"Everything will change. The only question is growing up or decaying"
-Nikki Giovani

An Animated Anthology on Black Freedom Post-Black Panther Era

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Introduction:

Huey Newton coined the term "Revolutionary Suicide" in an attempt to describe what a revolutionary should be prepared for. One who considers themselves a revolutionary should be ready for death as they challenge the powers that be. If you were going to challenge the systems which oppress you, you must be prepared for the systems to fight back and shoot you down. You might die at the hands of those you wish to upturn, but the struggle will continue as your comrade will pick up where you left off, until your successors are finally able to free themselves from oppression and tyranny. However, what happens when a person picks up the baton and takes a different path, one with less risks out of fear? Black politics aimed at freedom post the Black Panther Era has been a response to the perceived shortcomings and successes of the movement, as people have been divided on how to move forward. This anthology will be aimed at highlighting the shift in ideologies and responses to the Black Panther Era in Black politics.

Section I: The History of the Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party began in 1965 when Bobby Seale was introduced to Huey Newton after a rally in Oakland, California where they both attended Merritt Junior College. Seale was impressed with Newton's charisma and speech abilities, and the two militant personalities decided to create their own organization with the goal of being able to serve the marginalized and predominantly Black Oakland community (Harris 165).

In order to create a plan to best serve the residents they created a survey, and decided to use the results to create a platform for the newly founded organization, which they then labeled the "Black Panther Party". The Panthers centered their ideology on a ten point program

1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our Black Community.

2. We want full employment for our people.

3. We want an end to the robbery by the white men of our Black Community. (later changed to "we want an end to the robbery by the capitalists of our black and oppressed communities.")

4. We want decent housing, fit for shelter of human beings.

5. We want education for our people that exposes the true nature of this decadent American society. We want education that teaches us our true history and our role in the present day society.

6. We want all Black men to be exempt from military service.

7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of Black people.

8. We want freedom for all Black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.

9. We want all Black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their Black Communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.

10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace (UC).

The platform emphasized a need for self sufficiency, re-education, community values and protection against a predatory white supremacist government. Over time, as the party expanded the ideologies and programming for the party shifted and changed. The first significant change which placed a clear separation between the Black Panthers and other Black organizations of the time involved the notion of self-defense (Harris 165). The party started the program of self-defense in which the Panthers vowed to defend themselves under attack, but would commit

to not making any unprovoked attacks themselves. Furthermore, the ideology of the party continuously became more centered around providing services to peoples of the community as they initiated programs such as "The free breakfast program" which provided breakfast to school children, free health clinics, Clothing and Shoe Programs, and the Buses to Prison Program, as well as others, which responded to the obvious needs of black people with the ultimate goal of building a system which actually centered justice for Black people (Harris 168). The final ideology shift the Panthers represented was in 1972 in which the leadership of the Panthers expanded their focus from racial struggle to "class struggle", and created alliances with other revolutionary groups of different races. Their theory became a combination of Black Nationalism and Marxism-Leninism. Adapting theories such as "death with honor" from Che Guevara and "the cleansing force of violence" from Fanon, it was understood that the same global oppressors who controlled their contemporaries, also controlled them (Harris 168). The Black Panther Party successfully projected a revolutionary nationalist ideology that solidified the ideological direction of Black politics aimed at liberation.

The Panthers peaked in the late 1960s, as they had over 2,000 members and over 68 offices in urban cities throughout the country (HISTORY). The organization soon began to decline as a result of internal tensions and the deadly COINTELPRO, an FBI program which aimed at dismantling the Panthers both internally and externally. The FBI's director, J. Edgar Hoover went as far as to call the Panthers "one of the greatest threats to the nation's internal security" (Abu-Jamal 118). The Black Panthers eventually disbanded as an organization in 1982.

