

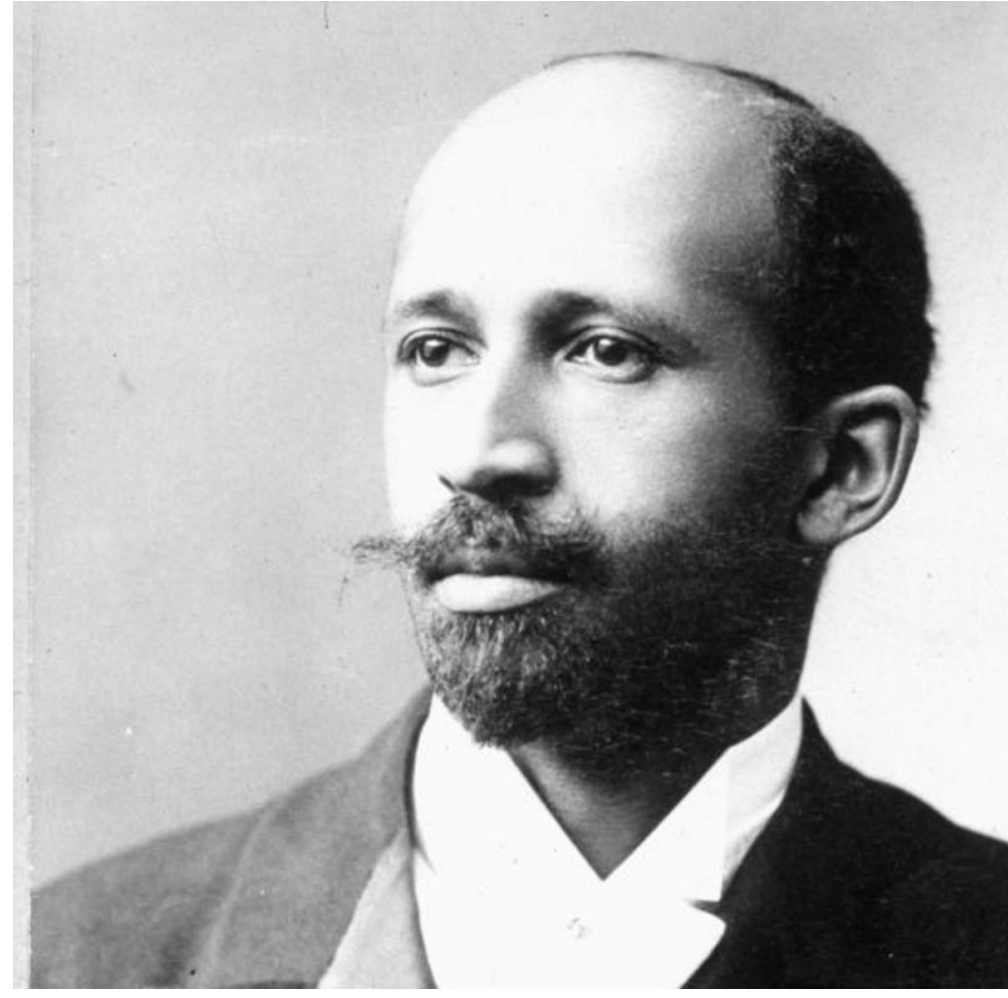
Azealia Banks vs. Cardi B: The Great Debate, Evolved

Who gets to define blackness?

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Introduction

- This study discusses the unanswerable question of *who gets to define blackness?* and how this question has evolved and complicated in America over the last hundred years.
- The struggle of what constitutes a legitimate black identity in contemporary society has roots in The Great Debate, which in this study concerns discourse between W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey.
- I explore this struggle by looking at the public feud played out in social media and interviews between two female hip-hop artists, Azealia Banks (African-American) and Cardi B (Dominican, Afro-Caribbean).
- The feud ignited when Azealia Banks called Cardi B a “*caricature of a black woman*” and an “*untalented, illiterate rat*” on the nationally syndicated radio show, The Breakfast Club.
- I consider their feud as it unfolds and juxtapose it with the feud carried out between W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey in their respective newspapers, the *Critic* and the *Negro World*.
- My goal is to provide insight into the age-old struggle over *who defines* and *what it means to be black*, and how this has played out in past and present discourse.



