

DAMN. 2024: A YEAR IN SURVIVAL, SOUND, AND STRUGGLE



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THEORY + PRACTICE = PRAXIS
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I recognize and honor that this newsletter was written and assembled on the ancestral and traditional lands of the Tequesta People and the occupied lands of the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes of Indians.

These lands are known as Miami.

Let us never forget that The United States is stolen land built by stolen and enslaved Africans.

A NOTE FROM LUTZE

Happy New Year, Co-Strugglers and Dreamers. We made it through 2024. Whew, chile! If I am being radically honest, 2024 was one of the worst years of my life, especially the last three months. It was tough economically; my spirit and mental health went through it, and my creativity suffered. Romantically, I ended my long-term relationship, and I have been nursing some grief around platonic love. It has not been all bad, thank goodness. Even with all that, dear reader, I am thankful to be above ground and among the living. As long as I have agency and access to some modicum of choice(s), that is a cause for celebration and a reason to flirt with possibility and dare to hope. It does not always seem like it, but life is a miracle.

On a very U.S.-centric note, the worst has happened. It happened. He won. They won. What exactly did our fellow citizens win, the over 74 million who voted for Trump, and what will the rest of us be subject to? We will have to wait and see. Their playbook, Project 2025, gives us insight into their visions and plans, but we will have to wait and see how much they will implement and how it will play out in our lives. For some, Trump 2.0 will be merely annoying background noise, but for the rest of us whose intersections have intersections, this regime will be the foreground, the context, and the text of our everyday.

Have mercy.

This edition is a mini newsletter. It was supposed to go out in late December, but I was too sad and depressed to get it together. I wrote a long-form post-mortem essay about the election. I am offering my humble analysis, hoping it can be of use, and I also shared my year in music. I made many playlists in 2024 and shared some with you and my thoughts on the albums that got me through this hellish year. Music is already extremely important to me, and as I continue to nurse myself back to health and fight against this new regime, I foresee music playing an even more dominant and sacred force in my life. Right now, the two albums I have been listening to since we entered the new year are Ab-Soul's Soul Burger, which, if I started listening to it last year, would have been one of my top five albums, and my non-Spanish speaking self loves this new Bad Bunny project.

As a Black Southerner who is a first-generation Haitian-American, survival, resistance, and overcoming are imprinted in my DNA. The truth of the matter is that my enslaved ancestors have survived worse and did more with less. Black people and Indigenous people got the cheat code on how to survive white supremacy in North America. There is no futurity, especially on this side of Turtle Island, these lands known as The United States, without Black people and Indigenous people. Do not be fooled; white supremacy does not have a sustainable, scalable, resilient plan that guarantees the survival of both our planet and us as a species. I also want to remind you that there has never been a point in history that did not produce righteous, brave, and principled white people and non-Black people of color who strategically betrayed white supremacy while being deeply committed to social change and coalitional politics and struggle that was not tied to the fickle nature of electoral cycles. The temperature in the United States is going to rise on many fronts. Many will not make it to the end of this presidential term. Our people will be deported, jailed, harassed, menaced, fired, or worse, and I hope to still be here, still committed to what I believe in, still loving, daring to dream, writing, seeking joy, and centering my pleasure. I hope you will be here, too, with your unwavering commitment to social change no matter what. See you all in late March/April with another newsletter.

In community/liberation/love,

*Lutze aka The Social
Justice Doula*

MY PERSON OF THE YEAR.



My 2024 Person of the Year by a landslide goes to the French septuagenarian Gisèle Pelicot. Her husband of fifty years, with whom she had three children, spent the last decade of their marriage drugging and raping her. While she was in a comatose state, he invited strange men he met from the seedy, dark, depraved corners of the internet where he advertised his wife and recruited these men to come into their home, into their marital bed, and to participate in raping Gisèle Pelicot. When Dominique Pelicot was being investigated by the police for a separate unrelated incident that involved him filming up the skirts of women in a grocery store, that is

how the police stumbled upon his crime. The police found over 20,000 hours of digital footage that showed Dominique's organized, systematic raping of Gisèle Pelicot and the bevy of strange men who span across age, race, and profession, so much so the French media labeled the 50 men charged alongside Dominique Pelicot the "every man" because of how "normal" and integrated in life and society most of the men seemed to be. Gisèle Pelicot waived her right to anonymity, chose to have her name and trial public, and refused to be silenced and cower to shame. This harrowing case is a reminder of why feminism still matters. Any conversation that treats feminism as if it is some fashion trend that can be "in" or "out" is proof that many people continue to fall for Right-Wing talking points without even knowing it. Gisèle Pelicot's decade-long abuse at the hands of her husband reminds us why we need gender liberation for all. [There was recently an investigation in Germany that uncovered 70,000 men in a Telegram chat room where men shared tips and best practices on how to exact sexual harm on the women in their lives. In some instances, they shared pictures and live footage.](#) The way patriarchy recruits and grooms boys and men to become predators is something that I think about compulsively. Patriarchal violence is a public health issue that will eventually impact your life, no matter your gender or where you reside in the world. I do not subscribe to the gender essentialist notion that espouses the belief that men/masculinity are pathological and, therefore, inherently dangerous and a lost cause. For all of our sake, we cannot afford to buy into the fatalistic belief that men are a lost cause. Patriarchy and how it intersects with misogyny and white supremacy is what creates patriarchal terrorists and gender-based terrorism. Many patriarchal terrorists, before they harm queer and trans people, first practice victimizing a girl, woman, or animal. Gisèle Pelicot, this grandmother who became an unwitting feminist icon for her bravery, reminds us that rape is about power and that, as women, we never age out of being potential victims of patriarchal violence.



