

# The Oscars | Formation



You never  
know how  
**Strong** you  
are until  
being  
**Strong** is  
the only  
choice you  
have

# The Oscars | Formation

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**Dedication:**

To all of our ancestors, I thank you so much.

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## **Introduction (Cancer in the Black Community)**

The title, “Cancer in the Black Community” is offered both literally and figuratively. Metaphorically speaking, there is a malignant and invasive growth that has been spreading in the Black community from long before I was born. This tumor is evident and made manifest through the struggles and day to day life of all people to whom the Black American experience applies. This evil sickness simultaneously is both the overwhelming and underlying issue at the core of why many Black American communities are in such a poor condition.

The disease robs these communities of power as well as the true understanding of power. This robbery has created an environment where real resources and tools were and are still being replaced by debt creating schemes and perpetuated networks of dependency. In such a system, wealth, knowledge and knowledge of creating wealth are not passed from generation to generation. Instead this system mis-educates people to continue supporting its corruption. When one becomes aware of how this system operates and is able to observe and understand how it functions and has continued to function and develop over numerous generations, any thinking person would find challenges determining who is sicker, those inflicted with the sickness created by this system or those compelled to keep the system operating. The compulsion to keep up the status quo is usually driven by greed. Unfortunately, as there is much ill-gotten gain to be had in continuing to perpetuate the system, too many of our leaders and politicians have been active in maintaining the sickness as opposed to creating a cure to the disease.

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Literally speaking, the title, “Cancer in the Black Community” addresses how an entire eco-system consisting of various pieces including finance, education, religion, politics and social interacting was built upon a foundation of mis-education and mis-information and has created an environment where the social behavior of people is conducive to disease and death. This system has created a framework which when analyzed reveals how it processes and positions people for failure in all areas of living from schools and education to business and finance as well as health and medical treatment. The system is such that prevention of physical diseases is a low priority if a priority at all. Unfortunately, those who are “Trapped” in such a system are then forced to combat overwhelming odds and terrible conditions, without the needed tools and resources to properly fight. As the title of the document implies, this system has introduced a sickness that attacks the Black American community at the cellular level and replicates itself thus sustaining a system that continually destroys the people trapped within the confines of the system. Furthermore, so called cures administered by the system in many cases cause additional suffering and pain while real solutions to the cancerous issues and problems that plague the Black community, solutions that can lead to ending the carcinogenic behavior of people are systematically shut out. As I metaphorically stated earlier, greed is at the root for why so many want to maintain the sickness as opposed to curing the disease. The theme and spirit of this project is realizing and acknowledging the issues and bringing people to the point addressing these problems.

I challenge us all to think.

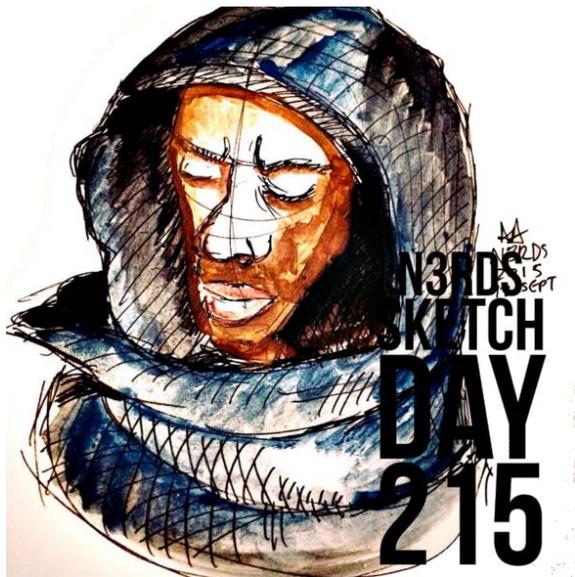
# Part 1 | Formation

“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the truth.”

■ Ephesians 6:17

## No Apologies

Black lives matter, I am not going to apologize for saying that. I was raised as a Christian; I’m not going to apologize about that. I am a Black man in the United States of America; I’m not going to apologize for that. In fact, I am illuminated, quite melanated and radiantly bright and unapologetically Black.



## Raised as a Christian

As Christians we learned that the bible is “the word of God Almighty”, “the truth”. We learn that the truth is considered “the sword of the spirit”. The book of Ephesians talks about the armor of God i.e. the breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and so forth.

