

Like Clockwork:

The Kairos of Presidential Tweets

by Chris Friend

THE 45TH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES has brought unprecedented attention to the connections between government authorities and social media. His late-night tweets have become staples of daily news, at times eclipsing the prominence of White House press briefings. In today's media-saturated culture, the way in which a government official presents on a service like Twitter becomes part of their brand and an opportunity for them to vocalize policies or platforms directly and in the moment.

Twitter thrives on timeliness. Active users' feeds present fast-scrolling barrages of information from myriad sources. The requisite brevity of a tweet ensures it can be both composed and processed quickly, leaving little time between initial observation and public posting of a remark. Twitter's mobile-centric design reinforces its brevity, simplicity, and portability. Today's popular smartphone apps have eclipsed mobile phones' earlier SMS-based system, making the interface and platform less about occasional announcements and more about immediate interaction – to both people and events.

This focus on quick reactions positioned Twitter as a popular source of breaking news as it unfolds, to the point that traditional television and web-based outlets have taken to reporting on trends and reactions on Twitter, as though that conversation was the news itself. It's easy to view Twitter as a record of what's happening now. Events like the Boston Marathon bombing, the Osama bin Laden killing, and the Ferguson race riots each broke on Twitter before other news outlets reported them, and "live" television coverage resorted to telling viewers what could be seen on Twitter streams. In many ways, Twitter connects us to events in our world like no other platform.

Twitter's rise to popularity and subsequent prominence in the modern news cycle draws attention to an oft-overlooked element of rhetoric: timeliness. While concepts of **ethos** (credibility), **logos** (reasoning), and **pathos** (emotion) are commonly examined when evaluating the effectiveness of a text, its **kairos** (timeliness) plays an equally significant role – a role brought to the forefront by tools like Twitter. The **kairos** of a text comes from its ability to take advantage of an opportunity. When wit fails us, and we think of the perfect come-back to a comment five minutes too late, we have missed the **kairotic** moment. We could still make our comment, but it would be ineffective because the opportunity for delivery had passed.

When we study texts, we too often do so in isolation, examining a story/poem/essay in light of its own merits and within the context of a broad literary movement, one that often spans decades. In many cases, this approach suffices. A broad view of time, using major movements to provide clarity, often provides enough detail and context for us to understand the issues critical to the text's author and contemporaries. Particularly for long-form texts like novels, which take years to craft, a broad perspective is most appropriate as it sets the **kairos** of the text within the "moment" that takes years.

Not so with tweets. The **kairotic** moment of an effective message on Twitter might be measured in days or even seconds. The rapid movement of ideas creates an ever-changing landscape of rhetoric warranting specific responses to create specific outcomes. When Twitter is used as a response platform to current events, the **kairotic** moment typically lasts a day or two. When used effectively, a well-timed tweet can change the shape of the discourse surrounding an event. Coming from the right speaker, a well-crafted, well-timed tweet can have the effect of a now-infamous "mic drop," all but ending the need for further comment.

Such was the case on September 16, 2015, when a single tweet from President Barack Obama served to wrap up discussion of an issue of national interest. While his tweet did not make the issue go away – and while it certainly wasn't the last word on the matter – Obama's message made it clear which side of the issue his administration would take. Looking more carefully at this single tweet shows that it reinforced the administration's long-standing position of compassion and reinforced the campaign's emphasis on hope. To understand the significance of this

one message, we first must understand the cultural moment in which it appeared.

On Monday, September 14, 2015, Ahmed Muhamed brought to school a project he had tinkered with over the weekend. He had built a homemade digital clock, and he showed his teacher what he had built. His teacher remarked that the contraption "look[ed] like a bomb" and contacted school authorities according to relevant protocols. Ultimately, Ahmed – a 14-year-old ninth grader at the time – was arrested for bringing the suspicious item to school. He was later released without being charged, though



Image courtesy of Anil Dash via Twitter

he was still suspended from school. The event created a storm of reaction from all sides. Some argued that the school overreacted to what was essentially a toy. Others argued that Muhamed should have known his creation looked suspicious and lauded authorities for taking no chances with school safety. Beneath it all lurked the spectre of Islamophobia, with some vocal public skepticism regarding Muhamed's motivations.