2025 SOCIOCULTURAL PREDICTIONS.





I predict that in 2025, the new word that will dominate our lexicon and that we all will collectively boldly misuse and overuse online and offline will be 'propaganda.' We will do so without a shred of irony, especially those of us who live within the United States, where we have been under siege by an anti-intellectualism campaign for the past twenty years, mis/disinformation goes unchecked, none of our social media companies are properly regulated, conspiracy theories have fully become mainstream in the last four years since the pandemic, and the most anti-intellectual and anti-science Party is getting ready to take power. There is a way many people across the ideological spectrum will talk about and point to propaganda as if it is new and as if the opposing side is the only one deploying the tactic. If you have been on the Black side of TikTok and following the Beyoncé Bowl discourse, you have already seen how the word propaganda has entered 2025 with a bang. As we matriculate through the year and use the word, read, and hear it used, I want to leave you to ponder the following: Is propaganda inherently bad? Is all propaganda equal? What is the line between artistic expression and propaganda? What are the criteria that make something propaganda versus just political? How does one know if they have fallen for or escaped a propaganda campaign? Is there a fine line between ideology and propaganda? Whose definition of propaganda do you rely on to determine which forms of propaganda you will or will not engage in?

My second prediction involves platonic relationships and social media. The pandemic has deskilled us. That is the thesis we hear repeatedly that we accept wholeheartedly because we see the stark differences in how we emerged out of lockdown and the effects that it has had on our relationships and ability to relate with one another on a personal and professional level. People's ability to make friends and navigate conflict was greatly diminished. One example of this deleterious practice that proliferated as we started emerging from the pandemic is the rise of people canceling on their friend's last minute, RSVPing to things, not showing up, and people being flippant about this flaky and flagrant behavior. When we first emerged out of lockdown, people didn't like the last-minute flakiness, but they tolerated it and did their best to honor people's boundaries, capacities, and all the incessant calls to prioritize self-care even though these behaviors were harming friendships and undermining our communities. Lately, I have noticed signs hinting that cultural tides may be shifting, or at the very least, some people are ready to shake the table. In the past four years, many people have been reading, retooling, and upskilling the skills they lost during the pandemic while rebuilding their friendship garden. Many people are slowly



returning to etiquette and norms within their social dynamics. Content created by sophisticated, often older women who frequently host and give hosting tips is followed by a bevy of people, including myself. I am seeing younger millennials make videos about lamenting their peers who come to hosted events at friends' houses without a gift for the host and how that social faux pas is being analyzed. I am seeing more conversations and curiosity about how Boomers preserve and conduct themselves in their lifelong friendships, and a key to their friendship is an adherence to social scripts and norms that many Millennials and older Gen-Z want to preserve. We will never return to the 2019 version of ourselves, but there is a desire to return to implement etiquette; it appears we are returning to something that may feel quaint or analog in this digital age that is beckoning us to center on an ethic of care. A correction to the overly permissive lack of care is happening.

What does this mean? I predict reciprocity will be making a big comeback in friendships. People will be spending more in-person time with friends. Therefore, it will make reciprocity much more important and easier to spot if lacking. I am already seeing videos and conversations encouraging people to unfriend or demote friends who habitually cancel at the last minute. This is clearly my very niche algorithmic feed, but as your resident digital Black feminist, trust me, I think the weather patterns are changing.

With the new regime coming, some people's lives will be greatly upended. And the last thing people need while they are organizing mutual aid, figuring out deportation scares/plans, wondering if their same-gender marriage is going to be valid, reproductive justice issues and the list goes on, family and friends are going to become critical to survival. And when the stakes are high, no one is going to be willing to put their hope in a fair-weathered friend who has a pattern of constantly blowing others off and struggles significantly with practicing mutuality. People will be calling on friends who are tried and tested and who will not need to have an orientation to reciprocity, care, and the importance of one's presence in friendships.

So those of you who have made a personality out of canceling, being the elusive friend, or you are the kind of person who says yes to an invite with the hopes a much better opportunity from a cooler friend comes up. When it does, you cancel on the less cool thing or friend; people have been taking note. And let's say you are not the friend who ever cancels. However, you do not practice reciprocity; your days may also be numbered. The friend who is always giving and hosts perhaps they also would love to be a guest from time to time. The friend with the social-emotional intelligence who is always ready to go into the deep end without very little notice and would never accuse you of "trauma dumping" could probably benefit from the same ethic of care. Don't expect a long, drawn-out processing conversation announcing the change either. I suspect people are tired of these long, drawn-out conversations with people using all this therapy speak and jargon, but nothing changes because there is no praxis of the therapeutic interventions we all claim to be in or have received. So, odds are, if it was already brought to your attention, it might not be again. Friendships are a privilege, critical to our overall well-being, and require care and good stewardship.

Good luck, babes!



MY YEAR IN MUSIC.

