

## Azealia Banks's "212": Black Female Identity and the White Gaze in Contemporary Hip-Hop

JAMES MCNALLY

### **Abstract**

*Azealia Banks's 2011 hit single "212" established her as one of hip-hop's rising stars, with critics highlighting the song's provocative lyrics and Banks's ability as an MC as standout qualities. Banks would later receive attention for her public dispute with white rapper Iggy Azalea, whom she accused of exploiting black musical culture. This article integrates an analysis of "212" with a discussion of Banks's recent public rhetoric in order to examine the ways in which Banks rearticulates the figure of the black female rapper and criticizes white fascination with black female sexuality and black cultural forms. I conclude by situating this discussion within the broader context of contemporary "post-racial" politics, in which the political elements of hip-hop and the systemic racial inequalities they address have become increasingly marginalized in favor of "color-blind" conceptions of United States society and popular culture.*

Released in 2011, Azealia Banks's hit single "212" rapidly made an impression in the mainstream popular music sphere. Predominantly circulated online and on BBC Radio, the song and its music video attracted wide attention and acclaim. A diverse variety of publications, including *Pitchfork*, *The Guardian*, and *NPR Music*, named the track one of the year's best; Kanye West declared that Banks represented "the future of music."<sup>1</sup> Commentators generally highlighted the song's distinctive pop appeal and Banks's sexually frank and profane lyrics as standout qualities, with some comparing her idiosyncratic style and vocal delivery to other female hip-hop stars such as Lil' Kim and Nicki Minaj. Over the next three years, Banks failed to achieve the same level of success and attention she received for "212." She would eventually make a decisive return to the spotlight with the acclaimed 2014 release of her first full-length album, *Broke With Expensive Taste*, and more controversially, her recent public dispute with white Australian rapper Iggy Azalea, whom she accused of racism and appropriation.

In this article, I consider the broader social ramifications of "212" and Banks's public rhetoric in relation to contemporary racial and sexual politics, as well as the United States' history of exploitative and voyeuristic engagement with black individuals and musical culture. I argue that Banks's performance in "212" confronts and challenges the white gaze, rearticulates the figure of the black female rapper, and comments on white attraction to black women and fascination with black cultural forms, both in the realm of hip-hop and in broader American culture. Her music presents a novel template for confronting hegemonic constructions of black female

I am grateful to Charles Hiroshi Garrett, Karen Ahlquist, and Loren Kajikawa for their guidance and criticism over the course of this article's preparation. I would also like to thank Evan Ware, Ian Cappelletti, and Myra Palmero for their additional feedback.

<sup>1</sup> Sowmya Krishnamurthy, "Act Like U Know: Azealia Banks," *XXL*, 16 February 2012, [www.xxlmag.com/entry/view/id/8765#bmb=1](http://www.xxlmag.com/entry/view/id/8765#bmb=1).

identity and critiquing white exploitation of African American cultural production. Her more recent rhetoric regarding appropriation has further helped bring these issues into focus. By addressing and contesting the white gaze, Banks confronts a deeply entrenched force in United States racial ideology, social structure, and cultural politics—one that, despite optimism regarding a “post-racial” America, shows little sign of going away.

### The White Gaze and Black Female Identity in American Popular Music

Central to the process of racial formation in the United States has been the structuring power of the white gaze.<sup>2</sup> Since the advent of European colonialism, it has played a formative role in the making of American society, constructing whiteness and Eurocentric conceptions of the world as normative and superior and portraying non-white perspectives and cultural practices as deviant and inferior. Patricia Hill Collins argues that it has functioned as a part of “technologies of control” in Western societies for centuries. She notes that during Jim Crow, segregationist policies “recognized that all Whites had the power to pinion all Blacks with the power of the White gaze,” and that this phenomenon continues today in more subtle and unverbilized forms.<sup>3</sup> bell hooks draws attention to the unequal, one-way nature of this relationship: “White people can ‘safely’ imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people, accorded them the right to control the black gaze.”<sup>4</sup>

The effects of the white gaze on black communities and individuals have been manifold. Shanette M. Harris highlights its contribution to ingrained internal racism in African American communities, where it has elicited “feelings of shame, hypervigilance, self-criticism, social anxiety, and in general, negative and uncomfortable feelings toward the self.”<sup>5</sup> Scholars have drawn particular attention to its contradictory construction of blackness as a source of violence, anxiety, suspicion, sexual attraction, and fascination. George Yancy characterizes the white gaze as being “inextricably bound up with objectifying, exoticizing, and sexualizing the Black body, inscribing it with myths and codes that function to ontologize it, thus

<sup>2</sup> Recently theorized by scholars such as George Yancy, Patricia Hill Collins, and Shanette M. Harris, discussion of the “white gaze” as a force of domination has existed in the scholarly sphere since the work of Franz Fanon and W. E. B. Du Bois. See Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, [1952] 1967), 90, 95; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: The Modern Library, [1903] 1993); Shanette M. Harris, “Lifting the Veil: African American Images and the European American Gaze,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 9, no. 1 (2008): 32–51; Patricia Hill Collins, “Reply to Commentaries: Black Sexual Politics Revisited,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 9, no. 1 (2008): 68–85; George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008). My use of the term “racial formation” follows Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Collins, “Black Sexual Politics Revisited,” 75–76; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, [1975] 1995).

<sup>4</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 168.

<sup>5</sup> Harris, “Lifting the Veil,” 38.

returning it as that which it is not.”<sup>6</sup> Harris argues that it conceives of black bodies as “symbolic representation and fantasy” and constructs “stereotypical images and societal barriers” to deal with the resulting emotions of anxiety and desire.<sup>7</sup> Today, it continues to reduce black men and women to a series of contradictory stereotypes: objects of both fear and fascination—alternately violent and lascivious, invisible yet impossible to ignore. Yancy characterizes these attitudes as all encompassing and destructive to positive black identity. He argues that successful efforts to transform perceptions of blacks must ultimately undermine the white gaze and challenge “whiteness as fanaticism.”<sup>8</sup>

The gaze black women have had to contend with is not only white, but male as well. The “double jeopardy” created by racism and patriarchy has generated a unique set of obstacles to black female empowerment and self-actualization.<sup>9</sup> United States culture has historically portrayed black women as alternately transgressive, primitive, hostile, and hypersexual.<sup>10</sup> Stereotypes with roots in the era of slavery, such as the “Jezebel”—a sexualized caricature of working-class black women—still endure today.<sup>11</sup> As Theresa Renee White notes, such portrayals have existed in the realm of popular entertainment as well: to many American white men, black female performers from Josephine Baker to Beyoncé have long represented “extreme, disproportionate sexuality.”<sup>12</sup> Cornel West emphasizes these stereotypes’ essentially conflicted nature: on one hand, prevailing notions of black female sexual prowess portray black women as sought-after sexual partners; on the other hand, dominant ideals of white feminine beauty render black women as inferior to their white counterparts.<sup>13</sup> He argues that these myths both degrade black women and devalue woman in general, and concludes that they are “part of a wider network of white supremacist lies whose authority and legitimacy must be undermined.”<sup>14</sup>

Stereotypically sexualized representations of black female identity informed by the white male gaze have existed in the American popular music sphere since nineteenth-century blackface minstrelsy, which presented black women as both

<sup>6</sup> Yancy, *Black Bodies*, 204.

<sup>7</sup> Harris, “Lifting the Veil,” 45–46.

<sup>8</sup> Yancy, *Black Bodies*, 247.

<sup>9</sup> Frances M. Beal, “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female,” in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: New American Library, [1970] 1979), 90–100.

<sup>10</sup> For examinations of these types of negative stereotypes of black women in the American cultural sphere, see Janell Hobson, “The ‘Batty’ Politic: Toward and Aesthetic of the Black Female Body,” *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (2003): 87–105; Bettye J. Gardner and Niani Kilkenny, “In Vogue: Josephine Baker and Black Culture and Identity in the Jazz Age,” *Journal of African American History* 93, no. 1 (2008): 88–93; Murali Balaji, “Vixen Resistin’: Redefining Black Womanhood in Hip-Hop Music Videos,” *Journal of Black Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 6.

<sup>11</sup> For discussions of the “Jezebel” figure, see Hobson, “The ‘Batty’ Politic,” 89; Balaji, “Vixen Resistin’”; Shanara R. Reid-Brinkley, “The Essence of Res(ex)pectability: Black Women’s Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap Music and Music Video,” *Meridians* 8, no. 1 (2008): 236–60.

<sup>12</sup> Theresa Renee White, “Missy ‘Misdemeanor’ Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionistin’ Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered?,” *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 6 (2013): 612.

<sup>13</sup> Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, [1994] 2001), 129–30.

<sup>14</sup> West, *Race Matters*, 131.

objects of forbidden white male desire and grotesque, masculinized targets of ridicule. The most prominent example of this was the provocative and tragic mulatto "wench" character, who was typically played by a white male in drag and blackface alongside other staple characters such as Jim Crow and Zip Coon. These portrayals were the first of many widely disseminated stereotypical constructions of black female identity in American popular music culture. Various scholars have drawn a link between the lascivious manner in which such black female characters in minstrelsy were portrayed and an anxious yet powerful attraction to black sexuality on the part of white male viewers.<sup>15</sup> Eric Lott makes the connection between this phenomenon and the white gaze explicit: "One might, after Laura Mulvey, call this dynamic the "pale gaze"—a ferocious investment in demystifying and domesticating black power in white fantasy by projecting vulgar black types as spectacular objects of white men's looking. This looking always took place in relation to an objectified and sexualized black body, and it was often conjoined to a sense of terror."<sup>16</sup> Lott draws particular attention to the conflicted, homoerotic nature of this attraction, noting that "white men were routinely encouraged to indulge in fantasies about black women—which, however, highlighted, and implicitly identified them with, the salacious black male characters who 'authored' the fantasies, confusing the real object of sexual interest."<sup>17</sup> Their enduring power was such that almost all black performers performed in blackface and incorporated minstrel tropes and performance practices at least through the early twentieth century.<sup>18</sup>

Black female musicians have developed a variety of rhetorical and performative strategies in response to these portrayals in order to both challenge the gaze and create "discourses in opposition to the dominant representations of black femininity."<sup>19</sup> They serve largely to counter "widely held assumptions of black female inferiority" and have existed since the era of slavery in various forms.<sup>20</sup> Female hip-hop artists are playing central roles in this endeavor. Cheryl Keyes argues that women rappers draw from a long line of female artists, dating back to 1920s-era blues singers such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, who have worked to articulate distinct black female subjectivities and establish alternative, empowering constructions of black female identity.<sup>21</sup> Black women rappers have adapted a diverse set of personas and identities in their performances and public rhetoric. Keyes identifies four primary categories: the matriarchal and Afrocentric "Queen Mother" (e.g., Queen Latifah,

<sup>15</sup> See Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1993] 2013); Robert Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 32–33.

