastic his description makes this technique seem, the changes to the original words are usually pretty subtle. In "Caught Their Eyes," for example, No I.D. slightly distorts Simone saying "and they hide their eyes" from her cover of "Baltimore" to where it sounds like she is saying the title of the song.

"The Story of O.J." also exhibits this technique of chopping up the original words to create something new. Whereas Simone's original lyrics are "My skin is black" in the first verse and "my skin is yellow" in the second, No I.D. has chopped up and spliced the words to say "Skin black, my skin is black, my... black. Skin is yellow," juxtaposing her words from the first verse with the beginning of the second. This does not change which words were said, but instead emphasizes skin color by repeating some words and skipping much of the rest of Simone's

³⁰ Leight, "'4:44' Producer No I.D. Talks."

³¹ Ernest Dion "No I.D." Wilson, "No ID On The Makings of Jay-Z's 4:44 + Tells Stories About Kanye's Beginnings," interview by Peter Elliot Rosenberg, Ibrahim "Ebro" Darden, and Laura Stylez, *Hot 97*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcDWPdMMx0g&t=626s>.

lyrics. No I.D. then draws from various verses of the original and splices together the lyrics “my name is Aunt Sarah,” “call me,” and “anyone who comes to buy.”³² Using her words in this way, No I.D. has allowed for Simone’s voice to remain recognizable to listeners and present throughout the track, but has changed it enough to fit the aesthetic of the rest of the beat and place focus on certain words.

The sample of Simone’s voice is layered over two different instrumental tracks, both also taken from “Four Women.”³³ The foundational layer consists of the piano and bass lines. They serve the same function in “The Story of O.J.” as they do in “Four Women” by providing a consistent foundation for voices and other instruments. The piano and bass lines even change chords after eight bars in “The Story of O.J.,” much like the original. The second instrumental layer is mostly composed of embellishments and adds a lighter quality to the darker sounds of the piano and bass. A short piano run from the instrumental section after the second verse enters first, followed by the guitar from the second verse and the flute from the third verse.³⁴ The retention of almost all of the instrumental elements from “Four Women” further indicates the source of the samples by condensing the song’s most memorable sounds. The piano sample in particular is a signature of Simone’s sound, and its inclusion in the beat for “The Story of O.J.” makes the source unmistakable.

Because the source is made so obvious through the sampling techniques used for both

³² This sequence of vocals lasts 20 bars and is always followed by a 12-bar period where No I.D. switches from focusing on words to focusing on the sound of the voice by only allowing the voice to make small, unintelligible interjections. After the first repetition of these 32 bars of vocals, they repeat on loop for the remainder of the track with some variations upon each repetition.

³³ A drum machine that provides the beat for the song is also present, but it is not a product of sampling.

³⁴ The whole sequence is sixteen measures long opposed to the thirty-two measure sequence used for the vocal samples. The instrumental layers are also looped for the entire track, but are not in synchronization with the vocal samples because the vocal sample loop does not start until the sixth measure whereas the instrumental loop opens the song.

the instruments and Simone's voice, listeners can immediately make the connections between the two songs that No I.D. and Jay-Z have created. The beat was actually made before Jay-Z wrote the lyrics, so No I.D. was not likely creating the beat with the exact lyrical connections in mind that Jay-Z makes.³⁵ However, it is possible that he was intentionally retaining so many elements of the original because he knew the significance of the lyrics in "Four Women" and the general direction that Jay-Z wanted to take his own lyrics. As evidence that No I.D. was intentionally making connections between the beat for "The Story of O.J." and the topic of "Four Women," he used topically relevant samples for the beats of other songs on *4:44*. On "Family Feud," a song about creating a familial legacy, No I.D. used samples from the Clark Sisters, a distinctly familial group.³⁶ In addition to making the sample source clear, No I.D.'s technique of chopping up Simone's words also draws attention to matters of race. This is helpful for listeners, but also for Jay-Z. As mentioned earlier, No I.D.'s new concept of producing includes assisting the rapper in unlocking their full lyrical potential and placing emphasis on race in a song that Jay-Z was already familiar with was one way of helping.

The lyrical and musical aspects of "The Story of O.J." both point to a high degree of cultural and social consciousness from Jay-Z and No I.D. This consciousness is interesting, though, considering Jay-Z's early career. He somewhat famously was a drug-dealer in Brooklyn, and much of his music initially reflected "gangsta" culture, which is not known for being particularly progressive. On "Big Pimpin" (1999), for example, he scoffs at the idea of monogamy, yet he apologizes for his infidelity with Beyoncé in several songs on *4:44*. Even the album released just prior to *4:44*, *Magna Carta... Holy Grail* (2013), features lyrics in

³⁵ Wilson, "No ID On The Makings of Jay-Z's 4:44."

³⁶ "Family Feud by Jay-Z on WhoSampled," *WhoSampled*, accessed April 20, 2019, <https://www.whosampled.com/Jay-Z/Family-Feud/>. Coincidentally, the Clark Sisters are a group of four women.

“FuckWithMeYouKnowIGotIt” about buying the very cars he says he regrets buying in “The Story of O.J.” 4:44, then, seems to mark a change in Jay-Z’s career where he has begun to place a higher importance on discussing social issues. This decision has influenced the samples that are used in his music.

One theme that remains consistent in Jay-Z’s music, though, is his consciousness of the inequalities faced by black Americans. In one of his most popular songs from his early career, “99 Problems,” Jay-Z implies that he was pulled over by a police officer mainly because he was black. While the song is problematic in its implications about women and Jay-Z’s admission to actually having drugs in his trunk when being pulled over, the primary focus of the lyrics in the second verse is on racial bias in the policing system. On top of his sarcastic response to the officer’s inquiry as to why he was pulled over, Jay-Z quotes the police officer saying that he was pulled over for “doing fifty-five in a fifty-four.”³⁷ He also quotes the police officer asking if he has a gun because “a lot of you are.”