2024 was a good year for music, especially if you are a Black hip-hop fan and have the distinct pleasure of being a Kendrick Lamar fan. I emphasize Blackness because the entire beef between Drake (the commercial pop star) and Kendrick Lamar (the hip-hop purist/ moralist) was about making it clear who the culture belongs to, who is a guest, who is a colleague, who is a culture vulture, and who is a colonizer. There is a long-running intracommunal conversation happening on the Black US side of the internet in which Black people are doing some soul-searching and wondering if we have been too permissive and allowed too many people into our culture and genre. Many want to bring back gatekeeping and maybe do what Country Music does, minus the racism. The number of white men with podcasts speaking with authority on hip-hop offering their hollow, lukewarm, remedial, and often anti-Black bad takes has reached a crisis point since TikTok became the leading social media app in the U.S. and the whole Post Malone and Jelly Roll of it all. White artists who used hip-hop to become famous and ditched it to make the music and chase the white audience they always wanted. America had a problem: a Canadian import named Drake, which many thought was too big to fail. However, the self-proclaimed certified boogeyman Kendrick Lamar has greatly diminished Drake's stock and social capital within hip-hop. Only time will tell how much and whether it is Ja-Rule level damage.

Kendrick Lamar had the best year for someone who just stumbled upon it. Kendrick proves why talent alone is not enough; one must commit to their craft and make friends with discipline. Kendrick won because his pen game was much better, and he didn't have to get ready for the rap battle; his conditioning and approach to his art ensured he was always prepared. How was he supposed to know that appropriately responding to a diss from Drake on Future and Metro Boomin's record "Like That" would allow him to dominate 2024 and set him up to dominate 2025, at least the first two quarters, now that he has released his album GNX and will be touring with SZA? GNX, Kendrick Lamar's sixth album, is an ode to the Buick car his father brought him home from the hospital. The GNX only had one production run in 1987, Kendrick's birth year. Because Kendrick is the King of double and triple entendre, I also think GNX is a play on Gen-X because, on this album, the production is very regional and harkens back to beats and sounds that would have been playing in the background of Kendrick's childhood while he was coming of age. There is nothing millennials like more than nostalgia. So, a great deal of the music sounds like what Kendrick would have been listening to if he was able to ride around in a GNX during that time, which is why so many people feel like this album is more of a mixtape and we are bound to get another project very soon. I believe GNX is a play on Gen-X because Kendrick is candid and direct about his grievances with his peers. There are still references to the beef, but the album's crux is Kendrick addressing the ol' heads in the game who have been moving in unbecoming shady ways towards him. On GNX, he informs the Gen-X rappers that he is no longer a lil homie. Kendrick Lamar is not only sitting at the adult table; he is sitting at the head of the table wondering why everyone is talking around him, about him, but not to him and, more importantly, why they are not showing him love when he is doing his best to preserve and push the culture forward without divorcing it from Black people and Blackness. He is attempting to correct the issues primarily created by the Gen-Xers in hip-hop.

Every fan of Kendrick who was hyper-fixated on the beef wanted him to do a very regional-sounding record, a very LA album after the blockbuster hit of "Not Like Us," and for a guy who has disdain for the internet and social media and is not chronically online like his peers, I suspect that Kung Fu Kenny just like Bey has a burner account and is tapped into the online discourse on the low because he rewarded his fans with exactly what we asked for including giving us a complete version of what became the song "Squabble Up" a request fans campaigned for. Parasocial relationships are always weird and unsettling, and there is no justifying them. However, it feels good as a fan when your favorite artist every now and then signals to the fan base that although we don't control them or dictate the art, which is a good thing, they do, however, appreciate us being in conversation with their art. When we, the fans, make generative critiques and suggestions, the artist is willing to take it and incorporate it. The artist will never admit it, which I love more when they don't, but we, the fans, the too-clued-in fans, know that our online yapping penetrated their fortress and made it into the meetings.

GNX came out after my Spotify wrapped, which sucked. I hate how, eventually, capitalism kills creativity and makes everything mediocre. Spotify Wrapped has lost its luster and is now flat and devoid of context. Instead of my feed being filled with people sharing their Wrapped, that was replaced with critiques and articles about why Spotify and the once-popular Wrapped sucks so bad now. Spotify has so many data points on us yet chooses to use them poorly to construct a boring AI-generated story. This year was the year that I fell in love with making playlists again. I made twelve, and I have shared four with you all. (I am seriously considering defecting from Spotify, but I have not been able to overcome the peer pressure).



SPOTIFY PLAYLIST.



breakup

I ended my long-term relationship in 2024. I made a breakup playlist. It is a compilation of my favorite breakup songs spanning genres and years from various relationship points of view:

Listen Here 



90s coming of age

I made a '90s coming-of-age playlist. If you grew up watching Teen Summit, BET Soul, and 106 and Park, this is your brand of nostalgia:

Listen Here 



eldest daughter angst

For when you want to affirm that you are anxious, life is tough, and you have what it takes to survive:

Listen Here 



Good Year

And, of course, I made a playlist for 2025 to remind myself that it doesn't matter who resides at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue; I declare it will be a good year! :

Listen Here 

MY TOP FIVE ALBUMS OF 2024

I have one goal every year: discovering and listening to new music. Data shows that between ages 30 and 33, we actively stop seeking new music. I refuse to become this brand of the ol' head who checks out of culture and compulsively only listens to the music of their youth. Nostalgia is great, but I refuse to build a personality and way of life around it. I will not become Al Bundy from the 90s sitcom Married with Children. I also have another obstacle to overcome. I am an avid consumer of podcasts and short-form video-first media, which has significantly eaten into my music listening time. So, this year, I am adding more music to my life's background as a goal, a directive co-signed by the spiritual realm, which a recent reading with my healer confirmed. Here are the albums, artists, and singles that marked my 2024.



