

**OF W.E.B. DUBOIS & KENDRICK LAMAR:
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY—
EXCUSATORY IDEAL OVER EMANCIPATORY INSTITUTION**

By Stephen Pacheco

What you want you? A house or a car?
Forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar?
Anythin', see, my name is Uncle Sam, I'm your dog
Motherfucker, you can live at the mall

I can see the baller in you, I can see the dollar in you
Little white lies, but it's no white-collar in you
But it's whatever though because I'm still followin' you

KENDRICK LAMAR, "WESLEY'S THEORY"

Kendrick Lamar is more than just a preacher of the Good Word: he's its prophet—addressing what's to come as much as what's come before him. The Words of his forefathers, those who paved the way for him with their revolutionary rhetoric in the struggle for the emancipation of the black body, black consciousness, and black experience—those Du Bois' and Wright's and Baldwin's and Malcolm X's and Martin Luther King Jr.'s of yesteryear—may function as the foundation for his message, but they are hardly the ceiling. For in my previous essay,¹ I argued that the discourse and discography of Kendrick Lamar acts as a new conceptual framework for—and modernized manifestation of—the cultural fears and anxieties of Du Boisian double-consciousness, establishing a cultural and historical through-line from Du Bois to Kendrick and substantiating the *foundation* upon which Kendrick crafted his cultural critique. But I did so without discussing its ceiling, or potential as a societal barometer for evaluating any possible progress made since. I focused more so on building a multi-disciplinary (psychological, social, epistemological, phenomenological, cultural, and commercial) defense for the *framework* of a modernized double-consciousness concept than I did on explicating the *realization* of what that modernization actually looked like: what are the new fears, what has the change (in terms of progression or possible degradation) looked like—ideologically, economically, and politically—and what does Kendrick envision as the most pressing subject going forward? Therefore, in this essay, I will look at the discography (focusing on “The Blacker the Berry” and “i” as complex ideological antinomies) of Kendrick Lamar—as well as the greater conversation surrounding him and hip-hop as a mechanism for change—not only as the conflicted materialization of Du Boisian double-consciousness ideology, but also as a revelation and reflection of new forms of continued institutional oppression. For what I really wish to uncover is how double-consciousness is realized and experienced differently once the regulatory bodies of explicit racism have been destroyed (i.e. the Jim Crow laws of Du Bois' era), and replaced by either disguised embodiments of systemic racism (the prison industrial complex, police brutality, and economic inequality of the present day) or the equally pervasive and problematic, but less tangible instruments of ideological racism (micro-aggressions, cultural appropriation, white supremacy, etc...). In particular, I want to analyze the exploitation, identity-constriction, and pseudo-progressivism of the American entertainment industry, and argue that within that industry economic empowerment is not *emancipatory* but *excusatory*—allowing for the perpetuation of individual and institutional subjugation under the pretense of liberating financial mobility. For pedestalization, visibility, and capitalistic consumption may actually be more linked to exploitation and the commodification of black stereotype than to progress and security for entertainers, as can be seen in the parabolic lamentations of Kendrick's biting aural narratives embedded within “Wesley's Theory,” “For Sale? (Interlude),” and “untitled 03 | 05.28.2013..”

Part I: Modern Racial Rhetoric & Its Implications for Rap

In 2008, Barack Obama was elected to be the 44th President of the United States, and racism in America was over. Or so at least John McWhorter, author and Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, would have you think. In a piece for *Forbes* written in December of 2008, McWhorter asserted that the tone of the conversation about racism needed to change, for its days of cultural influence and social dominance were for the most part over. Simply put, he stated that “in answer to the question, ‘Is America past racism against black people,’ I say the answer is yes.”² But as his answer evolved and complicated, so too did that terse proclamation that

¹ Stephen Pacheco, “Of W.E.B. Du Bois & Kendrick Lamar: Discourse Amongst Discord—A New Conceptual Framework for Double Consciousness,” 2018.