<sup>16</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 157–58.

<sup>17</sup> Lott, *Love and Theft*, 124.

<sup>18</sup> Kirsten Pullen, *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 108.

<sup>19</sup> Reid-Brinkley, "Black Women's Negotiation of Black Femininity," 239.

<sup>20</sup> Olga Davis, "Theorizing African American Women's Discourse: The Public and Private Spheres of Experience," in *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse*, ed. Marsha Houston and Olga Davis (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 2002), 40.

<sup>21</sup> Cheryl Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 187.

Sister Souljah); the independent and sexually frank “Fly Girl” (e.g., Salt-N-Pepa, TLC); the more overtly oppositional and assertive “Sista With Attitude” (e.g., Da Brat, Mia X); and the anti-heteronormative “Lesbian” (e.g., Me’Shell Ndegeocello, Queen Pen).<sup>22</sup> These categories are by no means exclusive: Keyes notes that figures such as Lil’ Kim and Foxy Brown, for instance, combined aspects of both the Fly Girl and the Sista with Attitude.<sup>23</sup> She argues that these figures enable rap music to become “a vehicle by which black female rappers seek empowerment, make choices, and create spaces for themselves and other sistas.”<sup>24</sup>

Out of the variety of responses from listeners and scholars these figures have faced, sexually straightforward and unapologetically erotic performances by woman rappers have generated some of the most contentious reactions. Although overtly sexual self-presentation has been a major aspect of female hip-hop performance since the late 1980s, when women in groups such as Salt-N-Pepa began to dress in clothing that emphasized their bodies and spoke openly about issues related to sex, by the mid-1990s, with the advent of gangsta rap and more frequently sexualized portrayals of black women in music videos, these self-portrayals became increasingly explicit. This change took place as part of a broader “new wave of black women addressing matters of sexuality in the mainstream public sphere” that took place in 1990s hip-hop.<sup>25</sup> Figures such as Shawanna, Lil’ Kim, Mia X, Trina, Lady of Rage, and Foxy Brown incorporated explicit lyrics throughout their raps and portrayed themselves in a more erotic and provocative manner than previous female rappers. Lil’ Kim became particularly well known for this aesthetic, which she often used to discuss her body in hypersexual terms or present herself in a position of sexual dominance. In her 2003 single “Magic Stick,” which she released as a “battle of the sexes” song with 50 Cent, Kim rapped about forcing men to perform oral sex on her “magic clit”—a reversal of the common rap trope of women performing oral sex on men—and boasted about being a “freak to the core.” She received particular notoriety later in her career for performing with breast implants and blonde hair extensions and marketing herself as “Black Barbie.” This aesthetic continues to define much of mainstream hip-hop performance, most notably in the music of multiplatinum artist Nicki Minaj, the most popular female rapper in the late 2000s and early 2010s, who has received widespread attention for following many of the tropes Kim and Brown introduced, including an erotic self-presentation and an (ironic) self-characterization as “Barbie.”

Artists such as Kim and Minaj have received mixed responses from scholars. On one hand, some praise such figures for reclaiming black female expressions of sexuality in a cultural environment that has historically policed such expressions.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 189–207.

<sup>23</sup> Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 204.

<sup>24</sup> Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*, 209.

<sup>25</sup> Marquita R. Smith, “Or a Real, Real Bad Lesbian”: Nicki Minaj and the Acknowledgement of Queer Desire in Hip-Hop Culture,” *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014): 361.

<sup>26</sup> Many have made this argument. See Jason D. Haugen, “‘Unladylike Divas’: Language, Gender, and Female Gangsta Rappers,” *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 4 (2003); Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 168–69; Aisha Durham, Brittney C. Cooper, and Susana M. Morris, “The Stage

Rana A. Emerson, for instance, argues that this kind of self-presentation offers the opportunity to return the male gaze and reappropriate the black female body in order to express an independent, empowered sexual subjectivity.<sup>27</sup> Jason Haugen asserts that rappers such as Lil' Kim, Mia X, and Lady of Rage construct resistant alternative black female identities that claim meaningful social power. He asserts that they are able to construct "a novel kind of femininity" that introduces alternative conceptions of female identity to both the traditionally male-dominated sphere of hip-hop and conventional American conceptions of propriety.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, many critics and scholars decry these artists' performances as pornographic, demeaning, and conforming to male-dictated images of women.<sup>29</sup> Rather than challenging or transforming perceptions of black female sexuality, critics charge, such hypersexualized portrayals only reinforce dominant racist and patriarchal structures of power.<sup>30</sup> In discussing the late-1990s work of rapper Foxy Brown, Stephanie Dunn argues that while in many ways Brown's self-presentation affirmed dark-skinned African American beauty, her image "did not offer an image of black femininity that transgressed stereotypes of black femininity or the traditional performance of sexuality by black women in popular entertainment."<sup>31</sup> Joan Morgan asserts that the standard Kim and Brown introduced ultimately limited artists:

I think that it is empowering to the individual, but, to me, feminism is not about empowering the individual . . . I would say that Kim and Foxy's experience has helped, in many ways, to narrow the kind of rappers that we even get to see put on in the game. The fact that they were not the first rappers to go platinum, but the first to come out of the box and sell at that level—they became the prototype for what the industry considered a woman rapper who could sell. We have seen a narrowing of the kind of female rappers that are able to come out ever since.<sup>32</sup>

Azealia Banks herself acknowledged an early desire to follow in Lil' Kim's footsteps, but maintained that she ultimately decided to "find something else completely. . . . It's been done, and it's being done again. What would I be adding to the world by

---

Hip-Hop Feminism Built: A New Directions Essay," *Signs* 38, no. 3 (2013): 729. Margaret Hunter notes that blacks have also participated in restricting and controlling expressions of black female sexuality—a phenomenon she labels the "politics of respectability: the historically black middle-class ideology of 'proper' womanhood and 'controlled' sexuality." Margaret Hunter, "Shake It Baby, Shake It: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip-Hop," *Sociological Perspectives* 54, no. 1 (2011): 31.

<sup>27</sup> Rana A. Emerson, "Where My Girls At?": Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos," *Gender and Society* 16, no. 1 (2002): 133.

<sup>28</sup> Haugen, "Unladylike Divas," 429, 431.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Morgan and Faedra Chatard Carpenter, "An Interview with Joan Morgan," *Callaloo* 29, no. 3 (2006): 771.

<sup>30</sup> For an example of a critic of these types of portrayals, see Imani Perry, "Who(se) am I? The Identity and Image of Women in Hip-Hop," in *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*, 2nd ed., ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez (London: Sage, 2003), 141.

<sup>31</sup> Stephanie Dunn, "*Baad Bitches*" and *Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 30. These self-presentations are not limited to the black-white racial binary. Most notably, Foxy Brown, who is of mixed African and Chinese descent, has complicated her persona by occasionally incorporating sexualized racial stereotypes of Chinese women into her performances.

<sup>32</sup> Morgan and Carpenter, "Interview with Joan Morgan," 770.

doing it too?” Indeed, despite the purposeful relation of certain elements of her persona to previous women rapper figures—in Keyes’s terms, the Fly Girl, Sista with Attitude, and the Lesbian—in both her performance in “212” and her public rhetoric, Banks introduces a new articulation of the figure of the female rapper altogether, with ramifications both in the market and in the realm of politics.<sup>33</sup>

### Rearticulating Black Female Identity

Originally from Harlem, Banks (b. 1991) achieved limited success before the release of “212.” From 2009 to 2010, she released several songs on YouTube and SoundCloud, delivered a featured rap on electronic dancehall group Major Lazer’s album *Lazers Never Die*, and held a position as a Harlem “borough ambassador” for Nike’s ILOVE advertising campaign. Banks’s best-known pre-“212” single, “L8R,” which she released as a music video on YouTube in 2010, follows many of the tropes found in the works of hip-hop artists such as Lil’ Kim and Nicki Minaj. Most significantly, the song’s music video, directed by Maxim Bohichik and Alex Bergman, largely adheres to conventional music video representations of black female rappers. Although it is not as visually explicit as videos released by Kim or Minaj, it portrays Banks in a sexualized manner, featuring shots down her shirt and lingering in slow motion on her wet clothing as she gets out of a pool. The camera situates the male gaze unambiguously. This sort of portrayal was common in videos by male and female rappers alike throughout the mid-1990s, 2000s, and thus far in the 2010s.

At the same time, “L8R” also features certain distinctive musical and thematic elements that Banks would feature prominently in her later releases. Her rap, although devoid of the stylistic variety heard on her later songs such as “212,” features deft, dense lyrical qualities that came to define her characteristic delivery and flow as an MC. The lyrics, which celebrate Banks’s sexuality and proclaim her desire to make money, stand out for their frank, explicit discussion of sex, particularly white attraction to black women. Her later releases would address these same themes. Despite receiving a modest amount of attention from YouTube users and music websites, however, “L8R” never gained enough traction or play to jumpstart her career. *Pitchfork*’s Marc Hogan would later recall in retrospect that the song, while full of “no-holds-barred rhymes,” ultimately “lack[ed] a bit of the artist’s later fire.”<sup>34</sup> In the end, “L8R,” while captivating in its own right, neither adequately differentiated Banks from other mainstream rappers such as Kim and Minaj nor offered the sort of sufficiently inventive and challenging rearticulation of black female identity she would later present in “212.”