Methods + Theoretical Frameworks

- Critical analysis of three social media posts from Instagram, Twitter and Facebook Live, as well as transcriptions from three interviews.
- The Stance Triangle by Du Bois**
 - A social actor evaluates an object, assigns it value, and takes a stance towards it.
 - Epistemic stance: “I know”
 - Affective stance: “I feel”
- The Linguistic Marketplace by Pierre Bourdieu**
 - Bourdieu maintains that utterances aren’t just meant to be understood, but are also signs of wealth to be evaluated and appreciated.
 - Certain language varieties are more ‘profitable’ than others.
 - The linguistic marketplace involves language ideologies that characterize some varieties as powerless and others as authoritative.
- Notions of:
 - Habitus*: We are born into circumstances, and that environment shapes who we can be.
 - Hexis*: More about physicality (e.g., accented speech).
- Chronotopes by Bakhtin + Chrontopic Identities by Blommaert + de Fina**
 - Chronotope literally means “time-space.”
 - Chronotopes are imbued with language ideologies and evaluations; they organize what kinds of identities can occur in particular time-space configurations.
 - Chronotopic identity construction leans into this inseparability, providing time-space ‘coordinates’ to a constructed identity.



Analysis

DJ Envy = DJ Azealia Banks = AB Charlamagne tha God = CG

1 DJ: Well- Did you call Cardi B a:: illiterate uh:: what is it (.) untalented rat?

2 AB: I did

3 DJ: %Why?%

4 AB: I feel like maybe two years ago the conversation surrounding Black women's

5 culture was really reaching an all time high=

6 =and we were really like (.) discu:ssing:: (.) y'know our power amongst ourselves

7 and

8 y'know=

9 Beyonce came out with Lemonade::de and like (.)=

10 =there was just this really really really intelligent conversation going on nationally

11 and then (0.2) everything just kinda changed and (.) then it was like (1.0) **slaps*

12 *hand on table*= ((cut in editing))*

13 *=I'm just talking about like this caricature (.) you get what I mean=*

14 *=this caricature of a Black woman that Black women themselves would never be*

15 *able to get away with (.) y'know*

16 Like if my spelling and grammar was that bad (.) ((cut in editing))

17 Just don't understand how we go from (.) Beyonce and Lemonade and Solange

18 and

19 all these like great conversations- Black Lives Matter- all of these conversations

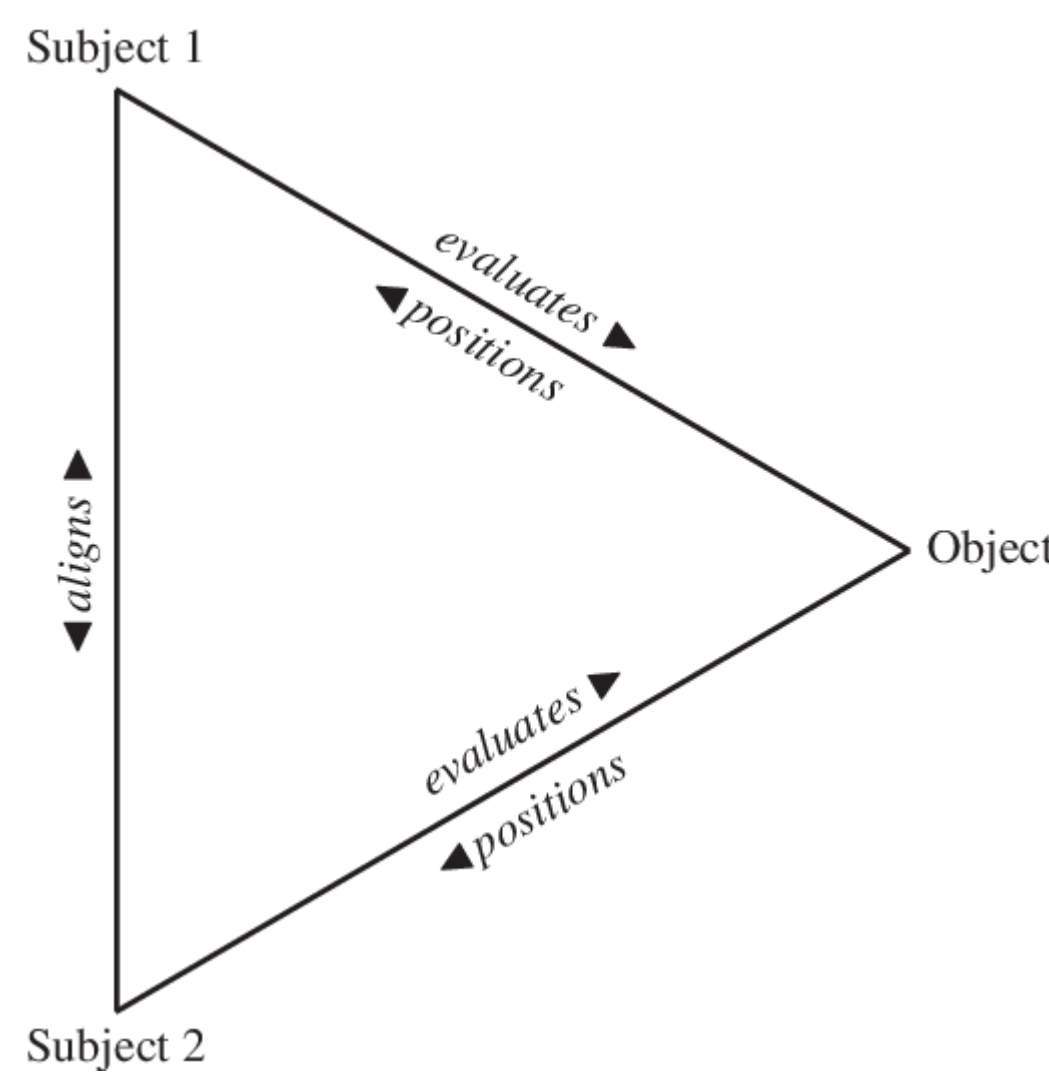
20 to like (.) **slaps hand on table* (.)* this