Where “The Story of O.J.” differs from “99 Problems,” though, is in its treatment of sampling. “99 Problems” is constructed from classic funk drum samples and a guitar riff recorded by a producer for the song, Rick Rubin. The distortion-heavy guitar riff is by far the centerpiece of the track, masking the source of the funk samples and adding an aggressive character to the song. The samples from “Four Women” in “The Story of O.J.,” on the other hand, set a more somber tone than the guitar riff and are emphasized by layering various elements from the song on top of one another. Even in a socially conscious song from Jay-Z’s early career like “99 Problems,” the layer of significance added through sampling a thematically similar song like in “The Story of O.J.” is not present.

³⁷ This margin would rarely be reason to be pulled over and perhaps is an indication that the officer was being dishonest since roads in the United States are almost always marked in increments of fives.

In the context of Jay-Z's career, "The Story of O.J." marks a new style of introspection and somber social consciousness through both his lyrics and choice of sampling that was not as evident in his earlier work. While this practice of using socially conscious samples to underscore a topically similar song is new for Jay-Z, it is not new for the genre of hip-hop. Many other artists have even used Simone's music for that purpose as well. Nas used Simone's "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" in his 2002 song "Black Zombie" in which he expresses his frustration over society's stereotypes about black people. Lil Wayne sampled the same Simone track in 2008 on "DontGetIt." Wayne's track features a lengthy spoken section in which he goes in depth on his irritation with the perceptions that white Americans have about black people. Simone is not the only civil rights artist sampled in conscious rap, either. Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," has been sampled (or in many cases, closer to quoting) in several conscious rap songs including Black Star's "Little Brother" from 2000 and very recently, Andersen .Paak's "6 Summers" from 2018. An older example is Public Enemy's "Can't Truss It" from 1991, which samples a variety of tracks, including vocals by comedian Richard Pryor saying, "It started in slave ships" and a bass line from the funk group, Slaves.³⁸

Through analyzing the lyrics and sampling techniques used in "The Story of O.J." and comparing this song to others in both Jay-Z's discography and the sub-genre of conscious rap, it is apparent that "Four Women" was deliberately sampled in a manner that allowed for the retention of its discussion of double consciousness and devotion to the black community. However, the choice in sampling Nina Simone and "Four Women" instead of any other civil rights musician leaves room for discussion. Of course, No I.D. stated that it was because Jay-Z

³⁸ Erik Nielson, "Did the Decline of Sampling Cause the Decline of Political Hip Hop?" *The Atlantic*, September 19, 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/09/did-the-decline-of-sampling-cause-the-decline-of-political-hip-hop/279791/>.

included it in his playlist, but that does not explain why Jay-Z included it in the playlist in the first place or why that particular beat by No I.D. was selected when many others did not make it onto the album. Those choices reveal a lot about both Jay-Z and Nina Simone.

For Jay-Z, it shows that he is aware of the history surrounding black music and his place in that story. Through listening to civil rights musicians like Simone and being able to apply her theme of double consciousness to a new context, Jay-Z has placed himself in the heritage of black musicians and paid homage to an admired predecessor. It also reveals Jay-Z's place in the context of modern hip-hop. He chose to work with a producer who writes sample-heavy beats at a time when much of hip-hop is moving towards digitally creating beats from scratch. This shows that he desires to hold onto an older style while still being creative and fitting into the current soundscape.³⁹

Perhaps the most important statement to be made about Jay-Z and No I.D.'s compositional choices, though, is that it shows how powerful Nina Simone's legacy is. "Four Women" and "The Story of O.J." were released fifty-two years apart, yet the latter is still able to not only discuss a similar topic but add meaning through incorporating Simone's music and all of the context that comes with it. The lyrics of Jay-Z's song are certainly powerful in their own right, Simone's vocals and music add depth to the track. The fact that Jay-Z and No I.D. are able to do that through sampling "Four Women" indicates that her sound is still widely recognizable, her lyrics are still relevant, and her activism is still remembered.

INTENTIONAL MISREADING AND IGNORING HISTORY: "BLOOD ON THE LEAVES"

³⁹ Nielson, "Decline of Sampling."; USC professor, Todd Boyd suspects that sampling and an awareness of history could be linked. He suggested that sampling necessitates that hip-hop artists to listen to black musicians from funk and jazz records and makes them aware of their position in that narrative.

No I.D. worked on several of Jay-Z's albums prior to *4:44*, but notably did not produce any of the tracks on Jay-Z and Kanye West's collaboration album, *Watch the Throne* (2013). This sets up an interesting relationship between those three men. For one, No I.D. is largely responsible for Kanye's entry into the music business, a relationship that supposedly began when No I.D.'s mother asked if he could help her friend's son with some of his music.⁴⁰ After some time of begrudgingly working with the teenager, No I.D. recognized his talent and briefly took him under his wing.⁴¹ The Jay-Z and Kanye relationship developed shortly thereafter when Kanye began working as a producer for Jay-Z's record label. Kanye was once again taken under an established figure's wing and the two began to see each other as big brother and little brother. Kanye eventually released an album of his own, *The College Dropout* (2004), and became widely known as much for his personality as his unique production and rapping styles.

Although Kanye and Jay-Z had worked together frequently as producer and rapper—even appearing as featured artists on each other's albums—*Watch the Throne* was the first true collaboration between the two as an official duo. The album was highly anticipated due to the high profile of both names and released with great success, reaching the number one spot on Billboard's Top Albums chart. The release also followed Kanye's *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2010, hereafter *MBDTF*), one of the most acclaimed albums in his career to date. *Watch the Throne* shares a lot of stylistic similarities with *MBDTF*, including frequent sampling and a sound music critic Robert Christgau describes as “prog-rap,” probably due to Kanye's heavy involvement in the production side of the collaboration.⁴² Critics were mostly positive

⁴⁰ Wilson, interview.

⁴¹ The mentor/mentee relationship did not last long because of several incidents where Kanye's infamous personality got in the way of important business deals, but the two remained friends and colleagues.