The piece of armor which stands out is the sword of the spirit. This piece is

significant because it is the weapon of the armor. Yes the sword is a defensive tool however the sword is also designed to be an offensive weapon. The weapon is made so that it can strike the enemy down.

This sword is double-edged. The truth can open you up and reveal your inner most self. As such, the truth can also pierce the foe, open up the beast and expose the true enemy.

So as we assess Mrs. Knowles-Carter's music and Super Bowl performance, we should proceed with truth.

### **Controversy**

One day prior to Super Bowl 50, Beyonce' released her new song "Formation" accompanied with a music video.

The song features lyrics that celebrate beauty such as, "I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils". Some listeners and fans were surprised to hear Beyonce' singing lyrics that recognize beauty which does not conform to a particular standard.

### **The Music Video**

More so than the lyrical content of the song, the imagery of the music video has caused controversy. The video is packed full of sociopolitical artistic conceptions that make statements which can be interpreted in different ways. Clearly, all people do not see all sociopolitical issues and concerns in the same way.

The video takes place in New Orleans and begins with a sound bite from Anthony Barre whose stage name was Messy Mya. Mr. Barre was a popular rapper and comedian based in New Orleans. He also became a YouTube sensation. Unfortunately Mr. Barre was murdered in 2010. His case is still unsolved. The "Messy Mya" sound clip asks the questions, "What happened after New Otrleans?" This question is important because it forces Americans, specifically Black Americans to preserve an accurate account of events that surrounded hurricane

Katrina. “Katrina” will always be a very relevant piece of American history.

Immediately following the sound bite, the video delivers images of Beyoncé’ sitting atop a police squad car that is submersed, up to its windows, in a body of water. The squad car continues to slowly sink through the course of the video.

Three additional sociopolitical references seemed to have made a significant impact on video viewers.



1. A young child dressed in a black hoodie dances across from a line of police officers dressed and outfitted in riot gear. When the child finishes his dance routine, the next scene displays the police officers with their hands up which is a direct reference to the “Mike Brown” shooting as well as the Black Lives Matter movement and slogan “Hands up, Don’t Shoot”.
2. Towards the end of the video a scene cuts to a wall on which is written, “Stop shooting us”. This is another reference to the Black Lives Matters movement.
3. There are several scenes in the video that display and express elements of the Black American religious experience. Some images portray scenes from “The Black church”. Also, one video scene displays a man holding a news paper which very much resembles a “Photoshopped” Final Call edition. The cover of this newspaper features a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr with the

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caption, “More than Dreamer”. This perhaps is a reference to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Million Man March (10.10.15) and the Justice or Else movement. The Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan referenced Dr. King’s last speech several times at most of his speaking engagements that led up to the Justice or Else event. Minister Farrakhan expressed that while MLK is usually labeled and categorized as a dreamer in “History”, Dr. King was actually a revolutionary thinker in the last years of life. A major objective of the Justice or Else movement is to pick up and continue some of Dr. King’s work. For instance, Dr. King had called for Black Americans to begin a campaign of economic withdrawal from certain businesses as a strategy to help redistribute pain being felt in inner city neighborhoods. Likewise, Minister Farrakhan is organizing Black Americans to begin economically withdrawing from companies that do not recognize the financial support that Black Americans contribute to their businesses.

The irony of this scene in the video is that the Justice or Else event, movement and subsequently its objectives received practically no major media coverage. While some reporting agencies estimate that 1.5 million people attended the Justice or Else event, the day was not featured or covered on any major television network. The entire event was completed successfully with no outbreaks of violence. In contrast, when the social uprising in Baltimore occurred, numerous major media outlets covered the events live. Perhaps due to all the controversy and conversation happening over the Formation song, the Justice or Else movement will gain some well-deserved media coverage.

### **The Super Bowl Performance**

Somewhere between Formation's lyrical content and music video imagery many people found themselves upset about the song's social and political references and expression.

However Beyoncé's performance of the Formation song during the Super Bowl 50 halftime show angered and frustrated some people to the point of protest. During the halftime performance, Beyoncé's backup dancer's hairstyles were done as afros while they were accessorized in leather and black berets to which some people interpreted as a reference to the Black Panther movement.