² John McWhorter, “Racism In America Is Over,” *Forbes*, December 30, 2008, accessed May 12, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/2008/12/30/end-of-racism-oped-cx_jm_1230mcwhorter.html#251e45e749f8.

he opened his article with declaring the end of a 400-year old institution constructed to oppress, obstruct, overwork, and objectify an entire race of human beings—and, unfortunately, it did not become less problematic. McWhorter went on to explain:

“When decrying racism opens no door and teaches no skill, it becomes a schoolroom tattletale affair. It is unworthy of all of us...So, if I have to give a single answer, it is, yes, we can call ourselves a post-racial country. W.E.B. Du Bois was correct that ‘the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line’—or at least it was for most of that century. In this 21st one, however, the color line is not the problem in any sense we can honestly consider logical, useful or even compassionate...The point is valid even when the terminology is ‘societal racism,’ ‘institutional racism’ or ‘white privilege.’ Obsessing over things that cannot be changed and are not the real problem anyway is of no use to anyone.”³

And while I could focus my entire essay on a response to this problematically contradictory and ahistorical “argument” that reads more like a 2018 Kanye West tweet or excerpt from a Trump campaign stump speech—if Trump at least knew how to speak eloquently, or what ‘white privilege’ and W.E.B Du Bois were—I just want to say this: representation is a reductive argument for restitution, and apathy due to fatalism breeds not just indifference but implicit tolerance or even approval of that wrongdoing. Just because America has placed black people in a few positions of power doesn’t mean that the ideologies, issues, and institutions still in place to prevent the majority of other black men and women from reaching that same level of success have altogether dissipated—or even lessened—as a result, and the idea that these institutions are somehow indissoluble or even irreparable allows the racist and oppressive ideas behind them to not only survive but flourish. Saying there’s nothing we can do is fundamentally equivalent to saying it’s ok to do nothing, that it’s ok to allow these institutions to continue to exist, that it’s ok to allow these ideas to continue to exist.

Concordantly, when Kendrick wins a Grammy and Pulitzer Prize in the same year for his album *DAMN*. (2018), breaking all previous streaming records in the process, the white-run-and-operated entertainment industry loves to flaunt his achievements as a spectacle, divorcing his content from its abrasive and revolutionary message and telling us how progressive they are by championing the talents of a young black man—all while placing a veil over his lyrics and the representational and compensatory incongruities stifling the rest of the industry. His success is touted and tokenized, presented as placation for previous, present, and potential future inequalities of an industry that sees him in terms of stereotypes and possible commodification more so than his humanity and hypotheses. For we must remember that double-consciousness goes both ways: not only does Kendrick Lamar have to negotiate his identity between the psychological division of being both a black man and an American, but America and its institutions also look at him through this lens—a lens in which his “Americanness” and “blackness” are separable and quantifiable selves that they can generalize and manipulate. And nowhere was this problematic rhetoric more clear than in Kendrick’s write-up for GQ’s 2013 “Men of the Year” Issue⁴—a write-up whose reception was split tonally between that of Kendrick and his label (“What ‘should have been celebrated as a milestone,’ Anthony ‘Top Dawg’ Tiffith of TDE Records wrote, had been ruined by the ‘offensive’ story’s ‘racial overtones’ and focus on ‘drama.’”⁵) and that of the publication and entertainment industry

³ Ibid.

⁴ Steve Marsh, "Kendrick Lamar: Rapper of the Year," *GQ: Music*, November 13, 2013, accessed May 11, 2018, <https://www.gq.com/story/kendrick-lamar-men-of-the-year-rapper>.

⁵ Spencer Kornhaber, "Kendrick Lamar Has a Right to Be Mad at GQ," *The Atlantic*, November 18, 2013, accessed May 11, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/kendrick-lamar-has-a-right-to-be-mad-at-em-gq-em/281578/>.