⁴² Robert Christgau, “Brag Like That,” *The Barnes & Noble Review*, September 19, 2011, <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/review/brag-like-that>.

about the album despite noting that there was nothing particularly new or interesting in the lyrics, citing a lot of aggression and braggadocio.⁴³ Several critics also made clear that they observed a distinct difference between the two rappers. Music critic Nathan Rabin states that they “are a study in contrasts: the businessman and the bohemian, the faithful husband and the drugged-up playboy, the walking press release and the loose cannon. Jay-Z is tidy. Kanye is nothing but rough edges.”⁴⁴

Everything about Kanye leading up to the release of *Watch the Throne*, from stories about the creation of the album to some of his lyrics, points to his inflammatory personality and massive ego. No I.D.’s absence from the *Watch the Throne*’s production team could point to how difficult he had become to work with. No I.D. was still friends with Kanye at the time of the recording and said that creative differences were the reason for not participating in producing the album, but it could have been that No I.D. did not want to work with Jay-Z if he knew that meant putting up with Kanye. On the album itself, Kanye frequently drops misogynist and conceited lines such as in “Ni**as In Paris” where he says:

I said look you need to crawl ‘fore you ball
Come and meet me in the bathroom stall
And show me why you deserve to have it all

Jay-Z likewise writes lines that are focused on power and wealth, of course, but the differences between the “walking press release and the loose cannon” noted by Rabin are apparent. Jay-Z seems to focus more on his attained success where Kanye often demeans women and demands worship because of his musical prowess and celebrity status.

⁴³ Matthew Cole, “Review: Jay-Z and Kanye West, Watch the Throne,” *Slant Magazine*, August 11, 2011, <https://www.slantmagazine.com/music/jay-z-and-kanye-west-watch-the-throne/>.

⁴⁴ Nathan Rabin, “Kanye West and Jay-Z: Watch The Throne,” *AV Music*, July 20, 2018, <https://music.avclub.com/kanye-west-and-jay-z-watch-the-throne-1798169205>.

Since *Watch the Throne*'s release, Kanye has quite famously become even more controversial and inflammatory.⁴⁵ Surrounding the 2016 U.S. presidential race, Kanye gave his support to then-candidate Donald Trump, an extremely divisive figure. Kanye later stated in an interview with TMZ that slavery "sounds like a choice," claiming that there was no way people could be enslaved for 400 years if they did not want to be.⁴⁶ Kanye has also publicly made paranoid claims that colleagues like Drake and Jay-Z have people "out to get him," the latter occurring during a panic attack on stage that led to his hospitalization.⁴⁷ These recent remarks seem to be very different from his infamous "George Bush doesn't care about black people," but that statement, too, was meant to be provocative.⁴⁸ The desire to be controversial and aggravating is a common theme all throughout Kanye's career, and is as present in his music as much as it is in his public persona.

It only makes sense, then, that Kanye's 2013 album following *Watch the Throne*, *Yeezus*, contains provocative lyrics and musical gestures. The name of the album alone, which places Kanye on par with Jesus Christ, is enough to cause issues, and the music can best be

⁴⁵ Helena Andrews-Dyer, "A Timeline of Kanye West's Most Political Moments as He Heads to the White House to Meet with Trump," *The Washington Post*, October 09, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/reliable-source/wp/2018/10/09/a-timeline-of-kanye-wests-most-political-moments-as-he-heads-to-the-white-house-to-meet-with-trump/?utm_term=.c9bad7c0f321.

⁴⁶ "Kanye West Stirs Up TMZ Newsroom Over Trump, Slavery, Free Thought," *TMZ*, May 01, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_M4LkYra5k.

⁴⁷ Prudy Gourguechon, "3 Facts About Mental Illness To Wrap Up The Kanye West-Don Lemon Kerfuffle," *Forbes*, October 15, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/prudygourguechon/2018/10/14/3-facts-about-mental-illness-to-wrap-up-the-kanye-west-don-lemon-kerfuffle/#1254ef055a04>.; Jaap van der Doelen, "How Kanye West Took Much More From Nina Simone Than Samples," *DJBooth*, February 12, 2018, <https://djbooth.net/features/2017-08-10-kanye-west-nina-simone-samples>.; It is widely speculated that Kanye was diagnosed with bipolar disorder after this incident. This does not excuse his actions and statements, but it also does not make them invalid. He is still a functional human being. This does, however, help explain some of his rash behavior. Interestingly, Nina Simone herself was also diagnosed with bipolar disorder towards the end of her life. She was famously contentious on stage and often difficult to work with. Some have drawn comparisons to hers and Kanye's temperaments.

⁴⁸ "Bush Doesn't Care About Black People," *YouTube*, April 17, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIUzLpO1kxI>.

described as abrasive and heavily industrial.⁴⁹ The lyrical content is even more controversial. The title of the second track, “Black Skinhead,” seems to suggest a violent, Nazi-esque approach to racial issues; the lyrics certainly touch on race, but the message of the song seems to focus much more on personal bravado with blackness as a secondary topic. “New Slaves,” the fourth track on the album, lyrically matches its title a little better, with several references to structural and institutional racism, but is tinged with more personal fronting and blatant misogyny.⁵⁰ Even the motivation for “New Slaves”—accusations that Kanye did not design his fashion line himself—comes from a cavalier and cushioned perspective. “I’m In It,” the sixth track, uses black empowerment symbols, such as a fist in the air and MLK Jr.’s “free at last” quote, but makes them overtly sexual.⁵¹ All of this muddled take on race comes to a head in “Blood on the Leaves,” in which Nina Simone’s haunting 1965 cover of “Strange Fruit” is very prominently sampled.

Those who have heard “Strange Fruit” usually do not forget it. Both the words and melody were composed by Jewish teacher and poet, Abel Meeropol, who wrote the poem after seeing an image of lynching victims on a postcard.⁵² The words depict the harrowing sight of this violence by describing the lynching victims as fruit hanging from trees. The poem further highlights the atrocity by alternating between innocent depictions of the Southern landscape and grotesque descriptions of the dead bodies. Billie Holiday reworked Meeropol’s melody and began performing it in 1939, later recording it that same year. Where Elliot describes Holliday’s

⁴⁹ Greg Kot, “Kanye West’s ‘Yeezus’ an Uneasy Listen,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 17, 2013, https://web.archive.org/web/20130820101622/http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-06-17/entertainment/chi-kanye-west-yeezus-review-20130616_1_kanye-wests-gospel-record-saul-williams.

⁵⁰ One line talks about having sex with (or possibly raping) the wives of the rich owners of private prisons.

⁵¹ Kanye also makes a racist comment about “sweet and sour sauce” in regard to oral sex with an Asian woman.