5. Take Care by BigXthaPlug – Southern hip-hop is my love language, and BigX was my favorite discovery this year, which came from an obscure video on TikTok and my homie Micha. BigX has a voice made for rapping. The album is well produced; I love his flow, the lyrics are on point, and he took the old-school Law and Order beat and rapped over it. That is so culturally specific and clever; that is what made me initially seek out the album. He has that Biggie Smalls bravado, a confident big boy with the respect of other men; he has been in the drug trade and sees himself as a playboy.



4. Glorious by GloRilla – I don't know how this Zoomer made an album that geriatric millennials and GenX aunties love so much, but she did! Back in the day, every rapper had a gospel song on their album, and Glo brought this tradition back with a song with Kirk Franklin that unsettled the saints. I enjoyed the album not just for the production, especially the genius way she took Lil Boosie's classic "Wipe Me Down" record that went 10x platinum on HBCU campuses and flipped it by making a Bad Bitch version with "Whatchu Kno About Me" I also loved the content Glo is talking about. The lyrics portray a girl's girl who is thinking about platonic love, her faith, navigating toxic relationships with men, and a young, sexually liberated Southern girl having fun. The project is a solid debut album.



3. Short n' Sweet by Sabrina Carpenter – I went out of my way to avoid the song "Espresso," and trust me, it was hard because Spotify, at one point in the year, was relentless in how it kept playing that song no matter what I was listening to. It wasn't until I saw the 5th video from Black TikTokers that I said I should listen to this album. Many Black people were creating two steps to "Bed Chem," and rarely are the recommendations of Black people on my well-curated algorithmic timeline going to steer me wrong. Her voice, the lyrics, mama is dropping bars! Short n' Sweet does a great job of harnessing the heteropessimism many younger heterosexuals feel regarding dating and mating. In the song "Slim Pickins," she sings, "And since the Lord forgot my gay awakenin' Then I'll just be here in the kitchen servin' up moanin' and bitchin'." Ouch, this is a Diva in the making. The album is a good mix of genre-bending and blending; some songs sound a little country, pop, and R&B, and it works. NPR ended their 2024 Tiny Desk concert series with our short and sweet queen, and a friend called me to admonish me for not sharing my love of this album with them. Honestly, I do not know anyone in my circle who has given this album one listen and didn't like it, and this is across race and age. I firmly believe this is a function of the fact that this is Sabrina's 6th studio album. This artist has had time to develop, and this album is a testament to why artist development is critical. Artists need time to cook, and her having the time to develop her sound and look has led to various audiences receiving this project with open arms.



2. Cowboy Carter by Beyoncé – I wrote an album review in April, which you can read [here](#) if you missed it. Again, I love the South, and I love how Beyoncé not only made a very Black country Beyoncé album, but she made a very Houston, Texas, ode and homage album. I love it when artists get hyper-local, regional, and specific in their sound because it is out of this depth of nuance and specificity that the art truly becomes universal and has global appeal. I believe it is a good thing when our pop music requires intellectual investment and critical thinking from the audience, and the audience must seek out more information and context if audience members want to go past the music and enjoy it on another level. I see this same phenomenon happening with Bad Bunny's new album Debi Tirar Más Fotos, and I am here for this cross-pollination and cultural exchange.



1. **Alligator Bites Never Heal by Doechi** - This mixtape is perfect from start to finish, with no skips. When Doechi said, in her song "Nissan Altima," "I'm Carrie Bradshaw with a back brace on. I have been carrying you bitches now for way too long," that was an accurate statement because outside of Kendrick Lamar, 2024 was Doechi's year she had the culture on her back. She is an artist's artist, a student of her craft; she can rap, hold a note, is everything, and is a superstar in the making. This album has everything; it is a little cerebral; she is talking about sex, drugs, her love of thick thighs, dating bi men; it is so Black, so queer, so Florida in its swamp motif. Sonically, the album is perfect, but watching her perform the album makes you love the project even more. Her [Tiny Desk](#) performance and her performance on [Colbert](#) are a must-watch.

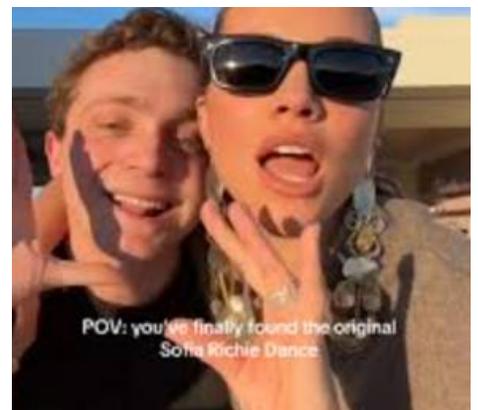
An honorable mention to **Rapsody's album Please Don't Cry**, which was also an album I enjoyed very much.

Before the beef started, I was listening to copious hours of **Kendrick Lamar's Mr. Morale & The Big Steppers**, if that gives you any indication of where my head and heart were. Many fans weren't feeling it. I feel very strongly the future will be much kinder to this album when we revisit it.

TIKTOK AND OTHER MUSIC MUSINGS

TikTok was the number one way I found new music and artists and what inspired me to fall in love with old music. Here is some of the music I found.