“GQ editor Jim Nelson has responded with bafflement, saying the magazine ‘gave him our highest honor: putting him on the cover of our Men of the Year issue. I’m not sure how you can spin that into a bad thing, and I encourage anyone interested to read the story and see for themselves.’”⁶ In the article itself, the descriptions “of Lamar’s crew as ‘slightly monastic,’ [and of] ‘rigorous discipline’ comes from them not getting high and Lamar not being a cad. In other words, being law-abiding and decent—which is only remarkable if we’re assuming the group of people in question to not normally be law-abiding and decent.”⁷ In addition, as writer Spencer Kornhaber responded in an article for *The Atlantic* when discussing another example of GQ’s stereotyped discourse⁸ on Lamar, “given the choice between continuing to buy into a cliché about out-of-control rap rivalries and believing the truth-telling genius being profiled, the reader’s asked to favor the cliché.” In other words, the very industry that was giving Kendrick cultural “value” and “visibility” by placing him on the cover was actually actively working to strip away his value and visibility as a human being by stereotyping and generalizing his actions. Kendrick couldn’t be described for what he *was*, only what he *was up against*—which were preconceived notions of how a rapper should think and behave. To GQ, Kendrick was just a commodity they could manipulate and sell to viewers: his “Americanness” was celebrated and amplified while his “blackness” was stripped and stereotyped. His perceived economic and cultural “mobility” in actuality could only take him as far as the industry allowed him to travel, a tight leash having been placed around his neck by the institutions that held the real power over his body.

Part II: The Typification of Hip-Hop: Perceived as Perpetrator/Perpetuator over Protestor

In addition, in the same year that John McWhorter published his article in *Forbes*, “Racism in America Is Over,” he also released a book titled—unsurprisingly—*All About the Beat: Why Hip-Hop Can’t Save Black America* (2008), in which he argues that “hip-hop is typified by narcissism rather than altruism, a culture of complaint rather than creative solution and a willful blindness to the real problems affecting black communities.”⁹ This book, as expected, turns out to be problematic for many of the same reasons that his article was: for he not only typifies and stereotypes all of rap music using a few representative examples, but the arguments that he makes also preserve and validate the pernicious (and unfortunately, in the critical community, fairly pervasive) idea that rap music acts as the perpetuator and creator—and not the illuminator and critic—of the issues of violence, misogyny, poverty, and hatred that have harmed so many black communities. These issues—just like those of *structural racism* mentioned in the previous article—are ones that he refuses to believe are institutional.¹⁰ Author, professor, and Director of the Center for Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown University, Tricia Rose, responds to this very criticism of rap music in her book, *The Hip Hop Wars* (2008), charging that, “to many hot-headed critics of hip hop, structural forms of deep racism, corporate influences, and the long-term effects of economic, social, and political disempowerment are not meaningfully related to rappers’ alienated, angry stories about life in the ghetto; rather, they are seen as ‘proof’ that black behavior creates ghetto conditions.” She

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Naturally Kendrick himself refused to corroborate any of [the details of the alleged scuffle]. ‘It was all love at that party,’ he told me on the private jet” (GQ); and Kornhaber’s response: “Lamar’s positivity comes off like image management; the frustrated ‘naturally’ and ‘refused’ implies that when Lamar says ‘it was all love,’ he’s probably lying” (*The Atlantic*).

⁹ John McWhorter, *All About the Beat: Why Hip-Hop Can’t Save Black America* (New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2008).

¹⁰ As quoted from McWhorter earlier: “The point is valid even when the terminology is ‘societal racism,’ ‘institutional racism’ or ‘white privilege.’ Obsessing over things that cannot be changed and are not the real problem anyway is of no use to anyone.”

continues, addressing the issue that “decades of urban racial discrimination (the reason black ghettos exist in the first place), in every significant arena— housing, education, jobs, social services—in every city with a significant black population, simply disappear from view [as a result of this perception of rap music as perpetuating or creating problems, not reacting to them].”¹¹ What McWhorter and many critics don’t understand, and what Rose points out, is that Kendrick is not the *perpetrator* or *perpetuator* of these problems, but the *protestor*: for the issues Kendrick lambasts in his songs (structural racism, police brutality, the appropriation of black bodies and cultures, etc...) aren’t preserved and maintained by individuals—but institutions. Therefore, no matter how much institutional “visibility” and economic security Kendrick may seem to earn and cultivate for himself—those same institutions and capitalistic systems feigning the provision of “empowerment” for black artists like Kendrick remain in place as bulwarks against the actual safety and preservation of his bodily and conscious security, obscuring his identity and self-reflexivity in the process.

