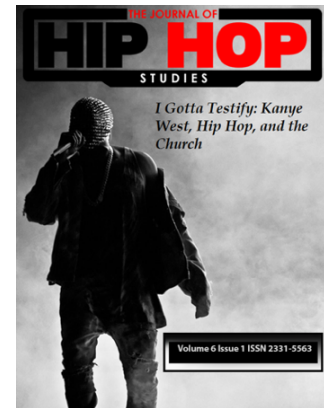

Meditation - Losing Kanye

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“All I listen to is old Kanye,” is what so many people say because they are ashamed of the Kanye they now know and the Kanye they *knew*. Maybe, I was so nostalgic that I was missing all the signs of his unraveling, I thought for a moment that his genius had arrived just with complicated nuances. I thought his god-like perception was simply grounded in his short-circuited human flaws, the same flaws Kanye identifies in his epically historic songs like “Diamonds (from Sierra Leone)” and “Jesus Walks.”

But...

En route to greatness was his latent desires to be accepted, not for his in-depth human perception based in an ontological genius, but rather for his prescribed role as “Negro” to give the whole world a show. How can you be “this generation’s version of Einstein,” or even one of the Pablos, when you cannot find your way home? Kanye’s unraveling signals his collapse as an artist who has everything but lost it all; he has lost his mama, his roots, and his “*gana*” (his will in Spanish). It took me a while to find these words because I had lost what I felt about him, until I realized I did not lose anything at all.

In Jasmine Mans’s powerful bittersweet poem, where she finds her own words for him, “Footnotes for Kanye,” she references all the songs that made him what he is today FOR us. Mans indelibly harnesses his titles and lyrics and throws them back at him with finesse and fire, but all to plead with this man to come back to us as his true self. She describes the scenes of protests where songs like “Blood on the Leaves” and “New Slaves” were being blasted, but no person of color was wearing his Yeezys. Her chilling voice, calling Kanye West’s actions into question about getting on and “leaving [her] ass for a white girl,” resonated as a voice from a powerful Black ancestor from the heavens, hoping to check him back into reality. Mans strategically asks “Can someone go and find the man who could make a diamond with his own bare hands?” Losing Kanye West right when he had the power to lead, revolutionize and truly transcend beyond his human limitations into his Yeezus legacy for good reason is heart wrenching. His spaceship never took off because he “traded [it] ... to buy back 40 acres.”¹

¹ Jasmine Mans, “Footnotes for Kanye,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_sGUVHID-8, or pp. 103-105 in this volume.

Attending the last “real” show of his Saint Pablo tour in 2016, made me feel and think differently about the way white people praise him like a god, despite his betrayal of his truest followers (and I ain’t talkin’ bout Instagram). They screamed out songs like “Blood on the Leaves,” you know the one played at protests, which pierced my ears as I cringed with fear that they sang *this song*. How many people knew it was Billie Holiday’s ode to black humanity, a humanity that had been strung up on trees like strange fruit? They held up their hands as if they hailed Hitler, which stopped me dead in my tracks and made me mourn the days when Hip Hop was reserved for us and made because of us. He transformed in front of me when they sang this and allowed them to feel free, singing it without fully knowing the context of *this song*, and the consequences of extending this art form to those who use it like their house slave, and keep it close but never close enough to sit at the table. Close enough to have sex with, but not respected enough to be called by her proper name in public.

He has betrayed Hip Hop more than anything...

I long for the days when there were traces of Dr. Donda West in his rhetoric, her life’s work in his discourse. I mourn him like a slain rapper who was robbed of his life in his prime. Looking through his latest albums set adrift on memory bliss of him. It was as if they were released post mortem by a collection of people wanting to make a profit, not truly knowing his real genius was speaking to the boys and girls of Chi-town and other hoods in America. But on his hypothetical death bed, instead of sending flowers, we the roses.