Ultimately, I conclude the Panthers demise to be a result of 1) tensions due to the machismo culture within the organization and a lack of inclusivity. 2) The belief that the

Panthers were too idealistic with their aims. This coupled with a lack of production towards these idealistic aims resulted in a loss of membership and funding. 3) Violence by the local and national government, as they classified the Panthers as a threat to the state, and systemically harassed, arrested, and assassinated members of the party. This resulted in fear within both the party and the Black community nationwide. I believe these three reasons to have been fundamental in the change in the Black political landscape and imagination in the following decades.

Section II: Shift in Politics as a result of the Black Panther Party:

American society is centered around the idea of The "American Dream" which was originally described as "…a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position." (Truslow 34). This culture developed from America's capitalist framework which is centered on the ideal that you can go from a worker to a capitalist through hard work, and be the one who extracts labor and owns private property (Marx 10.5.2). This emphasizes a culture of "individualism" and "work ethic", where the burden of success is placed on the individual (Shelby 126) and if one's position in life is unfavorable then they need to work harder and "pick themselves up by the bootstraps".

The Panthers allowed for a decentering of white American individualism. This led to an expansion of the Black imagination towards Black freedom as people were able to view a new system which centered Black communities and people. The Black Panthers put forward an idea of "freedom which included political emancipation, economic well being, physical and mental

health, social and cultural integrity, fundamental human rights, and spiritual salvation, all of the compo- nents, characteristics, and attributes of a freed people" (Harris 173). Furthermore, The Panthers put forward social programs, increased awareness towards both domestic and international oppression, and mastered techniques of mass organization (Harris 170) and not only centered but shared the burdens of the people they supported. The Panthers provided a glimpse of a world in which Black people were self sufficient and self determined, while carving out a political roadmap and legacy for the future. When people are able to act like the future is already here they are able to awaken countless possibilities in the present, and expand the imagination for those looking towards a better future. All it takes is a moment to live in the future, to open up the imagination to a whole generation of people of what the future can hold.

Despite the positives that the Panthers put forth in an effort towards Black Freedom, the negatives had just as much as a lasting effect on Black ideologies. One of the negatives set forth included the lack of inclusivity and misogynistic culture within the organization. Gender politics played a significant role in the activities of the party and adversely affected its ability to run as a political organization. The gender struggles affected the ideology of the party, positions on issues, formed adverse relationships with more progressive political communities, and made it more susceptible to state sponsored violence (Matthews 231-232).

Leaders of the movement consciously created an idea of leadership which was centered around a masculine public identity and viewed the struggle as a redemption for Black manhood often viewing women as being "outside" the movement (Matthews 233). Despite this, both men and women within the organization challenged this notion, and worked to expand the scope of the party towards the entire Black community. It is important to recognize that Black women

became "critical players in the party, and the Party overall had a significant impact on the political life of many youths and adults outside its ranks" (Matthews 234). Black women were able to be promoted and hold powerful positions, as they advocated for better treatment within the party and throughout society itself. This was exemplified when Huey Newton appointed Elaine Brown to be the leader of the organization after his self isolation (Harris 170). However, this appointment caused many organizational issues as a large portion of the male members could not accept a woman as their leader. This eventually led to Brown stepping down as she could no longer bear the sexism and misogynoir within the organization (Harris 170).

Black people whose imaginations were expanded based on the Black Panther movement viewed the collective values the Panthers put forth as a success and understood the importance of Black women within the organization. As their imagination expanded, they now looked to expand on who should be centered in society and the Black community. They looked to build communities and movements with values centered around inclusivity and equality in places the Panthers were unable to while acknowledging and focusing on intersectionality.

The Panthers were skilled in the media, but often made claims which were not able to be backed up and this led to them not being taken seriously enough. This coupled with the fact that a lot of members were not able to commit to the length of the struggle, led many to believe that the Panthers were living in a sort of utopia which failed to be based in reality (Harris 171). Despite existing for years, Black people still weren't freed, and it felt as though the Panthers were always losing and on the defensive. Members, including Newton, became disillusioned with the organization and turned to drugs as a way to cope and disengage with reality.