<sup>33</sup> Banks most explicitly demonstrated her desire to present herself as part of this heritage in the 2014 music video for “Chasing Time,” in which she adopted a series of poses and outfits that visually imitated figures such as Missy Elliott, TLC’s Left Eye Lopez, and Lil’ Kim. See Brennan Carley, “Azealia Banks Pays Homage to Rap Greats in ‘Chasing Time’ Video,” *Spin*, November 13, 2014, <http://www.spin.com/articles/azealia-banks-chasing-time-music-video/>.

<sup>34</sup> Marc Hogan, “Azealia Banks: Fantasea,” *Pitchfork*, July 23, 2012, <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16950-azealia-banks-fantasea/>.

"212," which Banks released in September 2011, developed the themes she introduced in "L8R" and combined them with a markedly different set of personas and musical elements. Released digitally in the United States on websites such as YouTube, Rhapsody, and SoundCloud, and on BBC 1 Radio in the UK, it became viral largely due to its accompanying music video, which was directed by Canadian directors Vincent Tsang and Paul Labonté and filmed in Montréal, where Banks was living at the time. Musically, "212" features Banks singing and rapping over a slight modification of Belgian electronic house producer Lazy Jay's song "Float Your Boat." The song's underlying beat, composed of a sparse set of electronically modified drum machine and trumpet tracks, falls generally within the purview of European house music, which Banks has incorporated into multiple songs.<sup>35</sup> Banks's instrumental modifications of the original Lazy Jay song, which follows an AA'BCA'C structure, are minimal; nonetheless, her version comes off as markedly different from the original due to her vocal additions, namely a deft syncopated rap in the A and A' sections, a soulful melodic solo in the B section, and a shout-like chant chorus in the C section.

Literally, Banks adheres to several standard hip-hop tropes and approaches in the song. First, she infuses it with bravado and declares her merit in joining the canon of successful rappers. She devotes the rest of the song to proclaiming dominance over a rival. Bold assertions of confidence and superiority are cornerstones of rap performance; they serve to establish a strong, independent voice, worthy of praise and, often, envy.<sup>36</sup> In this manner, Banks follows a well-trod path traveled by the majority of aspiring hip-hop artists, male and female alike. Banks backs up these declarations by demonstrating her significant technical skill and stylistic versatility as a rapper. In terms of rhythm, lyrical variation, innovation, and delivery, Banks's syncopated, rapid-fire rap is easily as complex as that of any of the most heralded rappers in the mainstream American music industry. In a manner similar to artists such as Eminem, Nas, and Busta Rhymes, she peppers her verses with internal rhymes, puns, and dense, agile lines.

The song's lasting effect, however, goes beyond simple lyrical skill and a convincing exhibition of confidence and technique. Indeed, at the same time that Banks signifies her belonging in the canon of major rap figures, she uses the music, lyrics, and video of "212" to reinvent the image and figure of the mainstream female hip-hop artist and subtly rearticulate conceptions of black female identity in the sphere of American hip-hop. For the purposes of this essay, I define "rearticulation" along

<sup>35</sup> Hot 97 DJs Ebro Darden and Peter Rosenberg would later draw attention to Banks's incorporation of house as a standout quality of her music. Darden noted the relative lack of such music in contemporary hip-hop releases and declared that he had an "affinity for rappers when they're not afraid to get on up-tempo [music that] people will party to but still spit bombs." Rosenberg praised Banks's ability to take advantage of such stylistic elements as a rapper, observing that "a lot of people want to experiment with pop and house and EDM and all the different genres that are out there, but she actually has the chops on both levels to do it." See "Azealia Banks Goes Off on TI, Iggy + Black Music Being Smudged Out," YouTube video, 47:29, from an interview conducted by Ebro Darden, Laura Stylez, and Peter Rosenberg, posted by HOT 97, December 18, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFDS-VEEl6w>.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew Oware, "A 'Man's Woman'? Contradictory Messages in the Songs of Female Rappers, 1992–2000," *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 5 (2009): 786. See also Rose, *Black Noise*, 163.



the same lines as Loren Kajikawa, who applies Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation to analyze white rapper Eminem's mainstream debut. Following Omi and Winant, Kajikawa characterizes the term as the repositioning of "political interests and identities, through a recombination of familiar ideas and values in hitherto unrecognized ways."<sup>37</sup> Banks accomplishes this rearticulation first by confronting the listener and viewer with lyrics and images that assert her sexuality, while at the same time presenting herself as independent and empowered and avoiding the kind of objectification common in the music and videos of previous female rappers who had achieved mainstream success.

Like Banks's previous work in songs such as "L8R," "212" features extended sexually explicit lyrics. In and of itself, that would not be particularly new or noteworthy. However, Banks and directors Tsang and Labonté use certain key musical and visual aspects to reframe these conventional rap elements and present Banks as dominant and in control. Most significantly, at the end of the A and A' sections, Banks refers to the song's nameless female rival as a "cunt" and likens the woman's submission to oral sex:

**A section:** Now she wanna lick my plum in the evenin' /  
 And fit that tongue, tongue d-deep in /  
 I guess that cunt gettin' eaten [repeated five times] /

**A' sections:** Who're you, bitch, new lunch? /  
 I'm a ruin you, cunt [repeated four times]

(Words and Music by Azealia Banks and Jef Martens. © 2014 Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Yung Rapunxel Publishing, Musicallystars BV Publishing and Kaimoche Music. All Rights on behalf of Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Yung Rapunxel Publishing and Musicallystars BV Publishing. Administered by Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, 424 Church Street, Suite 1200, Nashville, TN 37219. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Corporation)

For emphasis, as Banks repeats the final lines of each section, the music video flashes them repeatedly to the beat of an accented bass drum (see [Figure 1](#)). This jarring visual effect ensures that the viewer cannot ignore the lyrics, which up to this point in the song had avoided any references to sex, much less profanity on that level. Banks further emphasizes the switch in tone by flaring her eyes and licking her lips (see [Figure 2](#))—powerful, almost predatory gestures of both sex and power. In addition to establishing Banks as dominant, these expressions assert her subjectivity and allow her to directly address the gaze of the viewer. The effect is especially abrupt given the previous content of the video, in which Banks eschewed aggressive posturing in favor of a series of coy, cheerful expressions.

Banks's relationship with the other performers in the music video further establishes her in a position of power and allows her to confront the viewer's gaze. "212"

<sup>37</sup> Loren Kajikawa, "Eminem's 'My Name Is': Signifying Whiteness, Rearticulating Race," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3, no. 3 (2009): 357–58; Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 163.

I GUESS THAT CUNT GETTIN EATEN



**Figures 1 and 2.** Flashed lyrics of the final lines of Banks's rap; Banks's eye flare. From Azealia Banks, "212" (Sony/ATV Music), still frame from YouTube video, directed by Vincent Tsang and Paul Labonté, 12 September 2011.



**Figures 3 and 4.** Banks and Lunice dancing; Lunice looking back at Banks. From Azealia Banks, "212" (Sony/ATV Music), still frame from YouTube video, directed by Vincent Tsang and Paul Labonté, 12 September 2011.

features two men in supporting roles, played by Montréal-based producers Jacques Green, who is white, and Lunice, who is of mixed Haitian and Filipino descent. During most of his time onscreen, Lunice dances in a cheerful, gawky, often subtly effeminate manner while Banks follows just behind (see [Figure 3](#)). Lunice, who originally rose to prominence b-boying, adopts a markedly less stereotypically masculine manner of dancing and self-presentation than in his other performances and music videos.<sup>38</sup> Lunice appears oblivious of Banks's presence, while Banks, on the other hand, gazes purposefully at both him and the screen. The end of the video reinforces this dynamic: Lunice, who had previously remained oblivious of Banks's presence, sees her for the first time and appears timid (see [Figure 4](#)). That allows Banks, rather than the man, to act as the alpha.

This altered dynamic also falls far outside the conventional gender roles portrayed by mainstream hip-hop artists. Over the past two decades, rap music videos featuring female and male stars alike have consistently presented men, especially male rappers, as powerful and in possession of the dominant gaze. These figures often surround themselves with subservient, hypersexualized women (often referred to as "video vixens" or "video hoes") who often conform to strip club aesthetics.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> See, for instance: "Dancing to The Dream—Sex Intelligent Remix," YouTube video, 3:10, posted by "Lunice F. Pierre II," July 30, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2O0hLhW9ig>. B-boying is one of the most prominent forms of hip-hop dance. Often referred to as "breakdancing" or "breaking," it arose in the early 1970s among African American and Latino communities in New York City.

<sup>39</sup> *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, directed by Byron Hurt (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2006), DVD; Balaji, "Vixen Resistin."

Conversely, in her dance duet with Lunice, Banks presents herself in a strong, independent role, while Lunice, dancing to Banks's music, affects a subversive performance of masculinity that runs directly against the prevailing grain in hip-hop, as well as a variety of other Afro-diasporic music, such as soca and dancehall. Furthermore, by allowing Banks to look directly at the camera and intimidate the featured male character (who, conversely, never addresses the camera and acts submissive upon seeing Banks), the video reverses the typical dynamics of the male gaze present in most mainstream rap videos.

Banks's provocative and unavoidable incorporation of the term "cunt" particularly stands out, even in a rap sphere that regularly incorporates sexually explicit profanity. Although other female rappers who have achieved mainstream success over the past two decades have occasionally incorporated the word into their lyrics, they generally use it as a derogatory term for other women, not as an alternative word for female genitalia.<sup>40</sup> Banks uses the word in both contexts and has referred to herself and her fans as "cunts" as well. Furthermore, women rappers' videos have not highlighted the word itself in such a frequent and forceful manner as in the "212" video. Male rappers, when they incorporate the term, usually use it to disparage women or in the context of valorizing sexual violence.<sup>41</sup>

Banks, on the other hand, employs the term to validate the black female body, challenge heteronormative norms in hip-hop, and establish herself as a figure of power. In addition to allowing her to appropriate a sexual gesture that rappers often use to express power over a romantic interest, Banks's prominent and provocative use of the word "cunt" reclaims a term men commonly use to disparage women and rearticulates it as a figure of strength and control.<sup>42</sup> Her use of the word in the context of describing oral sex with another woman is also significant; Banks herself has claimed to be bisexual in a number of interviews.<sup>43</sup> Although lesbian

<sup>40</sup> Trina, in her 2012 release "I'm Back (Back 2 Business)," provides a contemporary example of a women rapper using the word "cunt" as a derogatory term for women. Nicki Minaj uses the term as a synonym for a tough woman in her 2010 song "Roman's Revenge." However, her use of "cunt" is far less overt than Banks's and does not reappear in the rest of her work. Rappers who achieved mainstream success hardly ever used the word in the 1990s, though the rest of their music included a variety of profane words.