And while it may at first seem to the listener efficient and appropriate to take cognitive shortcuts and instinctively label songs like Kendrick’s “The Blacker the Berry”¹² as inflammatory and songs like “i”¹³ as celebratory, for their respectively abrasive¹⁴ or anthemic¹⁵ lyrics, this reduction proves to be (1) too simplistic—glossing over the intricacies and nuances of the songs’ rhetorical strategies—and (2) capable of preserving those harmful ideals embedded within McWhorter’s grossly misconceived depreciation of hip-hop culture: for it aligns the former song *with* the “culture” and the latter with an attempt *to transcend* “that culture,” as if the base state of black culture is inherently a problematic or lesser condition of existence and any attempt at transcendence is therefore deemed celebratory and righteous. However, in neither song is Kendrick decrying that state of black existence—only the arduous and complicating lens of double-consciousness through which he must view it. For instead of complaint or denunciation, what he is performing in *both* songs is the art of “black protest writing,” described by author and historian Precious Rasheeda Muhammad as “when black authors use their writing to challenge injustices, inequalities, and the secondary status faced by black people in America, in order to provoke change—from the earliest literary efforts to present day”¹⁶—and not, as McWhorter describes it, as an act of “narcissism,” a “culture of complaint,” or a “willful blindness” of those cultural problems. And while thematically and textually Kendrick’s records embody Muhammad’s foundational definition of “black protest writing,” sonically and aesthetically they differ. For within the dialogue and discourse of Kendrick, protest can take many forms. With traditional “black protest writing” often stereotyped as being caustic, moralistic, and lyrical but aurally unappealing, Kendrick would align more with Questlove—the drummer for the Roots and in-house member for *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*—who counters this convention, believing that “protest songs don’t have to be boring or non-danceable or ready made for the next Olympics. They just have to speak truth...songs with spirit in them. Songs

¹¹ Tricia Rose, *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop - and Why It Matters* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008).

¹² Kendrick Lamar Duckworth, writer, “The Blacker the Berry,” recorded March 15, 2015, in *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Kendrick Lamar, Top Dawg Entertainment / Aftermath Records / Interscope, 2015, CD.

¹³ Kendrick Lamar Duckworth, writer, “i,” recorded March 15, 2015, in *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Kendrick Lamar, Top Dawg Entertainment / Aftermath Records / Interscope, 2015, CD.

¹⁴ “So why did I weep when Trayvon Martin was in the street / when gang banging make me kill a n*gga blacker than me? / Hypocrite!”

¹⁵ “Sky could fall down, wind could cry now / Look at me motherfucker I smile / And (I love myself) / When you lookin’ at me, tell me what do you see? / (I love myself)”

¹⁶ Precious Rasheeda Muhammad, “Black Protest Writing, From W.E.B. Du Bois to Kendrick Lamar,” *Literary Hub*, August 10, 2016, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://lithub.com/black-protest-writing-from-w-e-b-dubois-to-kendrick-lamar/>.

with solutions. Songs with questions.”¹⁷ Kendrick is not the first artist to make powerful protest music,¹⁸ but he is one of the first to stretch the boundaries of what it is capable of sounding like—presenting it in some places through memorable melodies and palatable pop sensibilities, and in others through feverish drum kicks and vitriolic verses damning his detractors.¹⁹ And therein lies the true strength of Kendrick Lamar and the clearest manifestation of his double-consciousness: no matter how he is expressing himself or what sonic vehicle he uses to tonally convey that message—upbeat or uprisen²⁰—he can’t escape the forces oppressing him and complicating his identity. He can’t shake that condemnation, no matter how happy or glorifying the tone of his music appears, for even “though [his song ‘i’s] Isley Brothers sample makes it seem breezy, Lamar has said in interviews that the track's supposed to be a tool to use against one's own self-hatred; it's not an expression of contentment, but of struggle.”²¹ Despite the harsh tonal differences, it becomes clear that in *both* songs, Kendrick is performing the role of protestor—although in each he strategically encompasses a different perspective from behind the Veil. Whether channeling the uplifting message of continued striving and dogged perseverance of Martin Luther King Jr. in “i,” or the acerbic indictments and caustic rhetoric of Malcolm X in “The Blacker the Berry,” (as pointed out explicitly by Terrence Henderson, the President of Kendrick’s label, Top Dawg Entertainment),²² Kendrick uses his platform—the one productive thing the entertainment industry has provided him with—to express sonically what Du Bois did textually over a century prior: “How does it feel to be a problem?”²³ What Kendrick lacks in true *visibility*, both internal and external—shrouded and managed by an industry that commodifies rather than commemorates him—he makes up for with *versatility*, channeling the diverse voices and perspectives of all the revolutionaries who have come before him in an attempt to make his double-consciousness manifest: to bring visibility to his invisibility through the invocation of racial fears and the systems that prop them up.²⁴ For when Questlove tweeted out his message to black protest writers that “We need new Dylans. New Public

