



Fall 2019

Holding Allies Accountable

Gisselle Flores
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [Chicana/o Studies Commons](#), [Hip Hop Studies Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Recommended Citation

Flores, Gisselle, "Holding Allies Accountable" (2019). *Student Publications*. 859.
https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/859

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link:
https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/859

This open access student research paper is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Holding Allies Accountable

Abstract

Artists, including Rihanna, Cardi B, and Jay-Z, have turned down the NFL's offer to perform in the halftime show out of solidarity with Colin Kaepernick, but it was recently announced that Jennifer Lopez and Shakira will be performing in 2020. This has sparked controversy because some are celebrating that there are two Latinas headlining the Super Bowl halftime show for the first time while others do not view this event as a cause for celebration because they believe that J. Lo and Shakira should have boycotted like other artists have. Jennifer Lopez and Shakira have given no prior indications that they stand with Colin Kaepernick, so there should not have been an expectation from them to reject the NFL's offer. In addition, there are those who actually do stand in solidarity with Kaepernick who should be held accountable for their actions that do not align with their positions as allies.

Keywords

NFL, Super Bowl, Halftime Show

Disciplines

African American Studies | Chicana/o Studies | Hip Hop Studies | Sports Studies

Comments

Written for AFS 250: Black Bodies in American Sport

Gisselle Flores

Holding Allies Accountable

The National Football League's Super Bowl halftime show has been seen as a momentous event for artists to perform for a significantly large audience and performing in this event has represented artists' achievement of a higher level of fame (McDermott). However, performing in the halftime show means something different today, and there has been an aversion of the NFL and the Super Bowl due to the events that unfolded between the NFL and Colin Kaepernick; Kaepernick and his teammate Eric Reid were blackballed by the NFL after kneeling during the national anthem as a protest against police brutality and racial inequality in the United States. Artists, including Rihanna, Cardi B, and Jay-Z, have turned down the NFL's offer to perform in the halftime show out of solidarity with Kaepernick (McDermott), but it was recently announced that Jennifer Lopez and Shakira will be performing in 2020. This has sparked controversy because some are celebrating that there are two Latinas headlining the Super Bowl halftime show for the first time while others do not view this event as a cause for celebration because they believe that J. Lo and Shakira should have boycotted like other artists have. Jennifer Lopez and Shakira have given no prior indications that they stand with Colin Kaepernick, so there should not have been an expectation from them to reject the NFL's offer. In addition, there are those who actually do stand in solidarity with Kaepernick who should be held accountable for their actions that do not align with their positions as allies.

Jennifer Lopez and Shakira are both seen as "digestible" Latinas since they are white or white-passing, and this is the type of image they both wanted to create for

themselves (Marte, 2019). Mainstream media has been a significant factor responsible for the common portrayal of Latinidad, meaning that they have “homogenized all Latinos” into one group, which has erased the different types of subjectivities that are present within the Latinx community including class, race, and gender subjectivities (Aparicio, 2003, p. 91). The power dynamics that are then present within the Latinx community are not emphasized to the degree that they should be, and this can also contribute to the erasure of the narratives of those that are marginalized within the Latinx community.

When the mainstream media has presented a Latinx artist, or a group of Latinx artists, their general identity of “Latino/a” is what has been emphasized but not their more specific identities as Boricua or Colombian, and this type of portrayal that is emphasized adds to the idea that all Latinos can be considered to be part of the same group and there is then no need to distinguish how each group within the Latinx identity differs (Aparicio, 2003, p. 91). Even the type of music that has emerged from the Latinx community and has made its way into mainstream media is not a coincidence because it is what is deemed acceptable by American society, and thus the history of these different types of music, many of which were formed as a way for resistance to dominant institutions and powers, has been erased or ignored on purpose (Aparicio, 2003, p. 91). Another way that the way that the mainstream media has contributed to only constructing a certain type of Latinx identity can be seen in who of the Latinx community is present in mainstream media while also taking into consideration who is not. Those that are present include Jennifer Lopez and Shakira, and they have taken time to turn themselves into artists that are “digestible” and can be seen in media

production. However, their choice to become part of what mainstream media wants from the Latinx community came with consequences, one of them being that they are now visual representations of the “colonial conditions and historical experiences of second-generation U.S. Latinas who have been the objects of racial sexualization” (Aparicio, 2003, p. 97).