These factors resulted in my second change in the Black imagination: A pragmatic transformation based on the inability of the Panthers to succeed and the idea that they weren't based in reality and too idealistic to achieve their goals, although the idea of Black determinism and community remained intact. People now based their ideology on navigating the systems in play and remaining "realistic" while retaining a belief in the idea of Black determinism and the collective ideology the Panthers put forth.

Those whose imaginations were reduced as a result of the Black Panther Party viewed the Party as a failure or were overwhelmed with fear that their imagination was reduced. Black people saw how the government treated Panthers as COINTELPRO was successfully able to adversely influence all three of the Panthers' top leaders and create internal strife (Harris 171). The FBI in hand with local police forces arbitratily harrassed, arrested, and assassinated members of the party, culminating with the assassination of the charastmatic and young leader, Fred Hampton (HISTORY). This spread fear throughout the entire organization and the Black community at large. The FBI had the wish that Black people would become so afraid that they wouldn't trust or follow any Black leader or organization which looked to deal with oppression in the manner the Panthers did (Harris 171).

It is important to note that the state violence enacted on the Panthers was successful and has helped solidify a neoliberal brand of respectability politics within the Black community. This has dominated Black mainstream political ideologies the past few decades and is the basis for what I believe to be the reduction of the Black imagination due to fear.

Section III: Black Freedom as an expansion of the Black Imagination:

For Black freedom representing an expansion of the Black imagination I chose three pieces, *Combahee River Collective Statement*, written by the Combahee River Collective, an interview transcript of "*Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy J. Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism*" a conversation with Cathy Cohen and Sarah Jackson, and the poem, *Who Said it Was Simple,* by Audre Lorde.

I chose the *Combahee River Collective Statement* because it perfectly shows the expansion on the Black Panther ideology as it represents a collective based politics based on centering marginalized voices, but expands this as it centers Black women as it proclaims, "Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because of our need as human persons for autonomy". This directly builds on the flaws that helped lead to the demise of the party as it looks to center Black women and acknowledges that Black men and women struggle together with racism, while Black women struggle against Black men in sexism and the need to address and combat this in order to have a sustainable and successful politic.

The second piece I chose to represent the expansion of the Black imagination was an interview transcript of "*Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy J. Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism*". I chose this piece because it's an amazing interview which establishes the importance of Black women, especially Black queer and trans women, and the central roles they have played in Black struggles. Furthermore, the interview explains how feminism has transformed Black freedom movements and how the influence of feminist scholarship and teaching has resulted in many young activists being able to use what they learn in the classroom to their organizing lives. This is something that the Panthers began to

do towards their decline, but never had the chance to fully implement, showing a clear expansion of the Black imagination.

Black Lives Matter is one of the most prominent movements of our time and it can be said that the movement will define the activism of my generation. It is clear they have learned from the failures of the Black Panthers while expanding on the successes as they have kept a community approach to organizing, while "recogniz(ing) that the male charismatic leader, or the singular charismatic leader, is not the (only) form of leadership" (Cohen 777) and allowing for leaders of all identities to have their voices heard and be centered within the organizations.

The third piece I have chosen for the expansion of the Black imagination is *Who Said it Was Simple,* by Audre Lorde. I chose this piece because it centers Black women, or a population that has not been traditionally centered by American politics in the same manner the Panthers look towards. It expands the imagination as it challenges the notions of white feminism, which looks to "liberate" one solely based on their gender, and the traditional anti-racism train of thought which looks to "liberate" one solely based on their race. Introducing the concept of intersectionality in such a straightforward and clear manner, this poem drew my attention as Lorde makes it clear that having one or the other isn't enough for her liberation as she must be liberated as a Black woman, not as being Black, or being a woman, as she's oppressed on both fronts.

Section IV: Black Freedom as a transformation of the Black imagination:

For Black freedom as a transformation of the Black imagination I chose three pieces, a transcript from a Vibe interview with Tupac in 1996, a visual representation of Beyonce's Lemonade, and Ilhan Omar's Congressional Acceptance Speech.