¹⁷ Salamishah Tillet, “The Return of the Protest Song,” *The Atlantic: Culture*, January 20, 2015, , accessed May 9, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/01/the-return-of-the-protest-song/384631/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “I’m African-American, I’m African / I’m black as the heart of a fuckin’ Aryan / I’m black as the name of Tyrone and Darius / Excuse my French but fuck you — no, fuck y’all / That’s as blunt as it gets, I know you hate me, don’t you? / You hate my people, I can tell cause it’s threats when I see you / I can tell cause your ways deceitful” (Kendrick Lamar, “The Blacker the Berry”)

²⁰ “Kendrick’s fed up. And if you’re black, he seems to think you should be, too. So what now? I know how this song makes me feel. It makes me feel proud to be black, proud that a black man created it, but also mad as hell (Rembert Browne, “Being Real Black for You: Who Kendrick Lamar Is Rapping to on ‘The Blacker the Berry,’” *Grantland*, February 11, 2015, , accessed April 15, 2018, <http://grantland.com/hollywood-prospectus/being-real-black-for-you-who-kendrick-lamar-is-rapping-to-on-the-blacker-the-berry/>).

²¹ Spencer Kornhaber, “Kendrick Lamar Is Not a Hypocrite,” *The Atlantic*, February 11, 2015, , accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/02/kendrick-lamar-is-not-a-hypocrite/385384/>.

²² Terrence Henderson, Twitter Post, February 10, 2015, 2:41 AM, <https://twitter.com/iamstillpunch/status/565098179884883968>.

²³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903), 4.

²⁴ “The narrator of the song wants to show off black pride as fiercely as he can, and yet the memory of his past actions are getting in the way... actions in large part caused by a racist system. But that doesn’t change the fact that they happened, and that they come to mind when he talks about black lives mattering. The Lamar of ‘The Blacker the Berry’ may not be a hypocrite, but the world has made him to feel like one” (Kornhaber, “Kendrick Lamar Is Not a Hypocrite”).

Enemys. New Simones,²⁵ he forgot one important point: maybe we don't need new protest writers, but new ways of protesting. And it is precisely in this sphere that Kendrick thrives.

Overall, when discussing the work of Kendrick Lamar, we must consider the question at the center of author, musician, and expert of ethnomusicology Christopher Small's theory of "Musicking"²⁶: "*What does it mean when this performance (of this work) takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?* Or to put it more simply, we can ask of the performance, any performance anywhere and at any time, *What's really going on here?*"²⁷ And in outlining the previously stated exploitation, identity-constriction, and pseudo-progressivism of the American entertainment industry—conditions that are not merely discussed in the work of Kendrick, but their effects explicitly made manifest through the inherent 'doubleness' and complication of his conflicted consciousness and ideology existing around the songs—through the writing of Kendrick as well as that of hip-hop's staunchest critics and supporters, I have worked to contextualize just why his words are needed now, and what impact they make as a result of that timeliness. Kendrick isn't the "New Simone," or just another Du Bois. He's not an updated Malcolm or Martin. Or just a preacher. Or entertainer. His critique is built upon all of those foundations, but he is something entirely new, and his platform and protest take forms we've never seen taken by any of his revolutionary forebears. For while Muhammed (described earlier for her piece "Black Protest Writing, From W.E.B. Du Bois to Kendrick Lamar,") is technically right in saying that—

"I realized that I could take any part of that first verse of 'The Blacker the Berry' and connect it to almost any other black protest writer, showing how strong the through-lines are in this lineage—a lineage that continues because the struggle continues. All of these writers are part of a historic intellectual progression that keeps having to repeat itself: you are not less than, you are just as good or greater than. This repetition, across centuries and decades, reveals a struggle that hasn't lessened—it just shape-shifts to the times."²⁸