Given J. Lo’s origin, if she did not want to be seen as “digestible” or white-passing, she could have chosen to construct a different image for herself. She is the daughter of two Puerto Rican parents who grew up in the Bronx, New York, which means that she grew up experiencing the complexity behind race relations (Lugo-Lugo, 2015, p. 109). However, her identity as Puerto Rican is experienced differently from that of her parents who actually grew up in Puerto Rico and its beliefs about “racial authenticity” (Lugo-Lugo, 2015, p. 109). J. Lo’s claim to the identity of Puerto Rican could be a result of her not identifying with other racial categories, such as white or Black, and this is not to say that the identity of Puerto Rican is necessarily exclusive from that of being white or Black (Lugo-Lugo, 2015, p. 109). However, this identity has served as a “refuge” from having to identifying with these other racial identities, and it can be argued that today, Jennifer Lopez has taken advantage of this identity as Puerto Rican, which can even be seen as an in-between category; she has used this identity to change herself to “approximate Whiteness”, and being able to do this is a privilege in itself because there are Afro-Latinx and Indigenous Latinx people who are not able to move between worlds the way that Jennifer Lopez has been able to (Lugo-Lugo, 2015, p. 112). Throughout time, viewers can see how even her physical appearance has changed to become more palatable for mainstream media in the United States, with one

of the more significant features now being her light blonde hair, and although her hair color has shifted to darker hues at different times, it still stands in contrast to her darker hair during the earlier stages of her career.

Shakira was born to a father of Lebanese descent and a mother of Catalanian parentage in Colombia, and although many people consider her to be Colombian, she is also considered a transnational star (Cepeda, 2003, p. 215). A significant part of the reason as to why Shakira is considered to be transnational is because she is someone who has marketed herself to be “safe”, non-threatening, and even part of this category of “other” that is composed of “the exotic and erotic feminine ethnic minority” (Gontovnik, 2010, p. 144). Her success has been built on years of conforming to the U.S.’s mainstream expectations of her as a Latin American woman through her dances, songs, lyrics, videos, and her body (Gontovnik, 2010, p. 147). In fact, she has even received criticism because of her conformity to mainstream media’s expectations because since her music is marketed to be appealing to everyone, it has also been criticized for being “less Latin”, which brings up the idea that she has had to balance this border between “Anglo” and “Latino” in the music industry (Cepeda, 2003, p. 217). Similar to Jennifer Lopez, we can even see how her appearances, particularly her hair, have changed throughout time as a representation of this conformity that they both have participated in order to elevate themselves as Latina artists; Shakira also started out with very dark hair and today, there is hardly any trace of that because she always presents herself as a blonde woman today, and this choice in appearance is not a coincidence with her rise to fame as a transnational star that is able to “cross all borders she wants” (Gontovnik, 2010, p. 147).

Although Jennifer Lopez and Shakira may face xenophobia because of their identities as Latinas, more specifically as Puerto Rican and Colombian, they have both marketed themselves in a way that prevents them from experiencing racial discrimination (Marte, 2019). A part of building the platforms they have today was not by speaking out about racial injustice in the United States, and it is important to keep that in mind because this has to do with the image that they created for themselves as acceptable Latinas that are considered “safe”, meaning that they avoid controversial subjects such as those related race and/or injustice. Therefore, viewers should not have had the expectation that they would boycott the NFL’s halftime show performance because speaking out and protesting would not be considered to be part of this “safe” image that has contributed to their rise to fame in the past. It would have been a good gesture of solidarity if they did choose to take a stand against the NFL, but that does not equate to the idea that it is what should be expected of them especially considering that they are not affected by race relations the same way that racial minorities in the Latinx community are.

In this backlash against Jennifer Lopez and Shakira for choosing to perform in the halftime show, people have said that they are complicit in, which then leads to enabling, anti-blackness (Marte, 2019). Their ability to market themselves in a way that they choose is a privilege in itself because their physical appearance makes it easier for them to do so, and they are then able to benefit from these same systems that affect their different experiences with race relations. Their choice to accept the NFL’s offer further demonstrates that not only do they benefit from their appearances and proximity to Whiteness, but they also do not intend to give these privileges up seeing as how they

seem to view this as just another opportunity to continue advancing their rise to fame. If they would have stood in solidarity with Kaepernick, it would have been a powerful moment of allegiance with the Black community, but Marte claims that their choice proves that there is a lack of solidarity within the Latinx community, which a lot of it has to do with race and how different people in this community experience race differently (2019). This also brings up Shakira's controversial statement that she and J. Lo are representing all Latinos and Latinas from the U.S. and all over the world, because again, she is ignoring that her and J. Lo's experiences as Latinas are very different from others because of their appearance, race, class, and gender, so there are people arguing that they, in fact, do not represent all Latinos and Latinas (Pellet, 2019).