The reason I chose the Tupac piece as a transformation of the Black imagination is the excerpt from the interview had me thinking a lot about the response to the Black Panther Movement which the generation after the Panthers adapted. The Black Panther legacy along with their legacy of collectivism, had their own legacy of fear which was implanted into those after as a lot of the former Panthers struggled with a drug addiction, there was a "narrative of disillusionment". Tupac shows that he doesn't buy into the idea of the "Utopian Black revolution", and even though he advocates for the collectivism which they set forth he doesn't see this as being an appropriate solution for Black freedom in the world he lives in, a world which systematically destroyed the Panthers including his own mother. As Tupac's socioeconomic reality is not the same as the Panthers, he sees this as a means to creating his own solution to Black freedom through his music and spreading the message focusing on the world in front of him while holding on to the "dream" that the prior generation had left behind. As the Panthers had to adjust to the new reality after they disbanded, they learned to live in the world as it is today, but left behind an idea of the world we should strive for. Tupac looked to use the systems present to him in order to spread the Panther's core message instead of living in a "utopia" and trying to create a new world in which to base his ideology, thus transforming rather than expanding or reducing his imagination. Tupac looked to create unity and increase his platform through the capitalist system of the music industry, while still holding on to the core values of Black self determinism and community which the Panthers advocated for.

The reason I chose Beyonce's visual album "Lemonade" is because Beyonce challenges societal and political norms by centering positive images of the Black woman body with diverse representations in a similar manner to how the Panthers centered Black bodies in their politics.

However, despite this, it is clear Beyonce also buys into the capitalist values that the Panthers' looked to denounce, even going as far as commodifying historically Black images of resistance such as using images and voices of Malcolm X in order to make a profit for her own self gain. Beyonce is able to center Black women and their narrative in a manner which America has never, showing the influence of the Black Panthers, but at the same time looks to do this for a capitalist gain which the Panthers would denounce. Leading me to believe she transformed the Black imagination without expanding or reducing it.

The third piece I chose for the transformation of the Black imagination was the acceptance speech of Ilhan Omar. The reason I chose this piece as a transformation of the Black imagination is because it involves a Congress woman operating within traditional United States politics which have been dominated by the same systems the Black Panthers specifically denounced, especially on the national level. However, Omar's politics still look to take a radical shift from traditional politicians and center marginalized communities and her progressive policies are reminiscent of the Panther's social programs they put forth. Many people viewed the Panther's as being unrealistic in their hopes for a revolution. This helped put forth those who believe if you take ideas which are more progressive than the government has supported in the past and center marginalized people and communities, this will be a feasible and more pragmatic way to freedom. Taking the same approach the Panthers did in centering marginalized communities, but adapting it through the system that the Panthers denounced. Leading me to classify Ilhan Omar's speech and historical election as transforming the Black imagination, rather than reducing or expanding it.

Section V: Black freedom as a reduction of the Black Imagination:

For Black freedom as a reduction of the Black imagination I chose three pieces, a video from Barack Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention Speech, lyrics from Jay Z's song "Nickels and Dimes", and Michael Jordan's quote, "Republicans Buy Sneakers Too".

The reason I chose Obama's 2004 Democratic National Convention Keynote Address is because of the ways it advocates for a United States which overlooks differences between ethnicities and races. Particularly the phrase Obama uses "There is not a black America and a white America and Latino America and Asian America — there's the United States of America." To me, this is a direct result of the fear that emphasizing self determination amongst Black people in the era before has led to. The easier method towards freedom, would be to adapt and conform, and try to gain power within the systems without stepping too out of line. This has amounted to the respectability and neoliberal politics Obama has been known for in his past. This speech catapulted him on the national stage as he was lauded as a great orator and could be perceived as a leader, ultimately providing the platform for his presidency in which he carried these politics as the head of state and as an icon for Black Americans to follow and emulate. Instead of denouncing or looking to expand the American political system which has historically oppressed Black people, Obama chose to embrace it as his path to freedom, leading me to classify this speech as a reduction of the Black imagination.