—we must go back to the question Small posed: "*What does it mean when this performance (of this work) takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?*" For although Kendrick acts as a continuation of that legacy—that repetition, that lineage, that through-line—his message is also one that furthers and frames the narrative differently, and doesn't just *continue* it. For Kendrick's tonally complex and sonically disparate stances on "The Blacker the Berry" and "i," his symbolic manifestations of Uncle Sam²⁹ (a metonymy for capitalism and the white label executive) and Lucy³⁰ (a metaphorized female

²⁵ Tillet, "The Return of the Protest Song."

²⁶ "The essence of music lies not in musical works but in taking part in performance, in social action. Music is thus not so much a noun as a verb, 'to music'. To music is to take part in any capacity in a musical performance, and the meaning of musicking lies in the relationships that are established between the participants by the performance. Musicking is part of that iconic, gestural process of giving and receiving information about relationships which unites the living world, and it is in fact a ritual by means of which the participants not only learn about, but directly experience, their concepts of how they relate, and how they ought to relate, to other human beings and to the rest of the world." (Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 78-79).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Muhammad, "Black Protest Writing, From W.E.B. Du Bois to Kendrick Lamar."

²⁹ "What you want you? A house or a car? / Forty acres and a mule, a piano, a guitar? / Anythin', see, my name is Uncle Sam, I'm your dog / Motherfucker, you can live at the mall / I can see the baller in you, I can see the dollar in you / Little white lies, but it's no white-collar in you / But it's whatever though because I'm still followin' you" (Kendrick Lamar Duckworth, writer, "Wesley's Theory," recorded March 15, 2015, in *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Kendrick Lamar, Top Dawg Entertainment / Aftermath Records / Interscope, 2015, CD).

³⁰ "Lucy got million stories / About these rappers that I came after when they was boring / Lucy gon' fill your pockets / Lucy gon' move your mama out of Compton / I want you to know that Lucy got you / All your life I watched you / And now you all grown up to sign this contract, if that's possible" (Kendrick Lamar Duckworth, writer, "For Sale? (Interlude)," recorded March 15, 2015, in *To Pimp a Butterfly*, Kendrick Lamar, Top Dawg Entertainment / Aftermath Records / Interscope, 2015, CD).

temptress, short for ‘Lucifer’) in lyrical narratives that are equal parts carefully crafted parable and vilifying stream-of-consciousness diatribe, and his biting breakdown of the entertainment industry’s institutionally draconian chokehold on black entertainers (which he debuted ironically on *The Colbert Report*, a program which was satirical and critical but nonetheless situated in the dead center of the entertainment industry)³¹ are all forms of protest that have no precedent, no model that he had to follow in the footsteps of. For Kendrick is a *revolutionary* revolutionary, a man whose protests themselves are just as innovative as the messages that they promote. And as long as he continues to not just extend but evolve, expand, and rewrite the concepts of Du Bois and others before him, he is filling a gap in the critical cultural landscape of black protest writers that needs to be filled: exposing his own invisibility and internal conflict in order to make existence more visible and consciously clear for future generations of African Americans to come—generations who themselves must work to rewrite and add to the narrative as Kendrick did.

³¹ “A piece of mines / That’s what the white man wanted when I rhyme / Telling me that he selling me just for \$10.99 / I go platinum from rapping, I do the company fine / What if I compromise? He said it don’t even matter / Make a million or more, you living better than average / You losing your core following, gaining it all / Put a price on my talent, I hit the bank and withdraw / Hit the bank and withdraw, hit the bank and withdraw / Put myself in the rocket ship and I shot for the stars / Tell me what you accomplished and what he said to the boy / I’mma make you some promises that you just can’t ignore / Your profession anonymous as an artist / I don’t target your market / You ain’t signing your signature when I throw you my wallet / A lot of rappers are giving their demo all in the toilet / World tour, your masters, mortgage, I need ya” (Kendrick Lamar Duckworth, writer, "untitled 03 | 05.28.2013.," recorded March 4, 2016, in *untitled unmastered*, Kendrick Lamar, Top Dawg Entertainment / Aftermath Records / Interscope, 2016, CD).

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