⁵² *Strange Fruit*, dir. Joel Katz, prod. Joel Katz (US: California Newsreel, 2002), accessed April 12, 2019, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|video_work|3798024.

performances and recording as ironically distant, Nina Simone's live 1965 recording contains drastic contrasts between dark and light.⁵³ Those contrasts add a dramatic character that is accented by Simone stretching out phrases and adding her own flair, such as the long, falling vocal glissando on the word, "leaves." "Strange Fruit" still remains closely associated with Holiday, but Simone's cover is widely recognized and appreciated by modern listeners. Outside of performances by specific artists, "Strange Fruit" has become a popular symbol for black suffering and oppression.

Since "Blood on the Leaves" samples such a powerful and historical song, it would be natural to assume that its lyrics address a similarly serious topic. Kanye even makes the effort to tie his lyrics to Simone's throughout the song by singing a similar or identical word to one from the "Strange Fruit" sample. However, Kanye makes no thematic connection between "Blood on the Leaves" and "Strange Fruit." Instead, he discusses failed relationships and his belief that most women are gold-diggers. The song begins with a short intro of the "Strange Fruit" sample, and Kanye enters with his voice heavily autotuned shortly thereafter. He sings:

I just need to clear my mind now
 It's been racin' since the summertime
 Now I'm holdin' down the summer now
 And all I want is what I can't buy now
 'Cause I ain't got the money on me right now
 And I told you to wait
 Yeah I told you to wait
 So I'mma need a little more time now
 'Cause I ain't got the money on me right now
 And I thought you could wait
 Yeah, I thought you could wait

The lyrics are somewhat vague throughout the whole song, but the beginning is especially slow to develop and has little meaning on the first listen. Despite the ambiguity, Kanye is clearly upset

⁵³ Elliott, *Nina Simone*, 56.

with whoever he is addressing, apparent through the severity in his voice and the continued emphasis on “I told you to wait.” There is also a focus on the season of summer, perhaps Kanye’s first of several allusions to “Strange Fruit.” The original lyrics in “Strange Fruit” are actually “black bodies swinging in the *southern* breeze,” but Kanye places Simone’s “southern” next to his “summer” so that it sounds like Simone is echoing him. This both draws attention to Simone’s voice and creates a connection between Kanye and the sample.

The next half of the first verse still does not provide much new information or context, but it continues the menacing tone and sets up Kanye’s attitudes about the clingy behavior he believes women around him have:

These bitches surroundin’ me
 All want somethin’ out me
 Then they talk about me
 Would be lost without me
 We could’ve been somebody
 Thought you’d be different ‘bout it
 Now I know you not it
 So let’s get on with it

At the conclusion of the first verse, the tone of the song drastically changes from brooding to completely aggressive. Kanye creates tension by singing higher and louder throughout the first verse; the pressure explodes at the beginning of the second verse with a loud sample of overblown horns and Kanye’s voice at its highest intensity yet. This second verse also reveals a little more about the story:

We could’ve been somebody
 Instead you had to tell somebody
 Let’s take it back to the first party
 When you tried your first molly
 And came out of your body
 And came out of your body
 Running naked down the lobby
 And you was screamin’ that you love me
 Before the limelight tore ya

Before the limelight stole ya
 Remember we were so young
 When I would hold you
 Before the glory
 I know there ain't wrong with me
 Something strange is happening

It becomes even more clear that some incident occurred where a woman's behavior and loyalty changed when she got close to Kanye's wealth and fame. She then told somebody something that Kanye was not ready for. The lyrics also describe what sounds like one of their first encounters with each other, a drug-fueled romp that led to the two of them feeling a connection. He closes the verse by bringing the tone back down to the somberness at the beginning of the first verse and reminiscing about a tender moment before again putting the blame on the woman in the song. Once again, Kanye makes a lyrical allusion to the sample by including the word "strange" in the last line of the second verse at almost the same time as Simone is heard singing "strange fruit." Despite two references to Simone so far, there is still no mention of race whatsoever.

The song ramps up a second time at the beginning of the third verse in a very similar manner to the transition from the first to second verse. The first half is similar to the second verse, but the rest is new material that further portrays the woman as untrustworthy and a liar:

You could've been somebody
 We could've, ugh, we could've been somebody
 Or was it on the first party
 When we tried our first molly
 And came out of our body
 Before they call lawyers
 Before you tried to destroy us
 How you gon' lie to the lawyer?
 It's like I don't even know ya
 I gotta bring it back to the 'nolia

The final line is yet another reference to “Strange Fruit,” specifically “scent of magnolias sweet and fresh,” a lyric that is not actually sampled in “Blood on the Leaves.”⁵⁴ Kanye then interpolates the chorus from “Down For My Niggas” by rapper C-Murder:

Fuck them other niggas ‘cause I’m down with my niggas
 Fuck them other niggas ‘cause I’m down with my niggas
 Fuck them other niggas ‘cause I’m down with my niggas
 I ride with my niggas, I’d die for my...

This is an interesting inclusion because it is the only real focus on a theme of brotherhood and loyalty in the song. Kanye could be throwing his support to other men that have been “wronged” by women. The next verse tells the story of a second man who could be the target of his support. Kanye could also have done the same thing that he did with Simone’s “Strange Fruit,” and tried to remove the song from its original context of brotherhood and loyalty, placing it in the context of his own work. If this is the case, it is unclear what purpose it serves here.

The fourth and final verse switches to a new story, but keeps the same theme of women taking advantage of men’s wealth. It first taunts status-seeking women and then tells the story of a man who impregnated and now owes money to a woman he never loved:

To all my second-string bitches, try and get a baby
 Try and get a baby, now you talkin’ crazy
 I don’t give a damn if you used to talk to Jay-Z
 He ain’t with you, he with Beyoncé, you need to stop actin’ lazy
 She Instagram herself like #BadBitchAlert
 He Instagram his watch like #MadRichAlert
 He only wanna see that ass in reverse
 Two-thousand-dollar bag with no cash in your purse
 Now you sittin’ court side, wifey on the other side
 Gotta keep ‘em separated, I call that apartheid
 Then she said she impregnated,⁵⁵ that’s the night your heart died
 Then you gotta go and tell your girl and report that
 Main reason ‘cause your pastor said you can’t abort that

⁵⁴ How the final line fits into the story of the song is unclear, but a commentator on Genius Lyrics suggests it is a reference to the Magnolia Projects in New Orleans where C-Murder, the rapper that wrote the lines interpolated in the next section, is from.