For my second piece on how the Black Imagination has been reduced, I chose Jay Z's song "Nickels and Dimes", I chose Jay Z in order to show the range of how this ideology has spread in the Black community from the first Black president to a man many consider to be the greatest rapper ever. I also wanted to provide a rap song in order to highlight a medium in which Black politics have funneled, post the Black Panthers Era. It is often believed that Jay Z

encapsulates the American Dream as a poor Black American, who was able to become rich through hard work and masterfully navigating through the obstacles which he was born into, transcending his social and economic status. Jay Z has proved to be an inspiration to the Black youth in the ghettos especially of the late 1990's and early 2000's and instilled a belief that if one works hard enough they can overcome their position in life. Encapsulated by the lyrics, "I got a problem with the handouts, I took the man route", Jay Z often brags about making it on his own without the help of others and encourages others to do the same. This however goes directly against the community values which the Black Panthers looked to instill within Black communities, and is directly centered on the American individualistic values the Panthers looked to overcome. This thinking puts the blame on the individual and instead of examining the unfair systems one is born into, it makes the person think that they aren't working hard enough to succeed, shifting responsibility to the person and not the systems. Not only does this discourage the communal values the Panthers promoted, it relies on the exploitation of others and a "get it by any means" mentality in which you are exploiting people in your community in order to get ahead under the guise that you have worked harder than them. Instead of looking to create new systems, or transform harmful systems available to you, you look to obtain the same power that those who oppressed your communities have. This leads me to classify this as a reduction of the Black imagination.

For my third piece on how the Black Imagination has been reduced, I chose Michael Jordan's quote, "Republicans buy Sneakers too". Michael Jordan is considered to be the greatest basketball player of all time and is one of the most influential Black men of his generation. Unlike his contemporaries, such as Muhummad Ali, Jordan refused to use his platform and speak

publicly about politics despite the unprecedented oppression Black people were facing during his time. This ranged from televised police brutality, to mass incarceration, to the war on drugs which disproportionately targeted Black communities nationwide. Jordan was a Black icon who countless children looked up to and purchased his sneakers in the hope that they could one day "be like Mike". Instead of looking to support and uplift the Black community which revered him, Jordan decided to stay silent and solely focus on his own individualistic gains. He fully bought into capitalism to the point where he avoided doing anything that could upset or divide others and would cost him money, as "republicans buy sneakers too". Jordan didn't look to challenge, or even disapprove of the systems which were causing the communities he came from harm. Rather, he decided to perpetuate and buy into the violence, in order to make more money as he influenced a whole generation to buy into this mindset. Therefore, I classify this Jordan quote, and the ideology he embodied during his peak as a reduction of the Black imagination.

The Combahee River Collective Statement

Combahee River Collective

We are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. [1] During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

We will discuss four major topics in the paper that follows: (1) the genesis of contemporary Black feminism; (2) what we believe, i.e., the specific province of our politics; (3) the problems in organizing Black feminists, including a brief herstory of our collective; and (4) Black feminist issues and practice.

1. The genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Before looking at the recent development of Black feminism we would like to affirm that we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation. Black women's extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes. As Angela Davis points out in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," Black women have always embodied, if only in their physical manifestation, an adversary stance to white male

Cathy J. Cohen
Sarah J. Jackson

Ask a Feminist: A Conversation with Cathy J. Cohen on Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism

had the pleasure of having this conversation with Cathy J. Cohen, the David and Mary Winton Green Professor of Political Science and chair of political science at the University of Chicago, in late 2015. Cohen's work, both academically and as an activist, has inspired my own, particularly in terms of making connections between black feminist theory, social movements, and issues of race and racism in the United States. Cohen is the principal investigator of two major social change projects: the Black Youth Project (BYP100) and the Mobilization, Change and Political and Civic Engagement Project. Her books, *Democracy Remixed: Black Youth and the Future of American Politics* (2010) and *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (1999), have offered important interventions in scholarship on race and politics. She is also the coeditor, with Kathleen B. Jones and Joan C. Tronto, of *Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader* (1997).