<sup>41</sup> Examples of male rappers using the word "cunt" to disparage women include UK MC Tinie Tempah, in his 2011 release, "Lucky Cunt," and hip-hop/funk duo the Internet, in their 2011 song "Cunt." R. A. The Rugged Man provides the most notable example of a mainstream male rapper using the word "cunt" to valorize sexual violence in his song "Cunt Renaissance."

<sup>42</sup> It is also possible that Banks references cunnilingus in order to rearticulate earlier references to cunnilingus in performances by previous generations of female black R&B singers such as Millie Jackson and Denise LaSalle. See Elijah Wald, "Cocksucker Blues: A Respectful Exploration of Cunnilingus in African American Popular Song," (paper presented at EMP Pop Conference, Seattle, WA, 17 April 2015), <http://www.empmuseum.org/programs-plus-education/programs/pop-conference.aspx?t=zwald-e#Tabs>.

<sup>43</sup> Despite Banks's valorization of same-sex relations in "212" and her public self-characterization as bisexual, her public discourse on the subject has not been without its problematic elements. Most prominently, she referred to Perez Hilton as a "faggot," and upon receiving criticism from organizations such as GLAAD, she tweeted, "Really not as moved by this f word thing as u all want me to be. As a bisexual person I knew what I meant when I used that word." See C. Riley Snorton, "On the Question of 'Who's Out in Hip Hop,'" *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 16, nos. 3–4 (2014): 291–92.

rappers such as Siya have discussed their sexuality in their music, descriptions of same-sex relations are rare in the mainstream hip-hop sphere, even today.<sup>44</sup> Banks's willingness to discuss and validate sex with another woman thus distinguishes her from most mainstream female rappers and challenges prevailing heteronormative standards in hip-hop. Taken together, Banks's use of "cunt" permits her to reassert her sexuality on her own terms. To be sure, Banks's use of the term to denigrate a female rival raises potential charges of hypocrisy; despite this possibility, she has characterized the word as empowering: "To be cunt is to be feminine and to be . . . aware of yourself. Nobody's fucking with that inner strength and delicateness."<sup>45</sup>

Banks is not alone in reframing the word "cunt" as positive. Many feminist authors and publications have endorsed this project, including, most notably, *The Vagina Monologues*, whose second scene, entitled "Reclaiming Cunt," exhorts women to celebrate the word and view it in a favorable light. In the context of hip-hop, Banks's reclamation of "cunt" parallels the change in connotations associated with the word "bitch" over the past two decades. Citing Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Sexual Politics*, Stephanie Dunn notes that the term "bitch" has been revised as "Bitch" in order to signify a "hardcore woman who makes money and proudly flaunts her sexual libido . . . 'bitch' links the historical constructions of black female sexual wildness, whereas 'Bitch' suggests a woman who controls her own sexuality, manipulating it to her advantage."<sup>46</sup> Banks herself has occasionally respelled "cunt" as "kunt" on Twitter, and one of her fan pages even labels itself the "Kunt Brigade." Her use of the term ultimately allows her to reframe it as a marker of independent, empowered female identity.

Directors Tsang and Labonté contrast Banks's confrontational lyrics and demonstrations of power by subverting the traditional image of the mainstream female hip-hop artist. As Andreana Clay observes, contemporary popular music generally only allows black women to express their sexuality through "narrow constructions informed by a heterosexual (often white) male gaze."<sup>47</sup> Conversely, unlike the vast majority of previous female rappers who featured explicit lyrics, Banks does not present herself in an overtly sexualized manner. Indeed, rather than objectifying Banks, the "212" video creates a space to reverse the male gaze. It does so first by featuring extended close-ups on Banks's mouth as she delivers her lines (see Figure 5), thus eliminating her body from the frame entirely, denying the viewer the ability to see most of the parts of the female body that rap videos normally highlight and sexualize. Furthermore, Banks's choice of attire—a vintage Mickey Mouse sweater, faded torn jean shorts, and a Pippi Longstocking-style four-braid

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of gay and lesbian rappers who address the subject in their music, see Keyes, *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*; Andreana Clay, "'Like an Old Soul Record': Black Feminism, Queer Sexuality, and the Hip-Hop Generation," *Meridians* 8, no. 1 (2008): 53–73; Marquita R. Smith, "Or a Real, Real Bad Lesbian"; Snorton, "On the Question."

<sup>45</sup> Colleen Nika, "Q&A: Azealia Banks on Why the C-Word is 'Feminine,'" *Rolling Stone*, September 10, 2012, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/blogs/thread-count/azealia-banks-on-why-the-c-word-is-feminine-20120910>.

<sup>46</sup> Dunn, "Baad Bitches," 26; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 123–24.

<sup>47</sup> Clay, "Black Feminism," 54.



**Figure 5.** Closeup of the lower half of Banks's face. From Azealia Banks, "212" (Sony/ATV Music), still frame from YouTube video, directed by Vincent Tsang and Paul Labonté, 12 September 2011.

pigtail weave—eschews pointed emphasis on her body in favor of a tomboyish, youthful aesthetic that fits well within the stereotype of the 2011-era hipster.

To be sure, Banks's appearance is not entirely devoid of sexual references. Although her attire is common among certain contemporary youth cultures, it also evokes stylistic choices that many may associate with pre-adolescence. Taken together with her explicit lyrics, this image lends a striking, even shocking undertone to her performance. The camera's focus on Banks's mouth when she licks her lips lends a further overtone of sensuality to a video otherwise lacking in overtly sexualized visual elements. In the end, her performance forwards a new visual and rhetorical understanding of black female identity and sexuality—one that allows her to discuss sex in a frank, open, and queered manner while mostly escaping the kind of objectification so common in the realm of mainstream female hip-hop.

### Addressing the White Gaze

In addition to rearticulating mainstream conceptions of black female identity in hip-hop, Banks also confronts the white gaze by commenting on and critiquing white consumption of and attraction to black female artists and black cultural forms. Jacques Green, who provides the only white face in the "212" video, plays a critical role in this endeavor. During his time onscreen, Green stares at the camera with a slight smile, subtly nodding his head to the beat while Banks, facing him on the right side of the screen, raps and dances. In the beginning of the video, Banks holds a neutral pose and expression toward Green, but later on, in the A' section, Banks's actions become increasingly provocative: smiling, she dances seductively up and down his left side (see [Figure 6](#)), ending with the line "Bet you do want to fuck." In the next shot, she raps close to Green's face, ultimately lunging at his ear (see [Figure 7](#)) on the last word of the following lines:

Wonder who let you come to 1 2 /

With your doo-doo crew son /

Fuck are you into, huh?

(Words and Music by Azealia Banks and Jef Martens. © 2014 Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Yung Rapunxel Publishing, Musicallystars BV Publishing and Kaimoche Music. All Rights on behalf of Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Yung Rapunxel Publishing and Musicallystars BV Publishing. Administered by Sony/ATV Music Publishing



**Figures 6 and 7.** Banks dancing up and down Green's side; Banks rapping in Green's ear. From Azealia Banks, "212" (Sony/ATV Music), still frame from YouTube video, directed by Vincent Tsang and Paul Labonté, 12 September 2011.

LLC, 424 Church Street, Suite 1200, Nashville, TN 37219. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved.  
*Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Corporation)*

The final shot with the two ends with Banks moving back and forth in a restrained, yet recognizable approximation of intercourse. At the end of this section, she leans in towards Green on the line, "I'm a ruin you, cunt," which then immediately flashes on the screen.

This sequence of shots allows Banks to address the white gaze and simulate and comment on the enjoyment of performers like her. Green seems oblivious to Banks's presence; instead, he acts out the physical motions of listening to and enjoying music on earphones. Banks, meanwhile, simulates what he's listening to—and, perhaps, imagining. Banks faces Green, interacting with him in a purposeful, forward manner, while Green fails to notice her. As in Banks's dance with Lunice, this setup upends the traditional visual model of music videos, in which performers stay on screen while viewers get to enjoy the resulting spectacle in private, hidden from view. As the video presents it, rather than performing and having a safely anonymous listener or viewer consume her music, in these sections of the "212" video, the listener is oblivious, while Banks—the performer—knows exactly what's going on.

That a white male, particularly one dressed like Green (round glasses, plain white t-shirt), plays the part of the listener in the "212" video is particularly noteworthy. White men rarely make such prominent appearances in rap videos, and when they do, they rarely appear in attire that, like Banks's, evokes young, cosmopolitan adults. In many ways, Green stands in for the prototypical white hip-hop enthusiast—a character Banks, in turn, comments on in several significant ways. By synchronizing lines such as "Bet you do want to fuck" and "fuck are you into, huh?" with Banks's dance with Green, the music video transforms the lyrics' original meaning—which in the abstract purportedly refer to Banks's nameless rival and her boyfriend—into a comment on white male attraction to both black female sexuality and cultural practices associated with the black community.

This theme was not alien to Banks's work—indeed, she had addressed it in her previous releases, including songs such as "L8R." In a marked departure from the narratives given by most mainstream female rappers, Banks openly discussed

her relationships with white men—and their attraction to her—for years after her debut. She would address white attraction to black women in detail in the single she released immediately after “212,” “Liquorice,” which referred to “212” and suggested that the song had raised her popularity among white listeners. Banks likened herself to the eponymous candy, and, as in her earlier song, “L8R,” suggested that white men found her irresistible:

These niggas be vanilla, the chips be legitimate /  
 They just want the pumpernickel sis in the linens with 'em /  
 So since you vanilla men spend /  
 Can my hot fudge bitches get with your vanilla friends? /  
 Hey, I'm the liquorice bitch /  
 You know I'm lookin for these niggas if these niggas is rich /  
 ...  
 He got creme for ya colors and a blue eye too /  
 Hi, wanna get your number to your 212 line /  
 Maybe we can slumber, we can w-w-w-wine.