## Protesting

The constitution of the United States speaks about the right of assembly. While constitutional law debates how to interpret assembly and protests, issues and concerns of a country that is still discovering its conscience calls on citizens to join together and voice the opinion of the people.

With this in mind, I would say to people who do not agree with Beyoncé's latest record or performance at Super Bowl 50, you should protest. You should protest with at least two thoughts in mind.

1. **You should know why and for what you are protesting.**

If you do not understand the lyrics of the song, research the words and phrases and understand the context in which they used.



(<http://genius.com/Beyonce-formation-lyrics> ) If you do not understand the imagery, investigate, go beyond the assumption stage and begin asking questions. This will lead to more detailed questions and more importantly detailed answers that will help create a healthy environment for intelligent conversation. If you are not familiar with Black Panther organizations, study these groups and understand their origins. Again ask questions. If you are protesting you should understand why and for what reason(s) you are protesting.

2. **Protest to achieve results of the change you are seeking.** If you are going to protest, do so in such way that your actions matter

and are felt and help bring healing and cure to an environment of disease. Stop purchasing the products offered by any company or corporation that is opposed to the purpose of your protest. Don't stop there. Protest the marketers and sponsors. Follow the money. If you think the NFL or its sponsors are concerned about you walking around outside their building carrying a few picket signs, you're wrong. However if you stop buying tickets to NFL games, stop purchasing products with the NFL insignia, cease your patronage of NFL corporate sponsors and proceed in this manner as group then your protest matters. Stop the flow of money.

### **Double Edged**

For those of who are protesting Mrs. Knowles-Carter, again we should proceed and examine all protests of the people with truth. When Black Americans protest against injustice and systems that were and are still designed to be and to operate in adversity to being Black and even building a Black identity we should examine the scenario(s) and the facts by asking questions and initiating intelligent conversations.

Truth is a double edged sword that we should not be attempting to use against one another. We can wield the weapon together.



### **My Litter Sister “Bey”**

Mrs. Knowles-Carter, I support you. I’m very proud of your accomplishments and your success. It’s easy for many people to underestimate and overlook the risks some artists take in expressing themselves through their artistry. However many of your fans very much appreciate your expression of Black American identity and Black American culture. I help raise 5 young Black girls and so I love a song that celebrates “Jackson Five nostrils”.

As a Christian I was raised to speak truth to power. The truth is the sword of the spirit. As Black Americans, we are submersed in a American society that is adverse to being Black and expressing any form of Black identity. We must research and understand the truth of who we are and actively participate in building and establishing Black American communities.

Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, you officially rock. Carry it on little sister.

# Part 2 | “As plain as the nose on one's face”

## The Trees of the Forest



“Life is war” Black Americans are at war. In 2015 there were 344 homicides in Baltimore city, of which 320 were Black. Within 30 days of 2016 there were 20 homicides in Baltimore. Black American inner cities of Baltimore have open drug markets in our streets. On any given day in Black American neighborhoods, Black Americans can be observed dealing drugs, death and dependency to other Black people.

Some environmental variables:

- Family, home and friend structure
- Leadership
- Mentorship and communication
- Financial and economic issues
- Infrastructure requirements
- Institution requirements
- Education
- Political policies

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Analyzing environmental variables of these inner city spaces one realizes the need for community members and residents to strategically plan and implement solutions that deal with the issues and problems in Black American inner city neighborhoods.

While many in the “Black conscious community” will view the entire 2016 Oscars discussion, #OscarsSoWhite as a distraction from real issues, this moment in time may mark a much needed conversation that has been bubbling up to a slow boil in American society.

Objectively observing the discussion, there appears to be at least two prevalent points “of view” or “on graph” depending on how events and accounts are perceived.

I listened to, watched and read accounts, commentary and talking points from Whoopi Goldberg, Stacey Dash, Janet Hubert, Jada Pinkett Smith, Idris Elba and others.

While “We the people” are the United States of America and we are all connected, akin to politics, social issues are local. The environmental variables and social concerns of Baltimore city are not exactly identical to the social issues and problems of any other major metropolitan city. However as a caveat, particularly Black Americans should study Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”. Dr King explained why and how we as human beings and American citizens are all connected and interconnected in “Life’s war”.

