

Swiftly to the alt-right: Taylor subtly gets the lower case kkk in formation

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Swiftly to the alt-right: Taylor Swift subtly gets the lower case “kkk” in formation with “Look What You Made me Do”

An anti-Marxist Mixtape review.

A little over a decade after her musical debut, Taylor Swift has made a career out of being portrayed as a good girl unjustly wronged. Her song catalog is stocked with tunes about how innocent she is, and how men seem to wrong her. But the most notable moment of the Taylor-as-an-innocent-victim narrative may have come when Kanye West interrupted her Best Female Video acceptance speech at the 2009 Video Music Awards to drunkenly ramble about how Beyoncé should have won.

Kanye upstaging Taylor in that moment not only gave that narrative merit in a lot of people’s eyes, it also looked like the personification of many a long-standing white fear: a black man taking away a white woman’s power. And Taylor has been playing off that narrative ever since, while America has embraced the notion of white victimhood — despite the reality. Kanye West is still hated for that moment, and the media has documented further fights between Taylor Swift and other pop stars such as Katy Perry, Calvin Harris, and Kim Kardashian. There is no shortage of media details about these “feuds”, whatever their purpose may be.

On the other hand, the idea that Taylor Swift is an icon of white supremacist, nationalists, and other fringe groups, seems to finally be getting mainstream attention. But the dog whistles to white supremacy in the lyrics of her latest single are not the first time that some have connected the (subtle) dots. A white supremacist blogger from neo-Nazi site *The Daily Stormer* was quoted in a [Broadly](#) article in May 2016 as saying, “it is also an established fact that Taylor Swift is secretly a Nazi and is simply waiting for the time when Donald Trump makes it safe for her to come out and announce her Aryan agenda to the world.” What “facts” the blogger is pointing to are unclear (and likely invented); still, his statement exemplifies how neo-Nazis and white supremacists look to her as their pop icon.

And it is fitting: in the past few months, white supremacist trolls have jumped off line and onto the streets. Charlottesville was a coming out story for white supremacists and nationalists, a chance to show who they were and what they want — or really who they didn’t want in “their” country. But the brazen white supremacists on the streets are not the only ones who have bought into the current form of white supremacy. There is still a contingent of the country that agrees with the president and his response to the tragedy of Charlottesville. For all Trump’s tomfoolery and cavorting with white nationalism, his approval rating has stayed steady: [almost 40%](#) of the country thinks he is doing a good job. Perhaps this is an affirmation of the racist policies and climate that this administration has capitalized on and intensified, because racism and white supremacy have always existed in America — and the president alone cannot take credit for the movement.

The American eugenics movement — a pseudo-science theory that the human race would be improved by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics that favor the white or anglo race — was alive and well long before Hitler came to power. In fact, the American Eugenics movement actually *inspired* Hitler. During the Progressive Era of the late 19th and early 20th century, eugenics was considered a method of preserving and improving the dominant groups (a.k.a. “white” groups — a shifting political label) in the population. These early ideas paved the way for racist and nativist reactions to emigration from Europe rather than scientific genetics. Meaning, as the Italian, Irish, and other immigrants poured into the country, eugenics was used as the basis for keeping those groups out. [\[Source\]](#)

The American eugenics movements received [extensive funding](#) from various corporate foundations including the Carnegie Institution, Rockefeller Foundation, and the Harriman railroad fortune. Eugenics was championed by Ivy League scholars, Congressmen, and Presidents alike. One of the major campaigns emergent from the Eugenics movement was the restriction of immigration and scapegoating of immigrants, similar to what we see today. Another was the systematic sterilization of the poor and disabled. By 1910, eugenics had become so popular that even [women's suffragists](#) groups were lobbying for eugenics legal reforms. Prominent birth control advocate and Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger advocated for controlling birth rates among poor people, people of color, and the disabled.

Eugenics was popular among those who wanted the US to stay out of World War II, and until the US was attacked at Pearl Harbor, they were successful. Eugenics only fell out of favor because of the Nazi defeat in that war. Yet America never quite defeated the eugenics-based racial hatred in our country and culture, which is why it is no surprise that today the alt-right is echoing the cries of eugenicists. Indeed, signs with slogans like “defend the European race” are not new; the support of Trump for “extreme vetting” is just another form of advocacy for segregation.

Indeed, we often forget that there were many Americans who thought we entered the wrong side of the war. The Nazis received myriad support from the American business community and wealthy, WASP-y Americans, who seemed to see common cause. And while prior to the U.S. entering World War II, American support for the Nazis was never explicitly stated, the silence and refusal to help in the face of racial atrocities said everything. The racialized politics of the era lived on in America through segregation in housing (e.g. redlining), banking, xenophobic immigration policies, reactionaries against the civil rights movement, the Reagan era, the War on Drugs, etc.

Taylor's lyrics in “Look What You Made Me Do” seem to play to the same subtle, quiet white support of a racial hierarchy. Many on the alt-right see the song as part of a “re-awakening,” in line with Trump's rise. At one point in the accompanying music video, Taylor lords over an army of models from a podium, akin to what Hitler had in Nazis Germany. The similarities are uncanny and unsettling.

Aziz Ansari has aptly referred to the quiet support of white supremacy as “[the lower case kkk](#)”: that is, the quiet racial hatred that has played a role in the social, cultural, legal, and political history of America, and not just the “backwards” south as some may think. Quiet racism only needs subtle encouragement, and it seems that “look what you made me do” fits the criteria perfectly. The song “Look What you made Me Do” evidently speaks to the lower case kkk; and they have embraced it.