The artist Lola Young's song "Messy" went viral when Sophia Ritchie, daughter of Lionel Richie, used it in a video while doing a little two-step. The white women who worship Sophia Ritchie (seriously, she has Swiftie-esque level followers) lost it and turned the little two-step into a viral moment, and that spawned days of jokes that turned into a discussion about Sophia Ritchie having rhythm because she is Black and the white women fawning over Sophia Ritchie proceeded to have a meltdown because they were now discovering that their queen is Black and identifies as such. Chile, it was a mess. You had to be there; it turned into a whole thing. The upside to this online issue is that it puts Lola Young on the radar for many of us. That same week, I hopped in an Uber with a woman listening to "Messy," the girlies love the song. I am unsure how to categorize Lola Young, whether this is pure rock or indie sleaze, but I genuinely love her EP, which is also titled Messy. I live for the woman singer-songwriter combo with extremely vulnerable lyrics. The EP is 20 minutes of irreverent, sad, introspective lyrics, and I ate it up.

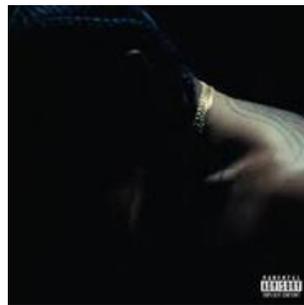


My TikTok algorithm finally learned I am a Kreyòl speaking Haitian from Miami and served me up [“4 Kampé,” a single by the French artist Joé Dwét](#), Filé of Haitian descent. This song has the Haitian diasporic community in a bear hug. The song is a Kompa song that blends French slang, Kreyol, and English. I only understand about 10-15% of this song, but I be vibin’.

When it comes to Southern hip-hop, women hold it down, and it appears that the reign of Southern hip-hop dominating the entire hip-hop sound has ended. Many people thought women rappers were a phase and would pass, but GloRilla, Latto, Megan, Doechi, and all the others proved that to be false. We are firmly entering the reign of the West Coast sound again, and as a lover of accents and distinct regional sounds, I am here for it. Kendrick’s victory in the rap beef and his victory lap with the pop-out show on Juneteenth reset the entire West Coast, and he also used the moment to highlight LA artists and followed up even more on *GNX*. I am excited to see what this new energy and tide shift in hip-hop will produce. Unfortunately, The East Coast isn’t even in the conversation because they are in a severe slump.

The West Coast is currently dominating the culture, mainly because of TDE. TDE is the hip-hop Motown. TDE artists take their craft seriously; they appear to be developed to be great and expect greatness from their artistic output; they are true artists to their core, and their understanding of who they are as artists comes through so clearly in the music, and that is why I call TDE the Motown of hip-hop because artist development appears to be happening over there and it shows. TDE’s current roster:

SZA | Doechi | Kendrick- his last album with the label was *Mr. Morale and The Big Stepper*, and now he is independent and has a distribution deal with them | Schoolboy Q | Ab-Soul | Jay Rock



Schoolboy Q put out an album, *Blue Lips*, that I am enjoying and slowly making my way through. **Ab-Soul** put out an album called *Soul Burger*. I recently saw his “Squeeze 1st 2” performance on *Colors*, and I am obsessed. He is quickly becoming one of my favorite emcees. I see why Soul is in his name.

Tyler the Creator released *Chromakopia*, and I have avoided Tyler’s music until now; however, the critical acclaim this album received makes me genuinely curious.

Finally, in 2024 the white queers influenced me to explore **Chappell Roan**. Last year, I traveled to Texas for work, and you have not lived until you have been at a karaoke bar with women + non-binary people across all the differences belting out “Pink Pony Club” in unison. The patriarchy was quaking! Her performance of Pink Pony Club on Saturday Night Live was one of last year’s best performances when the audience started singing with her instant goosebumps. That song is going down in queer history. The album *Good Luck, Babe!* is so full-frontal lesbian with songs like “Casual.” We have come a long way since inferences and innuendoes. The song “Good Luck, Babe!” is a fantastic song that also doubles as a lesbian damnation spell and curse. In the song, Chappell is damning her ex to a life of being some mediocre man’s wife. She threw a whole forest of shade. Who among the sapphics doesn’t have one woman in their past to whom she can’t send this song? Chappell is another superstar on the rise who is so of her time and generation, and I am curious to see where she goes.

**POST-MORTEM PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION THOUGHTS:
THE PEOPLE CHOSE A DADDY
OVER DEMOCRACY,
NOW WHAT?**



I. INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, November 5th, 2024, over 74 million citizens, roughly 50.4%, chose a Trump presidency again, proving Trump is not, in fact, weird; he is not an aberration. Trumpism is the mainstream. Those of us who believe in anti-racism, social justice, and multiracial egalitarian pluralistic democracy are the weird ones, but I suspect if you are reading this, you already know this. Believing that people can do better and are capable of rising above our human desire to fall into sectarianism while watching the very same people choose to do the opposite is what it means to work toward social change in the United States; you must accept that people will break your heart and reach for the lowest common denominator. There have been many signs that, in hindsight, show evidence of the mainstreaming of MAGA and that social conservatism was on the rise. Cultural moments such as the Amber Heard and Johnny Depp case, a #MeToo backlash moment, Target dialing down on their pride merch, signaling that inclusivity was no longer chic, DEI becoming a slur, a certain group of famous sisters getting rid of their BBLs, people dissolving their filler, the rise of the "clean girl aesthetic" the nonsensical obsession with "quiet luxury." The drug Ozempic hitting the market all of this signaled thin was in again, and fuck body positivity. The culture vulture look of everyone, irrespective of race and ethnicity, trying to look like a light-skinned Black woman, racially ambiguous Instagram baddie was out; we are all now supposed to be looking like a kept white woman in Lululemon who is the second wife of some CEO and of course, the Ivy League Presidents testifying before Congress and the firings that followed.