⁵⁵ “Impregnated” is spelled wrong intentionally; Kanye adds an extra syllable to make the word fit the meter.

Now your driver say that new Benz, you can't afford that
 All that cocaine on the table you can't snort that
 That goin' to that owin' money that the court got
 All in on that alimony, uh, yeah-yeah, she got you homie
 'til death but do your part, uh, unholy matrimony

Throughout this story, Kanye continually depicts women as problems, obligations, and a waste of money. Additionally, Kanye implies that this relationship was an affair, mentioning that the man has to tell his “girl” about the pregnancy. He also makes an insensitive correlation between the man and his side piece sitting on the opposite side of a basketball court from the man’s wife and South Africa’s notoriously segregationist apartheid policy.

The last minute and a half of the song is an outro of Kanye singing autotuned, melismatic passages. He repeats multiple phrases and gives the section an improvisatory feel with a loose structure.

That summer night holdin' long and long, 'din long
 Now waiting for the summer rose and breathe
 And breathe and breathe (x3)
 And live and learn (x2)
 And livin' and livin' like I'm lonely
 Lonely, lonely
 And livin' all I have
 And livin' all
 And live and live

Through the repetition of certain words rather than non-verbal syllables, Kanye places an emphasis on themes of loneliness and moving on with “breathe” and “live and learn.” The tone of this section is very different from the abrasiveness of the previous sections, as it takes on a reflective and somber mood. He also uses a similar technique in the outro as he does in the first verse with “southern” and “summer,” this time placing Simone’s “breeze” next to his “breathe” so that it again sounds like they are echoing each other.

Kanye successfully links his lyrics to Simone’s with many juxtaposed words, but only

brings up the theme of race that is the centerpiece of “Strange Fruit” one time in an insensitive comparison of divorce to South Africa’s apartheid. Instead of mindfully focusing on the same topic as “Strange Fruit,” Kanye never deviates from blaming women for men’s problems and portraying them as gold-diggers. Sampling a song like “Strange Fruit” without paying homage to the lyrics and history of the song is bold enough, but sampling an outspoken feminist like Simone in a song that diminishes women is yet another issue.⁵⁶

The lyrics alone show that Kanye wanted his audience both to notice the song he was sampling and that it had no thematic relation to his own lyrics. The way that Kanye and his production team sampled “Strange Fruit” and other songs on “Blood on the Leaves” furthers this intention.⁵⁷ Interestingly, Kanye and his team used very similar techniques as Jay-Z and No I.D. did on “The Story of O.J.” to make the sampling source obvious.⁵⁸ For one, Simone’s voice is very prominently heard all throughout the track, and her phrases are left whole. The beginning of “Blood on the Leaves” even opens with Simone very clearly singing “strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees,” and the rest of the song also contains the entirety of the lines “black bodies swinging in the southern breeze” and “blood on the leaves.” The only word that has been chopped out of its phrase and beyond recognition is “breeze.” Her voice is pitched up significantly, but like on “The Story of O.J.,” it is not unrecognizable.⁵⁹

Also similar to “The Story of O.J.,” “Blood on the Leaves” contains samples of the

⁵⁶ Ruth Feldstien, *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 99.

⁵⁷ Kanye did not use a single producer like Jay-Z did for *4:44*. Five different producers plus Kanye himself worked on “Blood on the Leaves” alone, not to mention the rest of the album.

⁵⁸ It should be noted that “Blood on the Leaves” was released four years before “The Story of O.J.” If anything, Kanye influenced Jay-Z and No I.D.’s production instead of visa versa, but it is more likely that these were pre-existing ideas and techniques since sampling is by no means a new art.

⁵⁹ Estelle Caswell and Joe Posner, “Kanye, deconstructed: The human voice as the ultimate instrument,” *Vox*, September 1, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgJyhKEZ8QU.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgJyhKEZ8QU;); Sampling vocals and raising their pitch almost to the point of comedy is a trend in Kanye’s production style. This style of altering vocals is referred to in *Vox*’s video as “chipmunk vocals.”

instrumental sounds from Simone's recording in addition to her voice. This further solidifies the source of the track because Simone's piano playing on her recording of "Strange Fruit" is almost equally as identifiable as her singing. Kanye does not just include the piano as an afterthought but makes it part of the base of his beat and more prominent than in the original. Even when Simone's voice is not being sampled in "Blood on the Leaves," the piano is often still present. Kanye and his production team raised the pitch of the piano and changed its rhythm, but the sample source remains obvious in combination with Simone's voice.

Although the source is made obvious through sampling both Simone's voice and piano playing, Kanye did not shy away from changing the meaning of some of her lyrics. Jay-Z and No I.D. chopped up Simone's lyrics from "Four Women" and spliced them together to add an emphasis on race. This technique certainly could be used to completely change what the original artist said, perhaps to something that is the opposite of their beliefs, but that was not done in "The Story of O.J." On the other hand, Kanye does not change what Simone says, but he *does* change how it is heard. As previously described, Kanye influences the way that a listener hears certain sampled words by placing the samples near his own words that sound similar, such as the "summer" and "southern" or "breathe" and "breeze" examples. More significantly, Kanye repeatedly positions the sample of "black bodies swinging in the southern breeze" so that the listener interprets the line as sexual rather than morbid. This follows the idea from the previous song on *Yeezus*, "I'm In It," where Kanye sexualizes black empowerment symbols.

"Blood on the Leaves" also differs from "The Story of O.J." by sampling other songs. The beat for "The Story of O.J." primarily consists of samples from "Four Women" and drum beats from a drum machine.⁶⁰ That conservative practice of beat-making allows the listener to be

⁶⁰ There is a drum fill from a funk track sampled twice on "The Story of O.J.," but it is very brief both times and does not draw attention away from the "Four Women" samples.

fully aware of the sampled song and highlights the deeper meaning that Jay-Z and No I.D. added by sampling “Four Women.” Although “Blood on the Leaves” very obviously samples Simone’s cover of “Strange Fruit,” Kanye quotes the lyrics from C-Murder’s “Down For My Niggaz” and samples from TNGHT’s “R U Ready,” preventing the listener from focusing on any one of the three songs for too long. These other samples are not sampled for any deeper meaning and thus interfere with the listener hearing “Strange Fruit” as a protest song in this context. The “R U Ready” sample in particular overpowers the “Strange Fruit” samples whenever present with its boisterous and aggressively overblown brass sounds, making “Strange Fruit’s” presence temporarily forgotten the two samples compete. The “R U Ready” sample also changes the mood of the song from the somberness of “Strange Fruit” and toward the aggression that Kanye displays in his own lyrics.