There have been other non-Black artists, including Pink and Amy Schumer, who have rejected the NFL's offer to perform in the halftime show or their ads, and this choice could be attributed to their avoiding criticism and/or standing in solidarity with Kaepernick and the Black community. This also shows that there have been other people in the past who do not identify as Black but still stood against the NFL, something that Shakira and Jennifer Lopez did not do. They had the choice to use their privilege as well-known Latina artists to use their large platforms and position themselves as allies, but they chose not to. Although NFL halftime show performers do not get paid to perform, this opportunity to perform is seen as a way to gain a large number of viewers and an even larger platform, at least in the past it has been seen that way (LT Staff, 2019). However, there has been a significant decline in viewers recently after the events that occurred between the NFL and Kaepernick, which brings up the idea if it was even worth it for J. Lo and Shakira to even accept this offer given as how it

does not represent the same milestone for artists that it did in the past and they do not gain direct financial benefits from the NFL. However, in order to look at this from a different angle, although performing in the halftime show does not hold the same prestige it did years ago, for J. Lo and Shakira it could symbolize a continuation towards their journey further into mainstream media.

On the other hand, there have been other artists, such as Jay-Z and Cardi B in particular, who clearly rejected the NFL's offer to perform in the halftime show, but their words of solidarity as allies has not aligned with their actions recently. For example, although Jay-Z did not take up the NFL's offer to perform, he and his company, Roc Nation, still partnered with the NFL as their "live music entertainment strategist" (Dart, 2019). The hypocrisy in Jay-Z's actions are evident to a lot of people who are calling him out for "compromising his principles" for the sake of money (Dart, 2019). This relationship between Jay-Z and the NFL is now seen as Jay-Z supporting an institution that blackballed another black man, whom Jay-Z has supported in the past (Martinez, 2019). According to NFL commissioner Roger Goodell, their partnership was created out of a result of a shared vision between Jay-Z and the NFL to create "meaningful social change", but during instances like this, it is imperative to look past words and look into their actions (Martinez, 2019). Sports industries, such as the NFL, have a history of profiting off the labor of Black bodies and their talent for the sake of entertainment, but they incorporate Black bodies without contributing towards structural change that can benefit the Black community and the NFL's actions have proven to do just that (Martinez, 2019). Since the events in 2016 with Kaepernick, the NFL has been attempting to repair the consequences of their actions for blackballing him as a result of

his choice to speak out against racial injustice, which the NFL has been complicit in. Jay-Z's partnership with the NFL is only another aspect of this attempt from the NFL to make things better for themselves, and although Jay-Z has been known to speak out against racial inequality in the United States, his actions today in this partnership can be considered contradictory to his past stances in social justice seeing as how he has aligned himself with those who silenced Kaepernick the most (Dart, 2019). It is also interesting to note that the NFL's efforts to alleviate the backlash for their actions consist of doing anything except bringing Kaepernick back into the league because it would be better and easier for them to simply get rid of Kaepernick and find a famous Black person, such as Jay-Z, to help create the illusion that they are doing something to address their wrong doing in not acknowledging racial inequality (Martinez, 2019).

Jay-Z's role in the NFL's halftime show performance for 2020 is also another aspect that should be taken into consideration in his decision to partner with the NFL. He had a say in the course that the NFL could have taken for these performances, which resulted in electing Jennifer Lopez and Shakira as the ones chosen to perform. Again, the NFL's choice to have "safe" and "digestible" Latinas perform is not a coincidence especially when they could have chosen to ask Black Latinas to perform as a way of achieving "meaningful social change" on the stage that Jay-Z is helping to direct. Instead, having J. Lo and Shakira on this large platform represents that there is still not a place for "visibly Black bodies" even with Jay-Z designated as one of the NFL's partners (Martinez, 2019).

In order to demonstrate that this partnership with the NFL was not solely for his benefit, Jay-Z was reported to have also been pushing for the NFL to organize an

opportunity for a workout for Kaepernick. Once this tryout was officially happening, it was also revealed that the league tried to have Kaepernick sign a waiver that would protect the institution from future employment lawsuits (Cash, 2019). When this was revealed, Kaepernick held his own workout session that was open to other teams and the media, and eight teams ended up attending (Cash, 2019). Kaepernick received criticism for this because others viewed this as a legitimate opportunity for Kaepernick to get back into the league, but instead, he used this opportunity to “make noise”, which is supposedly the sentiment that Jay-Z expressed but was later denied by Roc Nation (Cash, 2019). If Jay-Z did express this frustration with Kaepernick, perhaps it was due to the increase in criticism that he had been receiving for partnering with the NFL, and if Kaepernick were to have taken a different course of actions during the workout, there would have been a chance that the comments and criticism towards Jay-Z would have lessened.