Moreover, even the way some rap fans responded to one of the biggest rap beefs in hip-hop history was also indicative that the citizens of the United States are in trouble, and we are losing the plot on many fronts. All these cultural moments and signifiers were evidence that society was regressing. The world had made a sharp Right. For the first time in my lifetime or since I have been politically aware, the Left was not dominating the conversation or owning the cultural moments in the same way. People in the United States have been using every opportunity to let it be known that they are not interested in social progress through book bans, the unhealthy obsession with trans girls playing sports, the loud rejection of pronouns, and people across the political spectrum losing it over phrases such as "birthing people" were the tell. On the campaign trail, the two significant signs that Trumpism was now the mainstream was the infamous Madison Square Garden rally that happened in the middle of "blue" New York; people rightfully focused on the disparaging jokes that the Roast comedian made about Puerto Rico. But I want to focus on Tucker Carlson, former FOX News host and a Trump surrogate, and his remarks at The Turning Point Rally in Duluth, GA, on October 23, 2024. His comments do a good job of summing up Trump's symbiotic relationship with his acolytes and the one he will now have with the nation going forward.

He loves his children, disobedient as they may be; he loves them because they're his children. They live in his house, but he's very disappointed in their behavior, and he's going to have to let them know he's going to have to get to your room right now and think about what you did, and when Dad gets home, you know what he says? You've been a bad girl, you've been a bad little girl, and you're getting a vigorous spanking right now, and no, it's not going to hurt me more than it hurts you; no, it's not. I'm not going to lie. It's going to hurt you a lot more than it hurts me, and you earned this. You're getting a vigorous spanking because you've been a bad girl, and it has to be this way it has to be this way because it's true, and you're only going to get better when you take responsibility for what you did that's not said in the spirit of hate it's not said in the spirit of Vengeance or bigotry far from it it's said in the spirit of justice which is the purest and best thing there is and without it things fall apart.

In this part of Tucker Carlson's speech that comes at the 14:08 mark, the way Tucker Carlson describes Trump and his relationship with the country and citizens of the United States if I had no context of what he was talking about, it sounds like a description of how Christian Evangelicals' talk about their punitive god who is more of an authoritarian figure rather than a merciful father. In this interpretation of Trump, he is the nation's daddy whether we consented to this or not because, to MAGA, consent is not needed nor required when your mandates and authority come from the divine, the rights of others' rights be damned. Tucker makes clear, as well as Trump's proposed plans and cabinet picks suggest, that our not-so-new Daddy will be disciplining the nation.

For years, every election cycle, we are told that Americans are looking to vote for a president with whom they would like to have a beer, but conventional wisdom and logic do not explain and will not explain this election cycle. 50.4% of our fellow citizens opted for a daddy over democracy. And I want to understand why.

MAGA meticulously built a multiracial, multiethnic, intergenerational coalition that seemed to have fallen even more in love with their MAGA Daddy in his absence. I think it is too early to call this a radical realignment of the Republican party. I need more evidence. Trump is a once-in-a-generation politician. He is very talented and adept at what he does, and he has no heir apparent because Trump cannot be replicated. I do not think another Republican could get away with inciting a riot and attempting a coup and ascend in the same way. This kind of power and devotion is Trump-specific, and for all our sakes, I pray this is the case.



In the same way, President Barack Obama was a once-in-a-generation politician on the Democratic side who had an innate star quality, was a great orator, and a brilliant thinker. If he could be cloned, The Democratic Party would have done so by now. **Trumpism orbits around Trump. MAGA is Trump; therefore, a political realignment does not explain November 5th.** We who labor in the vineyard of social justice who care about expanding rights, enshrining rights, positive rights (freedom to) and negative rights (freedom from) must all do the work to understand why Trump has captured the imagination and fidelity of so many. The short-lived VP Harris campaign made it seem that reproductive rights were on the ballot and it would matter and shape a different outcome. In seven of the ten states that had abortion on the ballot, people voted to protect abortion rights. At the same time, those same citizens also voted for the party that put abortion in peril and could institute a federal-wide ban. **I want to understand this incongruent political math done in the voting booth. The people who voted for Trump have demonstrated the ability to hold two competing thoughts and arrive at a political solution that, although it does not make sense to me, I take seriously.**

Since the election, I have been ravenously reading and listening to all I can to understand what happened. Fact-finding and information-gathering are helpful activities for my anxious mind. That said, it will be a while until we get in-depth data from scientists, giving us all the details and the fault lines about this election cycle. Nevertheless, I humbly offer my election post-mortem analysis. I want to make some things clear; firstly, although I am a PhD candidate who studies gender, race, sexuality, and social justice as my academic interest and obsession, I also doula people and organizations through my activist practice as The Social Justice Doula, I reject the facile answer that all the people who voted for Trump are just racists, sexists, and xenophobes who are in a cult. Not everyone who voted for VP Harris is a practitioner of anti-racism; ask me how I know. In a nation-state built on white identity politics, Indigenous dispossession, chattel slavery, and racial capitalism, no matter your race, gender, or class, you have been socialized and live in a society that is organized by white supremacy. Therefore, racism is always already baked into the machinations and political equations we are all making. We are either seeking to undermine white supremacy or concretize it. So, this answer is not sufficient, especially for one who believes in the power of coalitional politics and struggles more than in the self-appointed omnipotence of white supremacy.