(Words and Music by Azealia Banks and Matthew Cutler. © 2012 Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, Yung Rapunxel Publishing and Warp Music Limited. All Rights on behalf of Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC and Yung Rapunxel. Publishing Administered by Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, 424 Church Street, Suite 1200, Nashville, TN 37219. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. *Reprinted by Permission of Hal Leonard Corporation*)

After the song's release, Banks was explicit about her desire to address a subject rarely encountered in black American music: “I date lots of white guys. It's still seen as slightly taboo in African American culture, but I thought, ‘Let me put this in your face and tell it how it is.’”<sup>48</sup> As she noted in an interview with BBC News, “It is a taboo among black women to desire white men, and vice versa. But if you read websites or magazines that are geared towards African American women, we're very curious about white men. And the world is becoming so mixed up now, it's happening a lot more.”<sup>49</sup> In this context, Banks not only addresses the white male gaze, but also reverses it. Furthermore, her frank discussion of white attraction to black women allows her to celebrate cross-cultural mixture and present herself as someone willing to cut against mainstream ideals and standards of the black community from which she hails, thereby validating increasingly hybrid conceptions of contemporary society.

At the same time, Banks also reverses the commonly discussed trope of black men dating white women—an action widely perceived to stem from

<sup>48</sup> Ben Olson, “The Lyrical Worker,” *GQ*, 10 April 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Mark Savage, “Sound of 2012: Azealia Banks,” *BBC News*, 4 January 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-16225186>.

Eurocentric standards of beauty and negative black female stereotypes.<sup>50</sup> By positioning herself—and black women in general—as the object of white male desire, she portrays black female sexuality and the black female body as the ultimate symbols of beauty and sex appeal. In the years after "212," Banks has continued to do so by featuring an all-black clothing aesthetic in both her music videos ("Liquorice," "Van Vogue," "Luxury," "Chasing Time," and others) and in the various covers of her first full-length album, *Broke With Expensive Taste*. In a broader sense, she constructs a positive black feminist aesthetic that answers Janell Hobson's call to "challenge dominant culture's discourse of the black body grotesque and articulate a black liberation discourse on the black body beautiful."<sup>51</sup> These actions were not lost on members of the hip-hop community. In an interview with Banks on GGN, Snoop Dogg hailed her for championing ideals of dark-skinned African American beauty: "I want to send a shout-out to you for being a, you know, chocolate diva. See, my daughter's chocolate, right? And what I want to say is they're always trying to push the chocolate, the black, to the back, right? But y'all ass step up front, let 'em know that chocolate flavor's here. See, you just stand tall and deliver, do that thing, you know what I'm sayin'? Representing for the dark side, baby."<sup>52</sup>

At the same time that Banks discusses—and often celebrates—black female relationships with white men, however, she also comments on and critiques their fascination with black cultural forms. In this context, the set of lyrics Banks directs at Green, "Wonder who let you come to 12 / With your doo-doo crew, son," takes on an additional, subtler meaning: Banks suggests that the character to whom she directs the lyrics is an outsider in the imagined space of "212." It is surely not a coincidence that the song derives its title from the Manhattan area code and makes reference to Harlem ("I was in the 212 / On the uptown A"), the New York neighborhood most strongly associated with the city's black community, where Banks herself grew up. Thus, her subtle lyrical references combine with her mastery of the hip-hop idiom in order to legitimize Banks as an insider—of Harlem, of the black community, of rap—and the character of the listener as a foreigner, albeit one who holds a lascivious fascination for her, her craft, and her backyard. Banks's final piece with Green, which ends with her delivering the line "I'm a ruin you, cunt," concludes the interaction with a simulation and declaration of dominance and power. It also reframes the song's nameless rival as the white character on screen. Once more, Banks, not the man, is aware and in control.

Banks's use of different voices and personas in the song's separate sections plays an even more significant role in this critique. Over the course of the song, Banks adopts three markedly different voices and styles. She delivers her most traditionally structured raps in the A and A' sections. In these sections, her quick, deft rap

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of Eurocentric standards of beauty and their effects on negative stereotypes of black women, see Erica Chito Childs, "Looking Beyond the Stereotypes of the 'Angry Black Woman: An Exploration of Black Women's Responses to Interracial Relationships," *Gender and Society* 19, no. 4 (2005): 544–61; Reid-Brinkley, "Black Women's Negotiation of Black Femininity," 240.

<sup>51</sup> Hobson, "Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body," 89.

<sup>52</sup> "GGN Azealia Banks Talks About Her New Projects, Twitter Trolls . . .," YouTube video, 11:00, posted by westfesttv, 9 April 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsu3qKuELE8>.



solo alternately plays against and synchronizes with the underlying “Float Your Boat” beat. Banks delivers these lines in a distinctly different accent than in her other releases. In the songs she recorded before and after “212,” she consistently employs the pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and slang of what linguists refer to as African American Vernacular English (AAVE).<sup>53</sup> Banks continues to employ grammar and vocabulary distinct to AAVE throughout “212.” At the same time, in the rap (A and A’) sections of “212,” she mostly avoids employing pronunciations associated with AAVE, choosing instead to use pronunciations not associated with vernacular dialects such as AAVE but instead hew to Standard American English (SAE).<sup>54</sup> Banks also adopts certain pronunciations associated with the California Vowel Shift.<sup>55</sup>

These linguistic differences create deliberate inconsistencies between text and sound that carry significant connotative weight. As Lauren Mason Carris observes, although the concept of “‘accent’ is a social construct, it serves as an important racializing factor that significantly impacts” the lives of racialized individuals in the United States.<sup>56</sup> Despite the fact that various Euro-descendent populations in the United States employ a wide variety of variations on SAE, and many black Americans primarily use SAE, SAE is still often associated with whiteness and upward socioeconomic mobility, whereas vernacular dialects such as AAVE are devalued and seen as incorrect.<sup>57</sup> Elements of the California Vowel Shift especially index white American populations; as Penelope Eckert notes, exaggerated use of

<sup>53</sup> Banks has consistently incorporated markers of AAVE in her raps, including aspects of AAVE pronunciation (e.g., the non-rhotic *r*; a syllabic /n/ instead of /ŋ/; /d/ at the beginning of words instead of /ð/), grammar (e.g., the absence of copula forms of “is” and “are;” expressing intention with “a,” as in “I’m a;” the auxiliary “be;” the stressed “been”), and vocabulary and slang. See *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v. “African-American Vernacular English”; Walt Wolfram, “The Grammar of Urban African American Vernacular English,” in *Morphology and Syntax*, vol. 2 of *Handbook of Varieties of English*, ed. Bernd Kortman and Edgar W. Schneider, 111–32 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004); Lisa J. Green, *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> The term “Standard American English,” despite being used by scholars from a variety of disciplines, is contested. Rosina Lippi-Green draws attention to its problematic qualities, arguing that the idea of a “standard language” is a “myth.” As a result, following syntacticians’ practice of using an asterisk “to mark utterances which are judged grammatically inauthentic,” she modifies the traditional SAE acronym as \*SAE. For purposes of simplicity in this article, however, I maintain the use of SAE rather than \*SAE. See Rosina Lippi-Green, *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 61–62. Examples of Banks’s change in pronunciation in “212” include her exaggerated rhotic *r* and use of /ð/ instead of /d/. For common pronunciations of SEA, see *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. Tom McArthur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1992] 1998), s.v. “American English.”

<sup>55</sup> See Penelope Eckert, “Where Do Ethnolects Stop?,” *International Journal of Bilingualism* 12, nos. 1–2 (2008): 25–42; Robert J. Podesva, “The California Vowel Shift and Gay Identity,” *American Speech* 86, no. 1 (2011): 32–51. Examples of Banks’s incorporation of aspects of the California vowel shift include her pronunciation of “to,” “do,” “you,” “bayou,” “dude,” and “gone,” among others.

<sup>56</sup> Lauren Mason Carris, “La voz gringa: Latino Stylization of Linguistic (In)authenticity as Social Critique,” *Discourse and Society* 22, no. 4 (2011): 475.

<sup>57</sup> As Suhanthi Motha notes, “The term AAVE is usually juxtaposed with the apparently neutral Standard English. *Standard English* often serves as a code for *White English*, with its ostensible neutrality suppressing the racialized nature of language discrimination. The tacit assumption that Standard English is racially neutral is related to the social, and particularly discursive, construction of White as neutral.” See Suhanthi Motha, *Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching: Creating*

the shift is associated with the "California white Anglo dialect," as well as the archetypal personas of Valley Girls, who act as "icons of privilege, materialism, and empty-headedness, but also national trend-setters and the embodiment of white California."<sup>58</sup> Banks's decision to perform textual AAVE using an accent associated not only with whiteness, but *stereotypical* whiteness, thus allows her to ironically comment on white fascination with black culture by subtly caricaturing the very racial group she signifies.

Banks does not maintain this posture throughout the song, however. In the song's B section, she adopts an entirely different delivery. Instead of rapping, she sings a melodic solo to the melody of the background synthesizer and changes the accent she used in the A and A' sections by pronouncing her lyrics in a manner more similar to AAVE. She also draws from African American gospel and blues inflections by using a rich, raspy timbre and incorporating slides, bends, and moans on vocables (in this case, on the word "Ayo"). This style of delivery is commonly found throughout genres of popular music developed in black American communities such as classic soul and R&B.<sup>59</sup> Banks's decision to reincorporate musical and linguistic markers associated with African American populations enables her to vocally signify an authentic black American identity and maintain a distinct black female persona that the rest of her performance avoids.

This subversive mixture of differently racialized aspects of the English language follows the hip-hop practice of what linguists have characterized as "semantic inversion" and rappers have referred to as "*flippin the script*."<sup>60</sup> As Geneva Smitherman argues, it is part of a tradition of manipulating mainstream forms of the English language that black Americans have used for centuries as they "created a communication system that became linguistically unintelligible to the oppressor, even though it was his language."<sup>61</sup> It is part of a broader set of strategies, both in "212" and in the broader sphere of hip-hop, in which rappers advance covert commentary and critiques that take the form of "hidden transcripts," or "critique[s] of power spoken behind the back of the dominant."<sup>62</sup>

"212" does not present an entirely critical or unwelcoming tone towards whiteness, however. Indeed, while the song subtly confronts the white gaze and critiques white fascination with black cultural forms, it also advances a parallel "public transcript" of openness to whiteness and deracialization that white listeners may

---

*Responsible and Ethical Anti-Racist Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2014), 124; Yancy, *Black Bodies*, 35–36.