Kanye has sampled a historically and culturally important song, intentionally misread its lyrics, and wants listeners to be aware of it. One could claim, however, that Kanye was unaware of the history of “Strange Fruit” and simply wanted to use its sound. Billie Holiday claimed in an interview from 1958 that some fans would ask her to sing “that sexy song about the people swinging” when wanting to hear “Strange Fruit,” so perhaps Kanye also saw it as a sexual song.⁶¹ That assertion is short-sighted, though, when looking at “Strange Fruit” in the context of Kanye’s career. The best piece of evidence that Kanye knew what he was doing lies in his production of Talib Kweli’s “Get By,” a hip-hop song from 2002 that both focuses on racial inequality in the United States and samples Nina Simone’s “Sinnerman.” Kanye’s deliberate use of Nina Simone’s music on a conscious rap track like “Get By” shows that he is in some respect aware of her history.

⁶¹ Jack Doyle, “Strange Fruit, 1939,” *PopHistoryDig.com*, March 7, 2011, <https://www.pophistorydig.com/topics/strange-fruit-1939/>.

Kanye's disregard for the history of "Strange Fruit" sparked controversy. One of the producers on the track, Hudson Mohawke, defended the sampling and told Pitchfork: "There's not an overtly political message in the final lyrics, but in some ways that would've been too easy."⁶² Others are more hesitant, such as *Vulture*'s Jody Rosen, who said: "I can't decide: Is it brilliantly tasteless? Or just plain tasteless? A cheap stunt? A tour de force? The worst song I've ever heard? The best? What other musician makes you ask such questions?"⁶³ As discussed earlier, however, controversy is nothing new for Kanye. As Rosen says in the same article, "If you took the jackass out of Kanye, he wouldn't be Kanye. Kanye is a gestalt: The knucklehead and the genius go hand-in-hand."

Just like controversy is nothing new for Kanye, sampling culturally important tracks without giving recognition to their history and the original artists is nothing new for hip-hop. Other artists besides Kanye have even sampled Simone's music with little regard for her political stances and her music's significance. Timbaland samples Simone's "Sinnerman" on his 2007 track "Oh Timbaland," similarly to Kweli's "Get By," but lyrically discusses musical prowess rather than social issues. Timbaland also manipulates Simone's lyrics through chopping and splicing the sample to make it seem like she is singing "Oh, Timbaland, where he gon' run to?" instead of "Oh, *sinnerman*, where he gon' run to?" Although not as overtly conscious as "Strange Fruit," Simone's "Feeling Good" is sampled in 50 Cent's "Bad News" from 2006, which glorifies street violence and outlines how to get away with premeditated murder. Apolitical rap songs sampled civil rights musicians besides Simone before "Blood on the Leaves's" release in 2013, but this distanced approach to sampling can best be viewed in "Mask

⁶² Ryan Dombal, "The Yeezus Sessions," *Pitchfork*, June 24, 2013, <https://pitchfork.com/features/article/9157-the-yeezus-sessions/>.

⁶³ Jody Rosen, "Rosen on Kanye West's Yeezus: The Least Sexy Album of 2013," *Vulture*, June 18, 2013, <https://www.vulture.com/2013/06/music-review-kanye-west-yeezus-jody-rosen.html>.

Off” by Future from 2017. “Mask Off” samples the flute from Tommy Butler’s “Prison Song” from 1978, originally written for the civil rights musical, *Selma*. “Mask Off,” on the other hand, features a hook consisting of the names of recreational drugs and verses that prioritize chasing money over everything else.

Kanye’s approach to sampling a political song on an apolitical rap track was done before “Blood on the Leaves” and has been done since. “Blood on the Leaves” is a little different than some of these examples, however, in how obviously Kanye is sampling Simone’s “Strange Fruit” and in the way that he changes the meaning of the original lyrics by placing them in a new context. Also different than these examples, Kanye uses “Strange Fruit” to make his song controversial. “Strange Fruit” is widely recognized as an anti-lynching anthem, and many listeners will probably recognize the contrast between the sample and Kanye’s track. “Prison Song,” on the other hand, is not as widely known nor as obviously sampled. Future likely sampled the flute just for the sound and assumed that most listeners would be unaware of its origin.

Kanye’s ability to create such a divisive track through sampling “Strange Fruit” is dependent on Simone’s legacy and the history of “Strange Fruit.” If Simone had a less distinct musical sound or was less known as an activist, Kanye would have been unable to cause controversy by sampling her. Similarly, “Strange Fruit” has had an impact on society that allows listeners to immediately pick up on the meaning of the original song and notice that its context has been changed in “Blood on the Leaves.” Kanye needs for both his listeners and himself to be aware of both histories so that he can continue to be publicly inflammatory. His reliance on history is similar to how Jay-Z and No I.D. needed history to add depth to “The Story of O.J.,” yet opposite in its intent.

Both Simone and “Strange Fruit” have powerful legacies that Kanye plays on, but so do other civil rights musicians and songs. Kanye had to make a choice to sample “Strange Fruit” and Nina Simone in particular. Perhaps “Strange Fruit” was either the most overtly political song that he could think of to cause controversy, or maybe he knew that he could intentionally misread the “black bodies swinging in the southern breeze” line. His choice in “Strange Fruit” also could have been made because of its solemnity, whereas other political songs in Simone’s discography, like “Mississippi Goddam,” are faster and more energized. This desire for moodiness could also be the reason that Kanye used Simone’s cover of “Strange Fruit” rather than Billie Holiday’s recording, as Simone’s cover is more dramatic and severe. There is also evidence that Kanye was simply more familiar with Simone’s music. “Blood on the Leaves” was Kanye’s fifth song that sampled Simone, and he has since sampled her again on “Famous” from *The Life of Pablo* (2016).⁶⁴ Kanye’s tendency to sample music that he already knows well would be reasonable since it is likely easier to work with a familiar song rather than an unfamiliar one.