Another artist who also stood in solidarity with Colin Kaepernick is Cardi B, but like Jay-Z, her actions have not necessarily aligned with her stance. When Cardi B was offered the chance to perform in the halftime show, Cardi B turned it down but with “mixed feelings” of feeling the need to stand in solidarity with Kaepernick but also knowing that her husband, Offset, loves to watch football (Landrum Jr., 2019). She viewed this rejection as a sacrifice, but it was in exchange for Kaepernick’s sacrifice of a job (Landrum Jr., 2019). She stated that she would not perform in the Super Bowl halftime performance until Kaepernick gets a job, and although she has held up that stance, it should be known that she has also been taking part in Super Bowl-related events, including hosting a pre-party and appearing in a Super Bowl commercial

(Landrum Jr., 2019). Although she made the decision to opt out of the Super Bowl halftime show, she still believed that she could participate in these other opportunities without directly supporting the NFL (Landrum Jr., 2019). One of her more controversial performances occurred during the party she hosted, which was a prison reform party, when she sang "Money" while dancing with NFL Patriots owner, Robert Kraft, who is also a known Trump supporter (Abraham, 2019). Once she received criticism for this, she claimed that she did not know who Robert Kraft was since she does not watch football, and she was not the one who brought him on stage (Abraham, 2019). In addition, when defending her choice to still participate in these Super Bowl-related events, Cardi B thought of this participation as a way to benefit from the NFL and their resources and money (Landrum Jr., 2019).

It is interesting to see the impact that Kaepernick's actions have carried for allies and non-allies today even though he began his visible protest in 2016. Shakira and J. Lo have been facing disapproval for their actions in accepting the NFL's offer to perform in the halftime show, but they never indicated that they were artists who stood in solidarity with the Black community; therefore, this expectation from them does not have a solid foundation. However, there are other artists, including Jay-Z and Cardi B who have clearly indicated that they are allies but who have still interacted with the NFL in ways that say otherwise. We are at a point in which more people should be held accountable for their complicity and enablement of racism and other forms of oppression, and the NFL's partnership and interaction with these artists should be one of the ways for people to look and hold them responsible.

References

- Abraham, M. (2019). Cardi B Hands Vicious Clapback to Trolls Bashing Her for "Performing" Next to Patriots Owner, Robert Kraft. Retrieved from <https://www.bet.com/music/2019/02/04/cardi-b-robert-kraft-pepsi-performance-response.html?cid=facebook>
- Aparicio, F. R. (2003). Jennifer as Selena: Rethinking Latinidad in Media and Popular Culture. *Latino Studies*, 1(1), 90-105. Retrieved from <https://ezpro.cc.gettysburg.edu:2609/docview/748666632/BD8050797B134B06PQ/1?accountid=2694>
- Cash, M. (2019). Jay-Z is Reportedly 'Disappointed' in How Colin Kaepernick Handled his NFL Workout this Weekend. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/jay-z-on-colin-kaepernick-nfl-workout-2019-11>
- Cepeda, M. E. (2003). Shakira as the Idealized, Transnational citizen: A case study of Colombianidad in transition. *Latino Studies*, 1(2), 211-232. doi:10.1057/palgrave.lst.8600023
- Dart, T. (2019, Sep 6,). Jay-Z and NFL Stage First Concert Despite Kaepernick Backlash. *The Guardian (Online)* Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2285412592>
- Gontovnik, M. (2010). Tracking Transnational Shakira on her way to Conquer the World. *Zona Próxima*, (13), 144-155. Retrieved from <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=85317326010>

Landrum Jr, J. (2019). Cardi B declined super bowl halftime with 'mixed feelings'.

Retrieved from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/music/ct-ent-cardi-b-super-bowl-halftime-show-20190202-story.html>

LT Staff. (2019). How much will Jennifer Lopez and Shakira earn for performing at the super halftime show? Retrieved from <https://latinrends.com/how-much-will-jennifer-lopez-and-shakira-earn-for-performing-at-the-super-halftime-show/>

Lugo-Lugo, C. R. (2015). 100% Puerto Rican: Jennifer Lopez, Latinidad, and the Marketing of Authenticity. *Centro Journal*, 28(2), 96-119. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1751972506>

Marte, M. (2019). Non-black Latinas are Often Complicit within Structural Anti-Blackness. Retrieved from <https://remezcla.com/features/music/thoughts-on-kaepernick-the-nfl-super-bowl/>

Martinez, J. (2019). With NFL partnership, JAY-Z Chose Capitalism over Community. Retrieved from <https://remezcla.com/features/music/thoughts-on-kaepernick-the-nfl-super-bowl/>

McDermott, M. RIP to the Super Bowl Halftime Show, No Longer a Cultural Institution. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2019/01/24/super-bowl-halftime-show-no-longer-cultural-institution/2668939002/>

Pellot, E. (2019). After many accused Shakira and Jennifer Lopez of Anti-Blackness, Shakira Defends the Decision to Perform at the Super Bowl. Retrieved from <https://wearemitu.com/entertainment/shakira-defends-performing-at-super-bowl-half-time-says-its-good-for-latinxs/>