<sup>58</sup> Eckert, "Where Do Ethnolects Stop?", 29.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Legg, "A Taxonomy of Musical Gesture in African American Gospel Music," *Popular Music* 29, no. 1 (2010): 103–29.

<sup>60</sup> Geneva Smitherman, "'The Chain Remain the Same': Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation," *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997): 17.

<sup>61</sup> Smitherman, "Communicative Practices," 17; Grace Holt, "'Inversion' in Black Communication," in *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in Urban Black America*, ed. Thomas Kochman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, [1972] 1997): 152–59.

<sup>62</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xii; Martin Lamotte, "Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-Hop and Resistance in the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 2 (2014): 689.

find appealing.<sup>63</sup> The song accomplishes this in several ways. First, at the same time that directors Tsang and Labonté comment on Green's character's presence, the figure also functions as an avatar for the white male viewer, who gets to imagine himself in Green's place and who may not play close attention to Banks's less direct commentary. This placement allows the white viewer to feel invited into the space the "212" music video evokes—a space, significantly, that lacks overtly racialized visual markers other than the actors themselves, who come from diverse racial backgrounds. Taken together, the music, clothing, characters, and title "212," which refers to all of Manhattan, create a less openly racialized space than in videos by black hip-hop artists, who often emphasize symbols of black authenticity. Filmed in Montréal, the scenes presented in "212" could take place in any number of densely populated North American cities. Moreover, other than Banks's subtle references to Harlem ("on the uptown A"), her lyrics avoid explicit references to race. The instrumental background, whose sparse electronic beat departs markedly from much mainstream hip-hop, further avoids evoking styles explicitly coded as black in the American musical sphere.<sup>64</sup> Finally, Banks's attire, which adopts a style more appropriate for a stereotype of a party in Williamsburg, Brooklyn than a conventional rap music video, evokes an aesthetic more commonly associated with alternative (and often white) twenty-something culture than hip-hop stars such as Kim and Minaj. Not coincidentally, music and news publications found this image irresistible: UK newspaper *The Telegraph* declared that Banks had "set hipster hearts aflame," *The Fader* called her "unbearably cute," and *New Musical Express* proclaimed her the "coolest person" of 2011.<sup>65</sup>

Banks's approach of conveying the impression of a deracialized persona to white listeners as a means of gaining white fans follows an approach used by black politicians in majority-white districts, who pursue a strategy of deracialization in order to secure white votes. This practice is part of a broader phenomenon in recent racial politics that demands that "blacks seeking access to white spaces should be mainstream, articulate, and clean-cut, black but not too black, friendly, upbeat, and accommodating."<sup>66</sup> In the context of "212," it ultimately amounts to what may have been a perverse—or ingenious—marketing strategy. It addresses a common dilemma aspiring rappers face: hip-hop's "ambiguity between its inherent secrecy as a hidden transcript, and the task of becoming public in order to reach a larger audience and express emotions to others."<sup>67</sup> By both adopting and subtly subverting markers of whiteness, Banks is able to both gain followers among white listeners, who constitute a hugely profitable section of the market for hip-hop, while at the same time advancing a subtler critique of those same listeners' practices. In so

<sup>63</sup> Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 45.

<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which rappers have employed musical elements in order to generate specific racial connotations, see Kajikawa, "Eminem's 'My Name Is,'" 354.

<sup>65</sup> Neil McCormick, "Azealia Banks: New Face," *The Telegraph*, 23 November 2011; Patrick Lyons, "Video: Azealia Banks, '212,'" *The Fader*, 13 October 2011, <http://www.thefader.com/2011/10/13/video-azealia-banks-212/>.

<sup>66</sup> Enid Logan, "Barack Obama, the New Politics of Race, and Classed Constructions of Racial Blackness" *The Sociological Quarterly* 55, no.4 (2014): 654.

<sup>67</sup> Lamotte, "Rebels Without a Pause," 690.

doing, Banks harnesses the power of the white gaze to her own ends, thus "flipping the script" on a force that has historically worked in the other direction.

### Hip-hop and the White Gaze in "Post-Racial" America

Banks's decision to signify, at least on the surface, an open and welcoming attitude towards black-white relations, reflects a broader moment of optimism in American culture regarding racial progress. At the time of the song's release (2011), figures from a variety of backgrounds had heralded events such as the historic election of the United States' first black president as evidence that the nation had reached a fundamental turning point in its long history of racism and discrimination. Scholars and journalists from a wide range of backgrounds began to speak of the United States as a "post-racial" society and pointed to Barack Obama as "the harbinger of a new dawn in race relations" whose election proved that "the bad old days of 'real racism' were in the distant past and that the nation had achieved remarkable progress with regard to race."<sup>68</sup> A variety of rappers released songs in celebration of the moment, leading Travis L. Gosa to declare Obama "the first hip-hop president."<sup>69</sup> Banks's celebratory tone towards black-white relationships and US society's increasingly hybrid (in her words, "mixed-up") nature point to a further positive outlook regarding the country's increasingly diverse populace. Writing in 2008, Shanette M. Harris cautiously praised developments such as a greater emphasis on "pluralism, diversity, and multiculturalism" in certain sectors of American society as offering great potential for African Americans.<sup>70</sup>

These optimistic attitudes were not destined to last. Few events punctured the myth of a "post-racial" United States more acutely than the killings of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, which generated a wave of protests and brutal police responses across the country. For many, their deaths, along with the less-publicized killings of countless other unarmed black men and women, acted as reminders that the United States' legacy of white supremacy was nowhere near being overcome. George Yancy lamented that the country's "national discourse regarding Trayvon Martin and questions of race have failed to produce a critical and historically conscious discourse that sheds light on what it means to be black in an anti-black America," and maintained that the white gaze continued to privilege whiteness and devalue blackness.<sup>71</sup>

Hip-hop has acted as a primary site of opposition in American popular culture. In both their songs and public rhetoric, a wide variety of rappers expressed solidarity with protestors and condemned chronically unpunished police violence against black men and women. Writing in *The Guardian* in November 2014, Lanre Bakare argued that "at a time when some have questioned the state of black leadership after

<sup>68</sup> Logan, "Barack Obama," 663. See also Michael Crowley, "Post-Racial," *New Republic*, 12 March 2008, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/post-racial>.

<sup>69</sup> Travis L. Gosa, "Not Another Remix: How Obama Became the First Hip-Hop President," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22, no. 4 (2010): 389–415.

<sup>70</sup> Harris, "Lifting the Veil," 44.

<sup>71</sup> George Yancy, "Walking While Black in the 'White Gaze,'" *New York Times*, 1 September 2013, [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/walking-while-black-in-the-white-gaze/?\\_r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/walking-while-black-in-the-white-gaze/?_r=0).

Ferguson, hip-hop artists have proved to be—on the whole—a reliable, informed and engaged alternative to traditional ‘community leaders.’”<sup>72</sup> Hip-hop even served as a site for the families of the deceased to express their reactions: Eric Garner’s daughter and brother, for instance, released a rap song entitled “This Ends Today.” On 3 December 2014, in the wake of the grand jury decision that failed to indict the officer who killed Garner, Banks expressed worry for the safety of black men and declared on Twitter that the matter “hurts deep deep down.”<sup>73</sup>

Not all figures in hip-hop chose to address these matters, however. Notably absent from the discussion was white Australian rapper Iggy Azalea (b. 1990), who in 2014 broke the record for longest-lasting number one on the *Billboard* Hot 100 by a female rapper with her hit single “Fancy.” Banks responded to this development with an entirely more public and confrontational tone than in releases such as “212.” On Twitter, Banks called Azalea out for her ongoing silence, proclaiming, “it’s funny to see people Like Igloo Australia silent when these things happen . . . Black Culture is cool, but black issues sure aren’t huh?”<sup>74</sup> Their dispute soon gained greater publicity in the wake of a December 2014 interview on New York City radio station Hot 97 between Banks and DJs Ebro Darden, Laura Stylez, and Peter Rosenberg.<sup>75</sup> In the interview, Banks accused Azalea of embodying white exploitation of black culture: “Here’s the thing with Iggy Azalea. In this country, whenever it comes to our things, like black issues or black politics or black music, or whatever, there’s always this undercurrent of, kind of like a ‘fuck you,’ there’s always like a ‘fuck y’all niggas,’ like y’all don’t really own shit, like you don’t really have shit, you know what I’m saying?”<sup>76</sup> Declaring that Azalea’s music was inferior to releases by black women rappers, Banks labeled Azalea’s success, along with accolades received by other white rappers such as Macklemore, as undeserved and demeaning to black artists: “It’s like a cultural smudging, is what I see. And when they give these Grammys out, all it says to white kids is ‘Oh, you’re great, you’re amazing, you can do whatever you put your mind to,’ and what it says to black kids is ‘you don’t have shit, you don’t own shit, not even the shit you created for yourself.’ And it makes me upset.”<sup>77</sup> Banks characterized Azalea’s popularity as part of a broader phenomenon in the United States of white appropriation of black musical production, arguing, “they’re trying to erase us. Like, all of our, like, books and scriptures and everything, like everything we’re supposed to know about ourselves is like, gone.”<sup>78</sup>

This was not the first time Banks had feuded publicly with Azalea (born Amethyst Amelia Kelly), whom Banks had earlier accused of stealing her stage name. In February 2012, Banks expressed displeasure on Twitter with Azalea’s selection

<sup>72</sup> Lanre Bakare, “‘We Are Michael Brown’s Family’: How Rap and R&B Stars Responded to the Ferguson Protest,” *The Guardian*, 27 November 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/27/michael-brown-rap-stars-responded-ferguson-protest>.

<sup>73</sup> Banks, Twitter post, 3 December 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Banks, Twitter post, 3 December 2014.

<sup>75</sup> “Azealia Banks Goes Off on TI, Iggy + Black Music Being Smudged Out.”