Conclusion

While “The Story of O.J.” and “Blood on the Leaves” exhibit a dichotomy in the approach to sampling civil-rights icons like Nina Simone, the two songs do have some similarities. Both tracks draw attention to their samples and make the sampling source obvious, indicating that both Kanye and Jay-Z want listeners to be able to glean something from the presence of the sample. In both cases, Simone’s voice is pitched up but remains recognizable, while her lyrics are kept intact and are intended to be heard as full words and phrases. Simone’s piano playing is also sampled in addition to her voice in both Kanye’s and Jay-Z’s tracks,

⁶⁴ “Famous” also disregards the context of the sample, Simone’s “Do What You Gotta Do.”

furthering the focus on Simone. Because both songs make Simone's music central to their sound, they are both able to allude to her history and utilize the meaning of their respectively sampled tracks. "The Story of O.J." and "Blood on the Leaves" need that history to be heard by listeners for their tracks to have their intended effects.

The difference between the beats for "The Story of O.J." and "Blood on the Leaves" primarily lies in the difference between the effects that Jay-Z and Kanye want their songs to have on listeners. Jay-Z intends for his listeners to come away from "The Story of O.J." with a better understanding of race issues in America. Obviously, Jay-Z makes race and loyalty to the black community central to his lyrics. To put his intent into effect with the beat, Jay-Z and No I.D. emphasize Simone's lyrics from "Four Women" that deal with race through selectively repeating them. They also avoid covering the Simone sample with other samples and instead create the majority of the beat from "Four Women" samples.

Kanye, on the other hand, intends to unsettle his listeners through sampling such a revered civil-rights song on "Blood on the Leaves." Lyrically, his singular mention of race is an insensitive joke about a racist government policy, and the rest of the song discusses the toils of women taking advantage of rich men's fame and wealth, paying no mind to the topic of the "Strange Fruit." Kanye also morphs the listener's understanding of Simone's words by placing his lyrics next to hers in strategic positions. In some cases, Simone's lyrics are misheard through Kanye singing a similar word in close proximity. Other cases involve Kanye sexualizing Simone's lyrics by placing them in a new context and leading the listener to misread them. Kanye also veils Simone's sample throughout "Blood on the Leaves" by sampling other more abrasive songs, changing the mood and allowing for the listener to forget that "Strange Fruit" is still present on the beat.

Jay-Z and No I.D.'s sampling of "Four Women" for "The Story of O.J." and Kanye's sampling of "Strange Fruit" for "Blood on the Leaves" provide ample material for further discussion in and of itself. For example, more analysis on how these two songs fit into the entirety of Jay-Z's and Kanye's careers, before and after their releases, could be interesting. A more comprehensive examination of all of their songs that sample Nina Simone might reveal other techniques and approaches to sampling, too. Outside of these specific artists, an expansive analysis of the frequency that political songs are sampled in broad sub-categories of rap and which approach the artist chooses to take with those samples could indicate trends in the genre. It would be interesting to see if one approach is significantly more common than the other and why that might be.

Finally, the limited scope of this project opens several questions for future study. The most glaringly missing topic is feminism. Simone's discussion of race often revolved around black feminism, but not even Jay-Z, who sought to make connections between "Four Women" and "The Story of O.J.," mentioned women in his lyrics. "Four Women" is as much about beauty standards placed on women in America as it is race, so Jay-Z's redaction of feminist themes is almost as near-sighted as Kanye's disregard of the racial themes in "Strange Fruit." Very few examples of Nina Simone samples in the music of women appear on *whosampled.com*, too. Rap has historically been a male-dominated genre, but female rap artists do exist and are producing music. This lack of results then becomes a question of actual scarcity or lack of popularity. One musician that should be included in any future analysis of Nina Simone samples is Ms. Lauryn Hill. Hill has made several references to Simone in her lyrics and appears in six different songs on the Nina Simone tribute album, *Nina Revisited: A Tribute to Nina Simone* (2015), made for the Netflix documentary, *What Happened Miss Simone?* Hill's approach to sampling and direct

references to Simone could possibly set up a third manner of sampling, paying tribute and establishing an artistic lineage through music.

Bibliography

- Andrews-Dyer, Helena. "A Timeline of Kanye West's Most Political Moments as He Heads to the White House to Meet with Trump." *The Washington Post*. October 09, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/reliable-source/wp/2018/10/09/a-timeline-of-kanye-wests-most-political-moments-as-he-heads-to-the-white-house-to-meet-with-trump/?utm_term=.c9bad7c0f321.
- "Bush Doesn't Care About Black People." *YouTube*. April 17, 2006. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIUzLpO1kxI>.
- Caswell, Estelle, and Joe Posner. "Kanye, Deconstructed: The Human Voice as the Ultimate Instrument." *Vox*, 1 Sept. 2016. www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgJyhKEZ8QU.
- Christgau, Robert. "Brag Like That." *The Barnes & Noble Review*. September 19, 2011. <https://www.barnesandnoble.com/review/brag-like-that>.
- Cole, Matthew. "Review: Jay-Z and Kanye West, Watch the Throne." *Slant Magazine*. August 11, 2011. <https://www.slantmagazine.com/music/jay-z-and-kanye-west-watch-the-throne/>.
- Connley, Courtney. "3 Money Lessons from Jay-Z's '4:44.'" *CNBC*. June 30, 2017. <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/06/30/3-money-lessons-from-jay-zs-444.html>.
- Coscarelli, Joe. "Beyoncé Releases Surprise Album 'Lemonade' After HBO Special." *The New York Times*. December 21, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/24/arts/music/beyonce-hbo-lemonade.html>.
- Dombal, Ryan. "The Yeezus Sessions." *Pitchfork*. June 24, 2013. <https://pitchfork.com/features/article/9157-the-yeezus-sessions/>.
- Du Bois, W.E.B., "The Strivings of the Negro People," *The Atlantic*, August 1987. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1897/08/strivings-of-the-negro-people/305446/>.
- Elliott, Richard. *Nina Simone*. Bristol, CT: Equinox Publ., 2013.
- Feldstein, Ruth. *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Gourguechon, Prudy. "3 Facts About Mental Illness To Wrap Up The Kanye West-Don Lemon Kerfuffle." *Forbes*. October 15, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/prudygourguechon/2018/10/14/3-facts-about-mental-illness-to-wrap-up-the-kanye-west-don-lemon-kerfuffle/#1254ef055a04>.
- Hawkes, Rebecca. "Beyoncé's New Album: Why Is It Called Lemonade, What Do the Lyrics

Mean, plus All You Need to Know.” *The Telegraph*. April 24, 2016. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/music/news/beyoncs-new-album-why-is-it-called-lemonade-plus-everything-else/>.