Since the publication of my book, *Black Celebrity, Racial Politics, and the Press: Framing Dissent* (Jackson 2014), I have been particularly compelled by the use of technology by racial justice activists like the women who started #BlackLivesMatter. My recent collaborative work with Brooke Foucault Welles, "Hijacking #myNYPD: Social Media Dissent and Networked Counterpublics" (Jackson and Welles 2015) and "#Ferguson Is Everywhere: Initiators in Emerging Counterpublic Networks" (Jackson and Welles 2016), has illustrated that everyday citizens—particularly young women and people of color—are having a very real impact on national narratives of equality and citizenship. In the following conversation, Cohen and I discuss the potentials for feminist theory in racial justice movements, the unique ways in which race and gender intersect in state violence, challenges for feminist academics of color engaged in activism, and the shape of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. You can follow us on Twitter at @cathyjcohen and @sjjphd, respectively.

Second, I think feminism is informing the movement for black lives in terms of how it's structured and its leadership. There's some important feminist work that tells us that there are different forms of leadership that we should be paying attention to. Whether it is Belinda Robnett's (1997) work on the civil rights movement and bridge leaders or the exceptional work that Barbara Ransby (2003) has done thinking about Ella Baker and more democratic forms of radical leadership, I think many of the young leaders in the Black Lives Matter movement recognize that the male charismatic leader, or the singular charismatic leader, is not the form of leadership that they adhere to or they are going to put forth. In fact, many of these new organizations are led by young black women who identify as queer and who promote the idea, as Barbara Ransby has noted, that far from this movement being led by one person or having no leaders, it is a leaderful movement with cis and trans women taking positions of power. So the organizations that are part of a network of groups working under the broad framework of the Black Lives Matter movement look different and structure their leadership differently than organizations significant to the civil rights movement in part because of feminist teaching, feminist scholarship, especially black feminist teaching and scholarship, and the fact that many of these young activists have been in the classroom learning about these alternative forms of organizing and leadership.

Who Said It Was Simple

BY AUDRE LORDE

There are so many roots to the tree of anger
that sometimes the branches shatter
before they bear.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free.
An almost white counterman passes
a waiting brother to serve them first
and the ladies neither notice nor reject
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.
But I who am bound by my mirror
as well as my bed
see causes in colour
as well as sex

and sit here wondering
which me will survive
all these liberations.

Q: *What about the Tupac who's the son of a Black Panther and Tupac the rapper?*

A: Tupac the son of the Black Panther and Tupac the rider. Those are the two people that's inside of me. Like, my mom and them envisioned this world for us to live in, and they strove to make that world. So I was raised off those ideals, to want those. And in my own life, I saw that that world was impossible to have. It's a world in our head. It's a world that we think about on Christmas and at Thanksgiving. And it's a world that we pass on to our children to make. So I had to live in this world like it is today. She taught me how to live in that world that we have to strive for. And for that, I'm forever grateful. She put heaven in my heart.

"The Most Neglected person in America is the Black woman" -Malcolm X

https://vimeo.com/260674272 (13:36)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDqU592faOU

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWynt87PaJ0

Sometimes I feel survivor's guilt

I gave some money to this guy, he got high as hell

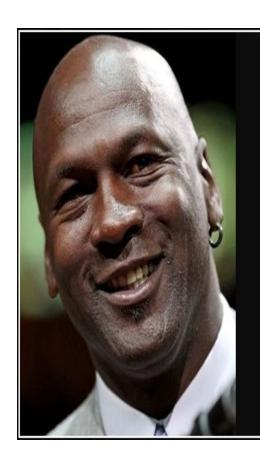Now I'm part of the problem far as I could tell

Did I do it for him or do it for myself

Can't lie to myself

I love my niggas more than my own blood

I die for my niggas and I love my cub, hope that's not fucked up

I got a problem with the handouts, I took the man route

Republicans buy sneakers, too.

— Michael Jordan —

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