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“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly... Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds”

■ (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, 1963)

With much respect to Jada Pinkett Smith’s Baltimore city roots as well as the background and life experiences of others who have weighed in and commented on the discussion, I personally speak and offer accounts and perspectives as a Black American Baltimore inner city resident. As such, I will be pleasantly surprised to meet any of the above mentioned celebrities in inner city Baltimore streets. That includes “Mr. Stringer Bell” himself, Idris Elba. While we are all indeed connected, social issues are local and at times require strategic planning and coordination with allies, groups and affiliates from various regions and of different backgrounds and social circles.

## Why does it matter?

Black American leadership has always been met with opposition, resistance and hostility in the United States. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. gave their lives in leadership of our people. While countless others have stepped up to lead Black Americans, many are unknown as they were not positioned on national or international platforms.



Through, during and due to the civil rights movement, many doors of opportunities were created to construct a pathway to achievement and success for Black Americans. Many Black Americans carved out paths to success and leadership through business, politics and finance as well as journalism, sports, entertainment and celebrity. Unfortunately, many Black Americans who had positioned themselves and were positioned into places of power through the civil rights era became more of figures behind the glass of television screens, out of reach and out of touch with their people. In fact with success for some of our Black leaders followed a disconnection from the Black American masses.

While today we do have Black American leaders most notably, the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan, there is a giant void that can still be observed and experienced decades after two of this planet's greatest leaders, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. were assassinated. Ironically, Malcolm X once disparagingly spoke about Black actors and comedians being regarded as Black American leaders.

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And here we are in 2016 as Black Americans with our political and business leaders behind the glass of television, distant and disconnected from Black people, reaching through that “glass”, that barrier are Black actors and comedians who were and are heavily influenced by Malcolm’s work.

It is in the spirit of Malcolm how I perceive the 2016 Oscars discussion. As I listened to Jada Pinkett Smith’s comments, she spoke about Black Americans converting our energy into power and establishing positions of power to create institutions and build infrastructure for growing a Black American economy. This was the work of Malcolm and Martin. This is historically where we see two different ideologies, two diverse philosophies, to points if you will, intercept and converge.

As I listen to some Black conservatives express their views of how the political policies and laws that were created during and due to the civil rights movement brought into existence an environment that is worse than slavery in the United States, I first and foremost strongly disagree. Second, it is ironic how these Black conservatives shy away and distance themselves from the work of Malcolm X when Malcolm’s movement was specifically designed to create Black leadership, Black businesses and build a Black economy.

With that said, it is fascinating when Stacey Dash suggests that Black history month and Black entertainment award programs be eliminated. Ms Dash expressed that Blacks would have a problem with a award program that seemed to only awarded white people. Again the irony is, that’s exactly what we’re dealing with,

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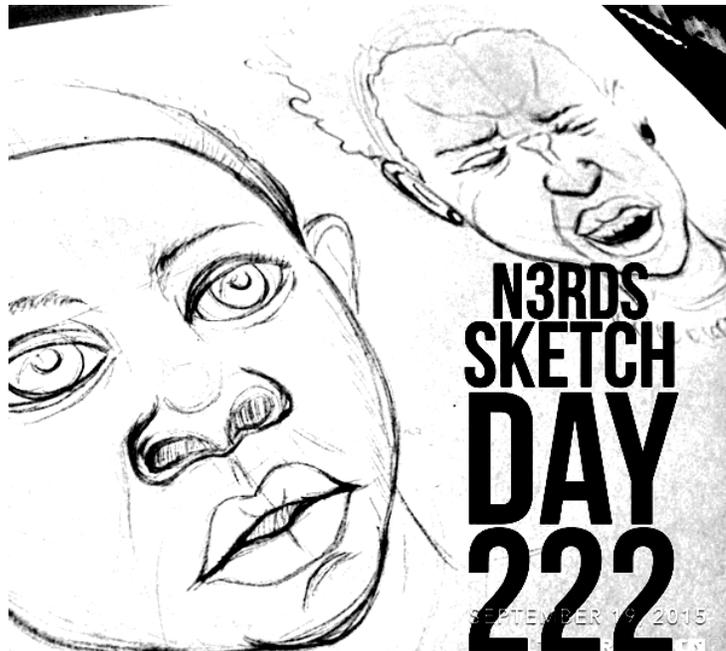
Ms. Dash went on to ask if Black Americans wanted integration or segregation. This is why history and proper education is so important and valuable.