Hawkins, Kayla. “Did O.J. Simpson Say ‘I’m Not Black, I’m O.J.’? ‘American Crime Story’ Shows His Complicated Relationship With Race.” *Bustle*. December 17, 2018. Accessed March 17, 2019. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/142063-did-oj-simpson-say-im-not-black-im-oj-american-crime-story-shows-his-complicated-relationship>.

James, Andy. “A Complete History of JAY-Z & No I.D.’s Collaborations.” *DJBooth*. June 19, 2017. <https://djbooth.net/features/2017-06-19-jay-z-and-no-id-collaboration-history>.

Jay-Z. “Jay-Z and Dean Baquet, in Conversation.” Interview by Dean Baquet. *The New York Times*. November 30, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbuQAbG2AZ0&t=631s>.

Jay-Z. “The Story of O.J.” Recorded 2017. Track 2 on *4:44*. BMG Monarch. Digitally streamed on Tidal.

Kajikawa, Loren. *Sounding Race In Rap Songs*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2013.

“Kanye West Stirs Up TMZ Newsroom Over Trump, Slavery, Free Thought.” *TMZ*. May 01, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_M4LkYra5k.

Katz, Mark. “Music in 1s and 0s: The Art and Politics of Digital Sampling.” In *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music*, 146-76. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010.

Strange Fruit. Directed by Joel Katz. Produced by Joel Katz. US: California Newsreel, 2002. Accessed April 12, 2019. https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|video_work|3798024.

Kestenbaum, Sam. “Is Jay-Z ‘Going Anti-Semitic’ On New Record?” *The Forward*. June 30, 2017. <https://forward.com/fast-forward/376036/is-jay-z-going-anti-semitic-on-new-record/>.

Kot, Greg. “Kanye West’s ‘Yeezus’ an Uneasy Listen.” *Chicago Tribune*. June 17, 2013. https://web.archive.org/web/20130820101622/http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-06-17/entertainment/chi-kanye-west-yeezus-review-20130616_1_kanye-west-s-gospel-record-saul-williams.

Leight, Elias. “‘4:44’ Producer No I.D. Talks Pushing Jay-Z, Creating ‘500 Ideas.’” *Rolling Stone*. June 25, 2018. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/444-producer-no-i-d-talks-pushing-jay-z-creating-500-ideas-253045/>.

- “Malcolm X - Message to the Grassroots.” *YouTube*. December 06, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ku2JzolPt50>.
- Mapes, Jillian. “Beyoncé: Lemonade.” *Pitchfork*. April 26, 2016. <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/21867-lemonade/>.
- Modell, Amanda Renae. ““You Understand Me Now”: Sampling Nina Simone in Hip Hop.” Master's thesis, University of South Florida, 2012. Accessed November 7, 2018. <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=5364&context=etd>.
- Nielson, Erik. “Did the Decline of Sampling Cause the Decline of Political Hip Hop?” *The Atlantic*. September 19, 2013. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/09/did-the-decline-of-sampling-cause-the-decline-of-political-hip-hop/279791/>.
- Pearce, Sheldon. “6 Nina Simone Songs Brilliantly Sampled by Rappers.” *Pitchfork*. July 10, 2017. <https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/6-nina-simone-songs-brilliantly-sampled-by-rappers/>.
- Pearce, Sheldon. “Album Review: 4:44.” *Pitchfork*. July 5, 2017. <https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/jay-z-444/>
- Penn, Michael, II. “Why Does Kanye Sample Nina Simone So Much?” *Vinyl Me, Please*. November 22, 2016. <http://www.vinylmeplease.com/magazine/kanye-west-sings-blues/>.
- Rabin, Nathan. “Kanye West and Jay-Z: Watch The Throne.” *AV Music*. July 20, 2018. <https://music.avclub.com/kanye-west-and-jay-z-watch-the-throne-1798169205>.
- Rosen, Jody. “Rosen on Kanye West’s Yeezus: The Least Sexy Album of 2013.” *Vulture*. June 18, 2013. <https://www.vulture.com/2013/06/music-review-kanye-west-yeezus-jody-rosen.html>.
- Schloss, Joseph Glenn, and Jeff Chang. *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-based Hip-hop*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014.
- Tillet, Salamishah. “Strange Sampling: Nina Simone and Her Hip-Hop Children.” *American Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2014): 119-137. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed November 28, 2018).
- “Tracks That Sampled Nina Simone.” *WhoSampled*. <https://www.whosampled.com/Nina-Simone/sampled/>.
- West, Kanye. “Blood on the Leaves.” Track 7 on *Yeezus*. Def Jam. Digitally streamed on Tidal.
- What Happened Miss Simone*. Directed by Liz Garbus. United States: Netflix, 2015. Streamed on

Netflix.

Williams, Justin A. *Rhyming and Stealing: Musical Borrowing in Hip-Hop*. Ann Arbor: University

of Michigan Press, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.3480627>.

Wilson, Ernest Dion “No I.D.,” “No ID On The Makings of Jay-Z’s 4:44 + Tells Stories About Kanye’s Beginnings.” Interview by Peter Elliot Rosenberg, Ibrahim “Ebro” Darden, and Laura Stylez. *Hot 97*. January 26, 2018.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcDWPdMMx0g&t=626s>.

Wright, Joshua K. “Endnotes to ‘The Story of O.J.’” *Abernathy*. August 03, 2017. <https://abernathymagazine.com/jay-z-444-endnotes-to-the-story-of-oj/>.