My second disclaimer: I am not the kind of thinker or writer who is going to encourage you to backstroke in your righteous indignation, hatred, and condescension toward those who voted for Trump. The internet does not lack people who will encourage you to throw MAGA voters away, give you all the reasons you should hate them, and declare war on them. I am not your therapist, so please manage your personal relationships and mental health as you see fit. As a Black feminist, a humanist, and a person who believes in anti-racist coalitions, I am clear we live in a society that is made up of many kinds of people. Not everyone who voted for Trump is a Nazi or a white nationalist. **I am interested in organizing the everyday aunts, uncles, cousins, and homies who took a few right turns and found themselves in the house MAGA built.** I want to organize these people into better, more socially just politics while also being deeply invested in the project of not becoming hateful and recalcitrant like my opponents and enemies towards everyone who does not vote like me. **A love ethic rooted in social justice undergirds my civic spiritual practice that is operationalized through my Black feminism.** This is not easy work. Since the election, I have been looking at my white friends funny. I did my best not to notice their passion for anti-racism waning precipitously over the last four years. As a first-generation Haitian-American in a mixed-status family, I felt super invisible in every Black organizing space I found myself in leading up to the election because immigration and how it would impact Black people never seemed to come up. Seeing the online discourse among Black women days after the election telling the world they were on break for the next four years and telling non-Black people of color not to call them when the mass deportations begin was hurtful to ingest as an online bystander. Witnessing the lateral violence between a small fraction of Palestinians, Arabs, and Black people online has been brutal to metabolize. It is not easy to choose daily to show up politically with a deep reservoir of love for the people when everyone's lack of theory + praxis, and kindness shows up. It is not easy to choose love when fear makes people act ghoulishly.

If you can only respect people if they act respectably, I find that weak and unprincipled, but I understand why this behavior and choice is the norm. If you can only show people love or act lovingly towards those who are easy to love or whom you find lovable, I question your commitment to social change and liberation and if you know what love is outside of white supremacy.

II. WHY DEMOCRACY LOST

1. There can be no proper autopsy of this election cycle that does not start with President Joseph Robinette Biden, who held his party and, above all, his country hostage when he reneged on his word to be a transition president, a bridge, and a one-term president. *Throughout his presidency, the electorate has consistently said two things: inflation is too high, and President Biden is too old for a second term. I sympathize with President Biden on the economy issue because it is a miracle that the U.S. economy did not plant headfirst into a recession after the pandemic. Compared to our peer countries, the U.S. economy is much stronger. However, on a micro-personal level, the economy did not feel good to everyday people, which is what matters. The public needed an explainer-in-chief to talk to the public, explain inflation to them, and make clear that it was a Democratic Congress that administered the stimulus checks and that the stimulus was not a neutral act. The government's choice to protect the economy and keep the flow of capital going eventually led to increased price hikes. We needed to be reminded that eggs were expensive due to sick chickens. President Biden did many ambitious things with the Inflation Reduction Act. However, the average citizen knew nothing and heard very little about it because Biden is bad at selling and talking about the good things he has done. Most voters do not even know that we are currently living under Trump's 2017 tax plan, which he will make permanent in his second term. We had a president who mainly avoided doing press, which created a vacuum. In the absence of information, bad actors came in, created spin, and flooded the zone with mis/disinformation. By the time we got to the Biden and Trump debate in June of 2024, which was a debacle, President Biden still had to be forced out of the race. I am happy that the Democrats chose to push Biden out of the race. It was the right decision for the party.*

President Biden did the same thing Senator Diane Feinstein and Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg did; they chose their ego and the warmth of power and screwed their country and fellow citizens in the process. When Ezra Klein, New York Times writer and podcaster, called for President Biden to step down in February, I was for this immediately. Ezra explained how an open convention could go in a series of nerdy, wonky episodes. Many people thought it was a mistake to "coronate" VP Harris and that there should have been an open convention. I disagreed with this sentiment at the time. I thought that the public had already voted for VP Harris on this ticket, and it made sense that if Biden dropped out at the 25th hour, she would be the proper successor to be on top of the ticket. In hindsight, I/we were wrong. The party and, more importantly, the voting public needed a primary. The idea of a Black woman being handed something in the era when DEI has been turned into a slur was too much in this polarized climate. President Joe Biden's decision to run again robbed his party and the nation of a key democratic process. A primary process would have allowed the party to fight about key issues internally, such as the genocide in Gaza, immigration, and trans girls and sports debate. The President, who fashioned his entire identity on civility and democracy in the end, was no less craven, self-serving, and egotistical than Trump.