<sup>76</sup> “Azealia Banks Goes Off on TI, Iggy + Black Music Being Smudged Out.”

<sup>77</sup> “Azealia Banks Goes Off on TI, Iggy + Black Music Being Smudged Out.”

<sup>78</sup> “Azealia Banks Goes Off on TI, Iggy + Black Music Being Smudged Out.”

as the first female rapper for the cover of *XXL* magazine's annual "Freshman" issue and asked how the publication could "endorse a white woman who called herself a 'runaway slave master'."<sup>79</sup> In the statement, Banks made reference to Azalea's song "D.R.U.G.S.," in which Azalea declared, "When it really starts / I'm a runaway slave master" and pantomimed cracking a whip in the accompanying music video. Banks has also drawn attention to Azalea's rap delivery, which departs from her native Australian accent and approximates the pronunciation of variants of AAVE common in the Southern United States—a performance Brittney Cooper declared "almost convincingly mimics the sonic register of a downhome Atlanta girl."<sup>80</sup> Many have taken issue with this choice of vocal delivery. Arthur Chu likened Azalea's accent to "verbal blackface," and Amy Zimmerman declared that her performance shared "some essential genetic code with the old-school American minstrel show."<sup>81</sup> Cooper drew attention to the endemic disparity between black and white female performers in hip-hop, arguing that:

Iggy profits from the cultural performativity and forms of survival that Black women have perfected, without having to encounter and deal with the social problem that is the Black female body, with its perceived excesses, unruliness, loudness and lewdness. If she existed in hip hop at a moment when Black women could still get play, where it would take more than one hand to count all the mainstream Black women rap artists, I would have no problem. Iggy would be one among the many. But in this moment, she represents a problem of co-optation.<sup>82</sup>

With the exception of the "runaway slave master" lyric, for which she later apologized, Azalea has for the most part rejected claims of racism and appropriation. She responded to Banks's criticism on Twitter by declaring:

There are many black artists succeeding in all genres. The reason you haven't is because of your piss poor attitude. Your inability to be responsible for your own mistakes, bullying others, the inability to be humble or have self-control. It's YOU! You created your own unfortunate situation by being a bigot and don't have the mental capacity to realize yet. Probably never will. Now! rant, Make it racial! make it political! Make it whatever but I guarantee it won't make you likable & THATS why ur crying on the radio.<sup>83</sup>

This statement follows a rhetorical strategy Azalea has adopted throughout her career, in which she has consistently played down the advantages she received as a white woman and dismissed accusations of being insufficiently political. In a 2013 interview with *Complex*, she characterized charges of inauthenticity as "retarded," proclaiming, "I don't think the voice makes me fake; it makes me an artist. Voice

<sup>79</sup> Banks, Twitter post, 28 February 2012.

<sup>80</sup> Brittney Cooper, "Iggy Azalea's Post-Racial Mess: America's Oldest Race Tale, Remixed." *Salon*, 15 July 2014. [http://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/iggy\\_azaleas\\_post\\_racial\\_mess\\_americas\\_oldest\\_race\\_tale\\_remixed/](http://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/iggy_azaleas_post_racial_mess_americas_oldest_race_tale_remixed/).

<sup>81</sup> Arthur Chu, "Kanye West vs. White Mediocrity: The Real Story Behind Beck, Beyoncé and 'SNL' 40," *Salon*, 17 February 2015, [http://www.salon.com/2015/02/17/kanye\\_west\\_vs\\_white\\_mediocrity\\_the\\_real\\_story\\_behind\\_beck\\_beyonce\\_and\\_snl\\_40/](http://www.salon.com/2015/02/17/kanye_west_vs_white_mediocrity_the_real_story_behind_beck_beyonce_and_snl_40/); Amy Zimmerman, "The Cultural Crimes of Iggy Azalea," *The Daily Beast*, 29 December 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/12/29/the-cultural-crimes-of-iggy-azalea.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Cooper, "Iggy Azalea's Post-Racial Mess."

<sup>83</sup> Iggy Azalea, Twitter post, 19 December 2014.

is my medium. I should have creative rein to do whatever the fuck I want with it.”<sup>84</sup> She declared that black individuals who take issue with her should “start a rap career and give it a go, too. I’m not taking anyone’s spot, so make yourself a mixtape. Or maybe if you’re black, start singing like a country singer and be a white person. I don’t know. Why is it such a big deal? This is the entertainment industry. It’s not politics.”

It would be easy to write off Azalea’s statements as hopelessly naïve. But she is far from alone in these sentiments. They are part of the broader phenomenon of “color-blind” ideology, which masks or denies outright the effects of racism and the advantages of white privilege. In the post–civil rights era, despite the enduring persistence of race-based discrimination, it has become the dominant philosophy regarding race in the United States.<sup>85</sup> It endures in contemporary perceptions of a “post-racial” United States, where adherents argue that race, if not irrelevant, continues to be less and less of a hindrance to black safety and success than individual or cultural shortcomings. Color-blind ideology has even penetrated the hip-hop sphere: rapper T. I. responded to critics of his decision to produce Azalea rather than a black woman by lamenting, “I can’t believe we’re at a place in America where we still see color.”<sup>86</sup> Banks and Azalea’s dispute ultimately mirrors a broader contemporary debate on the legitimacy of post-racial politics, in which those who seek to reassert the persistence of racism are met with claims of decreased racial discrimination and the idea that, fundamentally, opportunity exists in relatively equal amounts for all Americans, regardless of color.

Artists such as Banks offer promising potential templates for addressing these issues. Her performance in “212” advances a timely critique of systemic sexism, racism, and appropriation in the American popular music sphere and situates herself as a novel figure within hip-hop’s rich history of black female rappers speaking truth to power. The more critical qualities of Banks’s performance, however, are often lost on “color-blind” hip-hop fans and musicians such as Iggy Azalea, who may overlook the music’s hidden transcript of resistance in favor of its public transcript of provocative sexuality and openness to whites. This gap in understanding in turn reflects an entrenched division within the realm of hip-hop, in which black artists who emphasize hip-hop’s essentially political qualities have to contend with white artists and fans who more often view it as entertainment. Why bother to examine

<sup>84</sup> Justin Monroe, “Iggy Azalea: ‘The Low End Theory’ (2013 Cover Story),” *Complex*, 16 September 2013, <http://www.complex.com/music/2013/09/iggy-azalea-interview-complex-cover-story/page/1>.

<sup>85</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 171; Bonilla-Silva argues that color-blind ideology, or “color-blind racism,” “is characterized by a focus on culture rather than biology as well as by the abstract extension of elements of liberalism to justify racial inequality.” See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 194.

<sup>86</sup> Bené Viera, “T. I.’s New Found Colorblindness For Iggy Azalea,” *Bené Viera*, 10 July 2014, <http://beneviera.com/2014/07/10/ti-colorblind-iggy-azalea/>. Banks has called out T. I. repeatedly for his support for Azalea, calling him in her *Hot 97* interview a “shoe-shining coon.”

a musical tradition's critical elements if one primarily conceives of it as a source of titillation and amusement?

Barring a concerted effort on the part of white fans and musicians to take black artists seriously on a political level, this phenomenon will surely persist. Black female cultural innovators remain stubbornly reduced to, in the words of Jessica Care Moore, "hip-hop cheerleaders," cheering "from the sidelines of a stage [they] built."<sup>87</sup> Indeed, although overt, explicit forms of white supremacy have largely faded from public discourse, they continue in subtler and more entrenched forms. And although one would be remiss to disregard meaningful gains in racial progress over the past several decades, as long as deeper, more structural dehumanization of black bodies and devaluing of black voices endure, these issues will continue unabated. Recent events should make it clear that there is still much to be done.

## References

### Books and Articles

- Bakare, Lanre. "We are Michael Brown's Family': How Rap and R&B Stars Responded to the Ferguson Protest." *The Guardian*, 27 November 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/27/michael-brown-rap-stars-responded-ferguson-protest>.
- Balaji, Murali. "Vixen Resistin': Redefining Black Womanhood in Hip-Hop Music Videos." *Journal of Black Studies* 41, no. 1 (2010): 5–20.
- Beal, Frances M. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female." In *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara, 90–100. New York: New American Library, [1970] 1979.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- . *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.
- Carley, Brennan. "Azealia Banks Pays Homage to Rap Greats in 'Chasing Time' Video." *Spin*, 13 November 2014. <http://www.spin.com/articles/azealia-banks-chasing-time-music-video/>.
- Carris, Lauren Mason. "La voz gringa: Latino Stylization of Linguistic (In)authenticity as Social Critique," *Discourse and Society* 22, no. 4 (2011): 474–90.
- Childs, Erica Chito. "Looking Beyond the Stereotypes of the 'Angry Black Woman': An Exploration of Black Women's Responses to Interracial Relationships." *Gender and Society* 19, no. 4 (2005): 544–61.
- Chu, Arthur. "Kanye West vs. White Mediocrity: The Real Story Behind Beck, Beyoncé and 'SNL' 40." *Salon*, 17 February 2015. <http://www.salon.com/2015/>

<sup>87</sup> Originally cited in Cooper, "Iggy Azalea's Post-Racial Mess."