The day the song came out, Breitbart jumped on the lyrics on Twitter: “I rose up from the dead, I do it all the time,” a line that they interpreted as racism and racial hatred rising from the dead. Those tired old beliefs about protecting the white race have found new racists to carry the torch (literally) and their beliefs into the 21st century. Breitbart and their loyal followers are central to the movement to be proud of being a racist, white supremacist and have the audacity to equate that with patriotism. And for liberal Bay Area natives like myself, who grew up with a healthy dose of 90's era “racism is dead” propaganda, it feels like racism has risen from its grave with the stamina of a White Walker. While society at large seemed to reject racism as an abstract concept, the internet provided an “underground” space for racists to congregate without fear of retribution until Donald Trump encouraged them to come out in the open.



Taylor's are lyrics that connect with whites that are concerned with what they see as the white dispossession of power. Breitbart highlighted another lyric on Twitter, the line, "but I got smarter, I got harder in the nick of time. Honey, I rose up from the dead, I do it all the time." The lyrics were paired with the image of a story about a loophole for buying AR-15s. And the lyrics speak to even more than just unnecessary gun glorification but also to the white people who have been closeted racists for years.

Later in the song, there is another telling line: "I don't like your kingdom keys. They once belonged to me. You asked me for a place to sleep. Locked me out and threw a feast (what?)." These lyrics are the most explicit in speaking to white anger and affirming white supremacy. The lyrics speak to the white people resentful of any non-white person having a position of power and privilege. Think of Barack Obama: the fears of white dispossession of power were actualized in his success, which was a huge factor in the appeal of candidate Trump. He is a patriarchal, rich white man that embodied the anger and white supremacist ideology.

From the White House to the streets, chants like, "you will not replace us" and call and responses like "whose streets" "our streets" were yelled by white men carrying torches in the night in Charlottesville a few short weeks ago are reminiscent of Swift's lyrics. "I don't like your kingdom keys, they once belonged to me," is another way of saying, *I will not be replaced and anger over white dispossession of power.*

The lyrics validate those who feel that have been wronged, e.g. white people angry about a black president. The chant, "our streets" is similar to saying "you locked me out and threw a feast." It is about feeling displaced, feeling wronged.

In other words, these lyrics became the voice of the lower case kkk, and Taylor's sweet, victim image is the perfect vehicle and metaphor for white supremacists' perceived victimization. With the song at the top of the charts, it makes one wonder: how large is the lower case kkk? How much are people paying attention to the lyrics of the song? It is clear that Breitbart has embraced the song as being a white supremacist anthem, so why wouldn't Trump's base — and other white Americans that believe they deserve their white privilege — embrace it as well? And considering Taylor's fan base is mostly young girls, does the song also serve as indoctrination into white supremacy?

It is hard to believe that Taylor had no idea that the lyrics of her latest single read like a defense of white privilege and white anger — specifically, white people who feel that they are being left behind as other races and groups start to receive dignity and legally recognized rights. "We will not be replaced" and "I don't like your kingdom keys" are not different in tone or message. Both are saying that whites feel threatened and don't want to share their privilege. And there is no way to know for sure if Taylor is a Trump supporter or identifies with the white nationalist message, but her silence has not gone unnoticed.

"Quiet racism only needs subtle encouragement, and it seems that 'look what you made me do' fits the criteria perfectly."

Swift is not one for politics. She did not endorse Hillary Clinton until November 8th, 2016 on the eve of the election. She has stayed away from race conversations directly, but her music has been interpreted as racially offensive before. Her song "[Shake it Off](#)" has come under fire many times [[salon](#)]. The song has long been considered an insult to black America, yet it debuted at the top of the charts and is one of Swift's biggest hits. It is clear her message of being white, pretty, and consequence-free is one that many in America have embraced. And like the quiet support that Trump received to the surprise of polls, Democrats, and the world, Taylor is giving support to the white nationalist movements through lyrics that speak to their anger, entitlement, and selfishness.

When Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, and Beyonce openly campaigned for Hillary Clinton, Taylor's political silence appeared to be a rejection of her peers' support of the inclusive Democrat platform. And when one of the most popular female artists in the world declines to join the many in her field in voicing for progressive politics, it could well

be construed as her lending support to the voices rising against embracing diversity and inclusion emblematic of Trump supporters. Further, [the single attacks other pop stars](#) in the same way that the alt-right has attacked the “liberal” media. Taylor’s song identifies with the oppressed conservative trope, and the song is indeed their anthem.

Taylor Swift was called “[Nazi barbie](#)” by Camille Paglia, who stated that Swift is “a silly, regressive public image of white 50’s America.” That seems to fit nicely with the imagery of the alt-right. Her lyrics are like an affirmation for everything the alt-right has been feeling for years: oppressed, afraid to come out, and made to look like a fool. And now that they feel empowered, it befits the movement to have a white, blonde, conservative pop star that has no doubt been “bullied” by people of color in the media, singing their feelings out loud. And with a president that openly addresses hate groups and justifies racial hatred, this is not a time for neutrality.

And while pop musicians are not respected world leaders, they have a huge audience and their music often reflects their values. So Taylor’s silence is not innocent, it is calculated. And if that is not true, she needs to state her beliefs out loud for the world — no matter what fan base she might lose, because in America 2017, silence in the face of injustice means support for the oppressor.