In the “topsy-turby” world in which we live, where Black Americans find themselves in a space asking if we want integration or segregation, a proper understanding of history is needed.

Black Americans should study and understand the civil rights movements from the 1950s to the 1970s. There are several views and actions which have much value, relevance as well as impact on today’s present times and events.

Black Americans should have a understanding of why Malcolm X was denied entry into France and how he planned to bring the unjust treatment of Black Americans in the United

States before the United Nations. Black Americans should understand how and why the leader of and foremost spokes person of racial integration in the United States, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began speaking and teaching that Black Americans needed to exercise economic withdraw to begin pulling our money from white banking institutions and insurance companies and instead begin building a Black American economy.



## **“As plain as the nose on one's face”**

Communication and the transference of history and knowledge from one Black American generation to the next is needed to deal with the issues and problems within Black American inner cities. James Loewen, the author of “Lies My Teacher Told Me”, expressed the thought that young Black Americans have a warped idea that Blacks would have been better off under segregation.

I agree with Mr. Loewin, the perception that many people have, young and old of Black American history is warped. The distortion stems from improper education and lies about history as well as how and why things are the way they are.

Regardless of whether a person is conservative or liberal, democratic or republican, we can agree that Black American inner cities have multiple issues. Communication is the primary step to solving these problems. I would inject that yes Black History month is ridiculous. Black History should be taught and learned 365 days of every year. This is the responsibility of Black Americans. We cannot trust this very necessary and needed task to anyone other than ourselves. As such we should be investing in building Black American institutions and infrastructure. Opposition to establishing a Black American economy should be recognized as a key point when discussing the civil rights era. Unfortunately some folks have challenges observing this point. In the same way as they are not able to view the tip of their own nose without the aid of a mirror, this case requires one to see the reflection of one's self.

## Where do we begin?

“Life is war”. As Whoopi Goldberg said, “

“You wanna boycott something? Don't go see the movies that don't have your representation. That's the boycott you want,”

■ (Whoopi Goldberg, 2015)

As a “Scifi” fan, there are always movies playing in theaters that I would like to see. However it is a personal struggle to decide whether or not to see a particular main stream film which does not represents me or worse mis-represents Black Americans. Instead, an idea is to invest those dollars into something else such as a Black American independent film. This can be a challenging decision and at the same time, it is very simple.

As such this Oscars discussion could be considered meaningless and also pivotal in Black American society.

I challenge us all to think.

## Notes

### **WilliamDanney.com**

The goal of WilliamDanney.com is to reposition, redesign and reengineer society for the betterment and advancement of human beings. This goal is being accomplished through processes properly educating people with accurate information.

The goal is based upon two fundamental beliefs.

1. One person can change the world. Through thought and action as well as feelings and emotions conveyed via power of personal awareness and self-expression a person can influence another. This power manifests in many different ways; through speech, writing, art, athleticism, and teaching, just to name very few. Through positive influence, we encourage, motivate and advance each other. Utilizing the idea of likeminded thinking and pooling our personal resources, we can accomplish great things well beyond our current imaginations.
2. The power of change begins within the individual. Personal change is completely a participatory self-engagement activity. The initial requirements are to conduct a self inventory of one's personal resources, the acknowledgement of one's strengths and weaknesses and the self understanding of what one believes in i.e. faith, God the future and the power of change.

Through awareness of one's self, creativity and expression we can reshape and redesign a better environment for ourselves, our children and families, our communities and the Human family.

**How you can be involved:**

- Checkout the blog and spread the word.
- Check out our sister and brother sites and spread the word.
- The WilliamDanney.com project is currently completely self-funded. We have decided to monetize the blog utilizing ad campaigns. We ask that you please click an ad from the site. This small gesture will help us to continue creating and providing meaningful and good content.

We've added a "Take Action" button to the web site. You can also use this tool to show your financial support for the project and our goals.

Thank you so much,

Sincerely,

William Danney

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