- 02/17/kanye\_west\_vs\_white\_mediocrity\_the\_real\_story\_behind\_beck\_beyonce\_and\_snl\_40/.
- Clay, Andreana. "Like an Old Soul Record: Black Feminism, Queer Sexuality, and the Hip-Hop Generation." *Meridians* 8, no. 1 (2008): 53–73.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . "Reply to Commentaries: Black Sexual Politics Revisited." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 9, no. 1 (2008): 68–85.
- Cooper, Brittney. "Iggy Azalea's Post-Racial Mess: America's Oldest Race Tale, Remixed." *Salon*, 15 July 2014. [http://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/iggy\\_azaleas\\_post\\_racial\\_mess\\_americas\\_oldest\\_race\\_tale\\_remixed/](http://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/iggy_azaleas_post_racial_mess_americas_oldest_race_tale_remixed/).
- Crowley, Michael. "Post-Racial." *New Republic*, 12 March 2008. <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/post-racial>.
- Davis, Olga. "Theorizing African American Women's Discourse: The Public and Private Spheres of Experience." In *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse*, ed. Marsha Houston and Olga Idriss Davis, 35–52. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press 2002.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: The Modern Library, [1903] 1993.
- Dunn, Stephanie. *"Baad Bitches" and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
- Durham, Aisha, Brittney C. Cooper, and Susana M. Morris. "The Stage Hip-Hop Feminism Built: A New Directions Essay." *Signs* 38, no. 3 (2013): 721–37.
- Eckert, Penelope. "Where Do Ethnolects Stop?" *International Journal of Bilingualism* 12, nos. 1–2 (2008): 25–42.
- Emerson, Rana A. "'Where My Girls At?': Negotiating Black Womanhood in Music Videos." *Gender and Society* 16, no. 1 (2002): 115–35.
- Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, [1952] 1967.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. 2nd ed. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House, [1975] 1995.
- Gardner, Bettye J. and Kilkenny Niani. "In Vogue: Josephine Baker and Black Culture and Identity in the Jazz Age." *Journal of African American History* 93, no. 1 (2008): 88–93.
- Gosa, Travis L. "Not Another Remix: How Obama Became the First Hip-Hop President." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 22, no. 4 (2010): 389–415.
- Green, Lisa J. *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Haugen, Jason D. "'Unladylike Divas': Language, Gender, and Female Gangsta Rappers." *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 4 (2003): 429–44.
- Harris, Shanette M. "Lifting the Veil: African American Images and the European American Gaze." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 9, no. 1 (2008): 32–51.
- Hobson, Janell. "The 'Batty' Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body." *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (2003): 87–105.
- Hogan, Marc. "Azealia Banks: Fantasea." *Pitchfork*, last updated 23 July 2012. <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/16950-azealia-banks-fantasea/>.

- Holt, Grace. "'Inversion' in Black Communication." In *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in Urban Black America*, ed. Thomas Kochman, 152–59. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, [1972] 1997.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.
- Hunter, Margaret. "Shake It Baby, Shake It: Consumption and the New Gender Relation in Hip-Hop." *Sociological Perspectives* 54, no. 1 (2011): 15–36.
- Kajikawa, Loren. "Eminem's 'My Name Is': Signifying Whiteness, Rearticulating Race." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 3, no. 3 (2009): 341–63.
- Keyes, Cheryl. *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Krishnamurthy, Sowmya. "Act Like U Know: Azealia Banks." *XXL*, last updated 16 February 2012. [www.xxlmag.com/entry/view/id/8765#bmb=1](http://www.xxlmag.com/entry/view/id/8765#bmb=1).
- Lamotte, Martin. "Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-Hop and Resistance in the City." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Resistance* 38, no. 2 (2014): 686–94.
- Legg, Andrew. "A Taxonomy of Musical Gesture in African American Gospel Music." *Popular Music* 29, no. 1 (2010): 103–29.
- Lippi-Green, Rosina. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Logan, Enid. "Barack Obama, the New Politics of Race, and Classed Constructions of Racial Blackness." *Sociological Quarterly* 55, no. 4 (2014): 653–82.
- Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press, [1993] 2013.
- Lyons, Patrick. "Video: Azealia Banks, '212.'" *The Fader*, last updated 13 October 2011. <http://www.thefader.com/2011/10/13/video-azealia-banks-212/>.
- McArthur, Tom, ed. *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1992] 1998.
- McCormick, Neil. "Azealia Banks: New Face." *The Telegraph*, 23 November 2011.
- Monroe, Justin. "Iggy Azalea: 'The Low End Theory' (2013 Cover Story)." *Complex*, 16 September 2013. <http://www.complex.com/music/2013/09/iggy-azalea-interview-complex-cover-story/page/1>.
- Morgan, Joan and Faedra Chatard Carpenter. "An Interview with Joan Morgan." *Callaloo* 29, no. 3 (2006): 764–72.
- Motha, Suhanthie. *Race, Empire, and English Language Teaching: Creating Responsible and Ethical Anti-Racist Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2014.
- Nika, Colleen. "Q&A: Azealia Banks on Why the C-Word is 'Feminine.'" *Rolling Stone*, last updated 10 September 2012. <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/blogs/thread-count/azealia-banks-on-why-the-c-word-is-feminine-20120910>.
- Nowatzki, Robert. *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010.
- Olson, Ben. "The Lyrical Worker." *GQ*, last updated 10 April 2012.
- Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Oware, Matthew. "A 'Man's Woman'? Contradictory Messages in the Songs of Female Rappers, 1992–2000." *Journal of Black Studies* 39, no. 5 (2009): 786–802.

- Perry, Imani. "Who(se) am I? The Identity and Image of Women in Hip-Hop." In *Gender, Race, and Class in Media*, ed. Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, 136–48. 2nd ed. London: Sage, 2003.
- Podesva, Robert J. "The California Vowel Shift and Gay Identity." *American Speech* 86, no. 1 (2011): 32–51.
- Pullen, Kirsten. *Like a Natural Woman: Spectacular Female Performance in Classical Hollywood*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014.
- Reid-Brinkley, Shanara R. "The Essence of Res(ex)pectability: Black Women's Negotiation of Black Femininity in Rap Music and Music Video." *Meridians* 8, no. 1 (2008): 236–60.
- Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994.
- Savage, Mark. "Sound of 2012: Azealia Banks." *BBC News*, last updated 4 January 2012. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-16225186>.
- Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Smith, Marquita R. "'Or a Real, Real Bad Lesbian': Nicki Minaj and the Acknowledgement of Queer Desire in Hip-Hop Culture." *Popular Music and Society* 37, no. 3 (2014): 360–70.
- Smitherman, Geneva. "'The Chain Remain the Same': Communicative Practices in the Hip Hop Nation." *Journal of Black Studies* 28, no. 1 (1997): 3–25.
- Snorton, C. Riley. "On the Question of 'Who's Out in Hip Hop.'" *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 16, nos. 3–4 (2014): 283–302.
- Viera, Bené. "T. I.'s New Found Colorblindness for Iggy Azalea." *Bené Viera*. 10 July 2014. <http://beneviera.com/2014/07/10/ti-colorblind-iggy-azalea/>.
- Wald, Elijah. "Cocksucker Blues: A Respectful Exploration of Cunnilingus in African American Popular Song." Paper presented at EMP Pop Conference, Seattle, WA, 17 April 2015. <http://www.empmuseum.org/programs-plus-education/programs/pop-conference.aspx?t=zwald-e#Tabs>.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. New York: Vintage Books, [1994] 2001.
- White, Theresa Renee. "Missy 'Misdemeanor' Elliott and Nicki Minaj: Fashionist' Black Female Sexuality in Hip-Hop Culture—Girl Power or Overpowered?" *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 6 (2013): 607–26.
- Wolfram, Walt. "The Grammar of Urban African American Vernacular English." In *Morphology and Syntax. Vol. 2 of Handbook of Varieties of English*, ed. Bernd Kortman and Edgar W. Schneider, 111–32. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004.
- Yancy, George. *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.
- . "Walking While Black in the 'White Gaze.'" *New York Times*, 1 September 1 2013. [http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/walking-while-black-in-the-white-gaze/?\\_r=0](http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/09/01/walking-while-black-in-the-white-gaze/?_r=0).
- Zimmerman, Amy. "The Cultural Crimes of Iggy Azalea." *The Daily Beast*, 29 December 2014. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/12/29/the-cultural-crimes-of-iggy-azalea.html>.

## Media

- Azalea, Iggy. Twitter post, 19 December 2014, 12:46 a.m. <https://twitter.com/IGGYAZALEA>.
- "AZEALIA BANKS—212 FT. LAZY JAY." YouTube video, 3:25. Posted by "Azealia Banks." 12 September 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3Jv9fNPjgk>.
- "Azealia Banks—L8R." YouTube video, 1:34. Posted by "Azealia Banks." 23 September 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tP-4m4b3tA>.
- "Azealia Banks—Liquorice (Explicit)." YouTube video, 3:47. Posted by "AzealiaBanksVEVO." 8 August 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZlWRhnYgWcc>.
- "Azealia Banks Goes Off on TI, Iggy + Black Music Being Smudged Out." YouTube video, 47:29. 18 December 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFDS-VEEl6w>.
- Banks, Azealia. *1991*. Polydor; Interscope Records B0017001–22, 2012.
- . *Broke With Expensive Taste*. Prospect Park; Caroline Records 8 13985 01248 3, 2014.
- . Twitter post, 28 February 2012, 9:48 a.m. <https://twitter.com/AZEALIABANKS>.
- . Twitter post, 10 July 2014, 11:26 a.m. <https://twitter.com/AZEALIABANKS>.
- . Twitter post, 3 December 2014, 3:09 p.m. <https://twitter.com/AZEALIABANKS>.
- . Twitter post. 3 December 2014, 4:18 p.m. <https://twitter.com/AZEALIABANKS>.
- "Dancing to The Dream—Sex Intelligent Remix." YouTube video, 3:10. Posted by "Lunice F. Pierre II," 30 July 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o2O0hhlhW9ig>.
- "GN Azealia Banks Talks About Her New Projects, Twitter Trolls & More." YouTube video, 10:59. Posted by "westfesttv." 9 April 2013. = [bsu3qKuElE8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsu3qKuElE8).
- Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*. DVD. Directed by Byron Hurt. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2006.
- "Iggy Azalea—D.R.U.G.S. (feat. YG 400)." YouTube video, 2:16. Posted by "TeamIggyAzalea." 15 February 2013. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTb6m6n\\_i8o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTb6m6n_i8o).
- The Internet. *Purple Naked Ladies*. Odd Future; Sony Records 88691922492, 2011.
- Minaj, Nicki. *Pink Friday*. Universal Motown B0015021–02, 2010.
- R. A. The Rugged Man. *Legendary Classics, Volume 1*. Green Streets Entertainment GSE-724, 2009.
- "Tinie Tempah—Lucky Cunt (Ft. Big Sean)." YouTube video, 3:39. Posted by "BigSeanOfficial." 2 December 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4fKZ2ukdgs>.
- "Trina—I'm Back (Back 2 Business)." YouTube video, 3:09. Posted by "TrinaofficialTV." 22 August 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6P5ZqwWJaL0>.