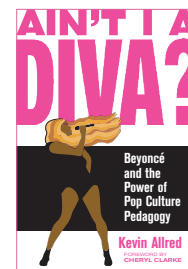


READING GROUP GUIDE

AIN'T I A DIVA? BEYONCÉ AND THE POWER OF POP CULTURE PEDAGOGY by Kevin Allred

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1. Allred's introduction quotes Janet Mock arguing that "pop culture is so much more than a guilty pleasure, it's an 'access point'—for education, entertainment, critical inquiry, politics. One that is available and accessible to most everyone in one form or another, unlike often exclusionary academic theory or biased formal education" (xvii). Why do you think pop culture icons such as Beyoncé are often seen as "guilty pleasures" rather than valid topics of academic discourse? Can you think of any other celebrities or icons that are often dismissed but have work that you believe is worthy of a deeper contextual analysis?
2. Kevin Allred is a white man writing about Black feminism, which is necessarily primarily about the experience of Black women. In his preface, he acknowledges his positionality and lays out a methodology: he will only cite Black women. How do you feel about the approach he takes writing about this subject from his place of privilege?
3. Allred refers to a *Saturday Night Live* skit, "The Day Beyoncé Turned Black," to note that prior to her Super Bowl halftime performance, many of Beyoncé's white fans imagined her as "not holding any progressive politics that would seek freedom for Black people in America" (72). Do you think it's possible to listen to Beyoncé's music without consideration of Black womanhood and culture in America? Is Beyoncé's music always political?
4. Too often, Allred argues, Black women are forced to "bend themselves" (112) in order to fit into society's warped standards of what womanhood is supposed to be. Has there ever been a time in your life when you were forced to "bend" who you were to fit a mold or to be seen? If so, how did that impact you? If not, why do you think that is?
5. Allred calls the song "Partition" a "lyrical ode to sex" (137), but Beyoncé faced criticism over the song's sex-positive nature. How do you differentiate between sex positivity and objectification? How do you think Beyoncé's work approaches (or refuses) this question?
6. Allred argues that Beyoncé's persona Sasha Fierce can be read as a queer drag performance and identifies the work she does as a "nod to queering the gender binary" (168). Do you agree? What do you think Allred's argument for an expanded interpretation of queerness does for discussions of queerness in general?

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7. Much of Allred's analysis pertains to the visual aspects of Beyoncé's art, from the "Déjà Vu" music video to *Lemonade*. What image or scene and subsequent discussion stands out to you the most? What about it seems important to you?
8. The book is organized into three sections—Past, Present, and Future—but not according to a linear chronology; in doing so, Allred complicates white, historical conceptions of time. How do you respond to the book's organization by themes of time, rather than the chronological order of Beyoncé's work itself? How does the structure demonstrate the ways in which Beyoncé's work contributes to a larger canon of Black feminists disrupting normative conventions of history and time?
9. How has reading *Ain't I a Diva?* shifted or solidified your perspective on Beyoncé? Where do you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with Allred? Is there any stance Allred takes that you'd like to push back against?
10. Beyoncé is frequently releasing new work that continues to fall in formation with her highly curated, political, public image. Consider what Beyoncé has done since *Ain't I a Diva?*, including her new documentary and live album, *Homecoming*. How does her new work fit in with the ideas, arguments, and discourse that Allred has put forth in this text?

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