

Don't Be Like Mike, Be Like Janelle Monae

By Jason Goudlock

At a time when African Americans are being brutally beaten and killed throughout the United States by rogue police officers and being incarcerated at an alarmingly disproportionate rate compared with white Americans, most black celebrities have failed to speak out about this injustice. Instead of using their mighty voices to address the racist, cruel, and unjust treatment of African Americans, they remain silent to protect their business relations with white corporate supporters. A few celebrities and athletes, such as WNBA superstar Brittney Griner, actually support the Jim Crow-like practices of the U.S. criminal justice system.¹

African American singer Janelle Monae is not one of these people.

At the conclusion of a performance on NBC's Today show in August of 2015, Monae made a brief, passionate speech about police brutality and racism. "God bless America," she said to millions of viewers. "God bless all who've lost lives to police brutality. We want white America to know that we stand tall today. We want black America to know that we stand tall today. We will not be silenced." Her words sent shock waves through the Today studio, and the producers cut the singer off in mid-speech with a commercial break.

As with other memorable public statements against the racist treatment of blacks in the United States--words spoken by the likes of boxing legend Muhammad Ali during the Vietnam War and recording artist Kanye West after hurricane Katrina--Janelle Monae's speech showed how powerful the words of a celebrity can be. In fact, the Today show's decision to pull the plug on Monae shows that words spoken by celebrities pose a threat to the U.S. status quo. If black celebrities and black athletes never realize the power of their voices and remain silently complicit like retired NBA superstar Michael Jordan, who rakes in millions from the sale of his Air Jordan basketball shoes in the same black communities he ignores while pledging financial support to white NASCAR drivers flying the Confederate flag, then they will continue to be the elite million-dollar slaves of corporate America.

If you are a black celebrity or black athlete who has been uninvolved in the Black Lives Matter movement but know you should be, reverse course. Be like Janelle Monae, and make your presence felt.

Jason Goudlock is a progressive writer embedded in the struggle against the repressive United States prison industrial complex. If you would like to offer him support on his quest to attain justice for Ohio old-law prisoners, you can contact him at the following:

Jason Goudlock #284-561
P.O. Box 80033
Toledo, OH 43608

Learn more about Jason Goudlock and his struggle for freedom at freejasongoudlock.org.

¹ October 11, 2014: <http://www.mstarz.com/articles/39077/20141011/brittney-griner-lebron-james-wnba-superstar-deny-parole-incarcerated-cleveland.htm>