CG: But Black women aren't monolithic though either right?

AB: I know we're not monolithic but c'mon



iamcardib • Beyoncé ? Wasn't Beyonce the same woman she was talking s about and dragging all over the media? I'm from the hood I speak how I speak I am how I am.I did not choose to be famous people choose me !People followed me on Instagram and the people gave me a platform to introduce my talent .I never asked to be a example or a role model I don't want to change my ways because I'm famous that's why I just mind my business .This is coming from a woman that bleached her skin but want to advocate. GOODBYE .Im not apologizing or killing myself because of who I am.



I don't got to tell you that I'm black. I expect you to know it. When my father taught me about Caribbean countries, he told me that these Europeans took over our lands. That's why we all speak different languages. I expect people to understand that just because we're not African American, we are still black. It's still in our culture. Just like everybody else, we came over here the same f*cking way. I hate when people try to take my roots from me. Because we know that there's African roots inside of us. I really just want people to understand that the color that I have and features that I have are not from two white people f*cking.

Research Questions

- Who gets to define blackness? Why is this important?
- How has this question evolved in public discourse over time?
- What ‘authentic’ or ‘legitimate’ presentations of blackness are ‘accepted’ by in-group members?
- What reasoning is used when accepting certain constructions of black identity presentations over others?

Discussion

- The defining features of colorism, intellectualism, and a ‘legitimate’ black habitus within white-dominated society are the primary points of contention as it concerns ‘authentic’ black presentation.
- Azealia Banks challenges Cardi B’s blackness in calling her a “caricature of a black woman that black women themselves could never get away with.”
- Cardi B challenges Azealia Banks’ ability to advocate for definitions of blackness because of her history with skin bleaching.
- On the one hand, there is a historical parallel between Azealia Banks and W.E.B. DuBois and their belief that intellect is paramount to the progression of black people (i.e., DuBois’ investment in the ‘Talented Tenth’ and Banks’ quote, “Like if my spelling and grammar was that bad? I’d be cancelled”).
- On the other hand, both Cardi B and Marcus Garvey have been criticized for being too ‘flamboyant,’ or “causing havoc within the race.” They both also reference skin color in relation to black advocacy (i.e., Cardi B’s quote, “This coming from a woman that [sic] bleached her skin but want to advocate. GOODBYE” and Garvey’s criticism of DuBois as “talking about the kind of blood he has in him other than the blood you can see”).
- Relevant chronotopes include:
 - *The Transatlantic Slave Trade chronotope*: evoked by Cardi B in response to challenges about her blackness because of her Dominicaness
 - *The “Lemonade” chronotope*: from Beyoncé's 2016 visual album, “Lemonade,” which Azealia Banks evaluates as a proponent of the positive, ‘intelligent’ conversation surrounding blackness, while regarding Cardi B as the opposite)
 - *The Great Debate chronotope* of the 19th and 20th centuries: laid groundwork for public discourse with regard to notions of ‘legitimate’ black identity construction in America.
- The struggles present in both feuds concern who is allowed to define blackness, in what ways, and what is at stake regarding these defining features for black people in America.

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