2. **Citizen versus Taxpayer conundrum** - Everything I have read and listened to thus far has boiled this election down to the economy. Which is something I must admit I struggle to accept fully. As a person living in the world, here are the ethnographic notes I have collected to support my why: The few times I traveled for work in 2024, the airport was always busy. Whether I was flying into a major or midsize city, it did not matter. Whenever Target dropped a Future Collective collection, items would sell out. Influencers on TikTok still had the power to influence by moving products and impacting the prices and availability of everyday items. There was no absence or shortage of Amazon delivery trucks in my neighborhood 7-days a week, all day and night. More importantly, no matter how expensive oxtails got, the Jamaican spots I frequented never stopped offering them on the menu, which tells me someone was buying and eating them. In my assessment, it appears people were still buying things they wanted, not just the items they needed. **After a while, the complaint about the price of eggs started to sound to me that people were actually saying that the cost of eggs was cutting into their conspicuous consumption habits.** I know my perspective does not indicate that of the entire United States. **I do not mean to demean people experiencing this economy unfavorably. However, we must not forget that capitalism requires winners and losers, and voting is one way we can attempt to intervene against this winner-take-all model.** In every election cycle, neither political party invites the electorate to think of themselves as citizens, part of a society, and to think about what is best for the society on a micro, mezzo, and macro level. The Democrats do push a more collectivist agenda. However, the messaging does not go all the way in promoting social welfare for all and not just for staunchly middle-income people. This is where the Bernie faction of the party gets it right! We are primed and socialized to consider ourselves only as consumers or taxpayers, which enshrines our individualism. Taxpayers are not inclined to want to support the expansion of The Affordable Care Act, Medicaid for all, forgive student loans for others even if they managed to hustle and pay off theirs, and build more homes across the country; yes, this means even in your backyard, or invest in robust social welfare programs that attempt to intervene against no person in this country being allowed to fall into abject poverty.

Taxpayers and consumers cannot and will not make this kind of consideration because the identity of a consumer and taxpayer is devoid of a sociopolitical context. It is an apolitical identity by default.

A new danger I see arising from this taxpayer identity being crafted in real-time is a linguistic one that seeks to concretize our racial bias and encourage those primed not to see race to continue not to see race. From a sociopolitical linguistic standpoint, many are using taxpayers as a new euphemism to avoid saying and drawing attention to the fact they are centering on white people, white identity politics, and white grievances. Tacitly, what is being said is that only white men and women are the valid working class because being white means they do not have identity-based grievances, and that makes their identity neutral. Everyone else who is Black or a non-Black person of color has an identity, and those identities cause wedges in a coalition because those identities are saddled with complications, but the white working class is presented as race-neutral and, therefore, devoid of any identity politics. **People in the majoritarian group are just people, and those who are minoritized are the ones who have identities, aka "the issues."** Using the word taxpayer is supposed to prime us to think about who the proper rightful citizen is who is always at "risk" of being taken advantage of by the "welfare queens" and the Other and who is constantly being crowded out by the issues of other people. So, when you hear "the Democrats have abandoned the working class," there is truth to this statement. When we conduct further investigations, our questions must be informed by an analysis rooted in understanding the role of oppression, domination, and power and how they intersect with social categories such as race, class, gender, etc. You are not supposed to notice that the title working class is an identity that is not neutral. Who gets to be a taxpayer and who gets to be considered part of the working class is race/class/gender coded, and only one party this last election cycle understood this and used it negatively to their advantage. Too many Liberals, Progressives, and Leftists never did the readings to understand identity politics as Black feminists define it. The word got gentrified and power-washed by liberals. Now that Democrats have destroyed the words utility and have lost the election, everyone wants to blame it on identity politics, which is once again a gross misunderstanding of how it could have been used in a generative way to coalition build, not even noticing that Trump won using the white MAGA version of identity politics.

3. Absent Voters - According to the University of Florida Election Lab, 150 million people voted. However, 89 million people, about 36% of eligible voters, did not vote. That staggering number gives me hope and fills me with existential dread. Yes, Trump won, and more of his base showed up, but he did not win overwhelmingly and did not secure some special mandate from the electorate. Most people were too checked out to vote, which tells me that some people feel so left out of the body politic that they see no value in politically participating. Others are so beleaguered by the crushing weight of capitalism that they have been rendered sociopolitically dead, and that has made them unable to participate. I am also thinking of the portion that frankly wanted to punish the Democrats for a bevy of reasons that they deemed righteous and, just by staying home, by default, rewarded MAGA. Democrats have a lot of work to do to determine how they will earn these people's votes and what needs to be done to win back the others. **With that said, 36% of people not voting is abysmal. In a healthy, thriving democracy that is trending upward, we cannot afford to have so many people not voting.**



4. Democracy is a contact sport. Democracy requires embodied participation. It requires one to be mentally, emotionally, intellectually, and physically checked in. This time, democracy fatigue took over the nation, and people did not feel a sense of urgency to protect it. Democracy feels elusive. What is it anyway? "If my guy wins, the elections are free and fair, but if my guy loses, then the election is not free and fair." Democracy is too abstract for most citizens to grapple with on a material level. People were tired of hearing that this was the most consequential election, and I don't think many USians understand that rights must be fought for more than once, and any right that had to be brokered to be given can be brokered to be taken away. The United States has not mastered representative democracy, and the Electoral College makes many feel that their vote does not count. Many citizens begrudge that the project we call The United States is not yet finished. Many feel we should be in the maintenance phase, not constantly fighting and contesting. This is what many misunderstand about democracy. It is a living idea that requires us to be in a dialectical process with it, which means citizens must return frequently to consent to it. Democracy needs defending, and in a nation-state like ours built on Indigenous dispossession, genocide, chattel slavery, and state-sanctioned gender-based violence, this country was not created to be a multiracial egalitarian pluralistic democracy. It was built by white men for white men who owned property (land and people). Under these conditions, democracy is not only a contact sport but also a philosophical idea. The United States is squarely in the age of anti-intellectualism, and many of its citizens do not have the appetite for such an idea and the fight it requires. The embrace of Trumpism is one where many are willing to adopt a little illiberalism and anti-democratic ideals for the false promise that this gamble will bring back who we were as a nation before the pandemic.

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