This scenario took place in Irving, Texas, a conservative area where Muhamed's family says they often have not felt welcomed. For two days, the event garnered national attention but remained in the hands of local authorities. The debate about appropriate response, potential guilt, and the intentions of all parties involved continued to rage. The discourse began to degenerate as the investigation revealed Muhamed's device was indeed what he claimed it to be, and community members started passing judgment on the decisions of the school administration. The situation had created the perfect kairotic moment for an intervention from a higher authority to essentially settle the debate. President Obama stepped into that moment and strategically leveraged its kairos:

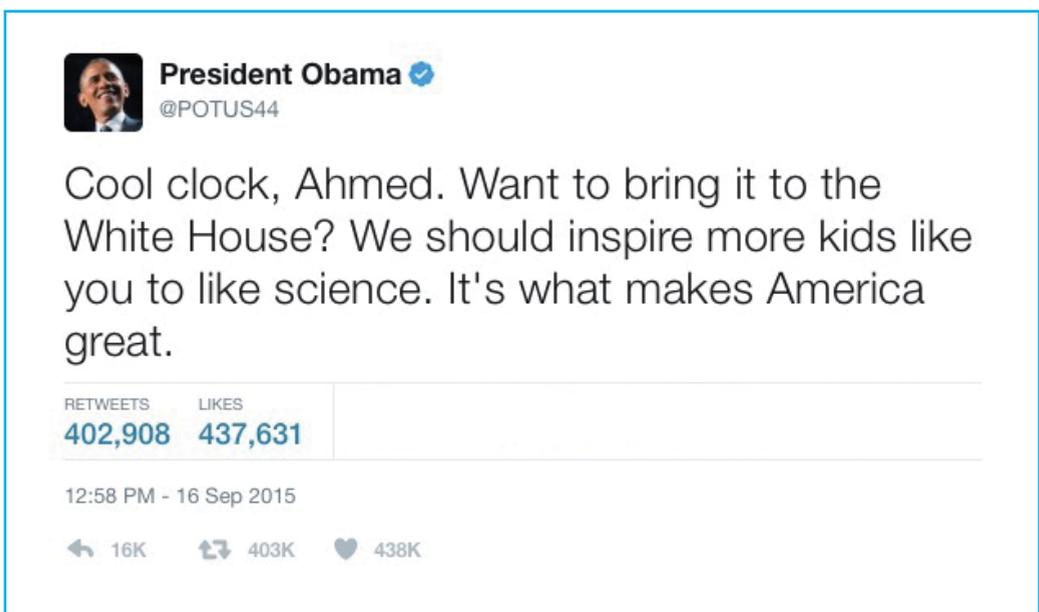
to his policies and statements. This tweet is no exception. His assertion that kids liking science is "what makes America great" emphasizes the importance of STEM education and early involvement to bolster the intellectual strengths of the nation. Obama's ethos essentially demands that he support Muhamed's work as a young creator.

Logos: The claim that kids liking science "makes America great" can hardly be supported within the confines of a brief tweet, but the argument relies on the current trend of praising STEM education to reduce the chance of dissenting views. Using the word "inspire" supports his position that STEM interests are highly valued and important. Most significantly, though, his first two words effectively settle the debate about whether Muhamed

the message in optimism, echoing the overall approach of the administration during each of his presidential campaigns. Whereas his successor uses "great" as a standard to reach for, here, Obama argues that greatness could instead be preserved and developed. This tweet is crafted to imply confidence and opportunity.

But when the element of time – the kairos of Obama's tweet – is added to the analysis, we really understand the effect and influence of his message. Two days after the debate began, the issue of how to respond to Muhamed's creation had entered the collective consciousness and national discourse. What had started as an isolated, local incident had grown into a spectacle garnering attention on broadcast news from coast to coast. Before September 16, the discussion had not yet gained widespread attention. After the 16th, calls for intervention may have made a tweet insufficient to address the situation. But the kairotic opportunity to address a popular conversation without the need for context or backstory – addressing to Ahmed by first name only in a country of millions – made it easy for Obama to step into the discussion smoothly and gently. Then, drawing on his years of experience with public speeches and appearances, Obama could leverage his crafted ethos to deliver a White-House invitation to Ahmed along with an edict to the rest of the nation's citizens, telling them to settle down and treat Ahmed as a "kid."

Language is strategic. The right word from the right person clearly carries significance. But the right timing is also necessary. The fleeting, ephemeral opportunity contained within kairos deserves greater attention in writing studies, particularly in digital spaces where entire conversations come and go in the span of moments. The fleeting nature of kairos adds mystique to our concept of time and shows how vital synchrony is in modern discourse. When we consider the influence of the words we write, we need to keep kairos in mind. The most transitory of rhetorical elements, kairos celebrates the constancy of change in our words. ■



In 26 words, this message captures – and attempts to settle – the heart of the debate, passing an elegant judgment in motivating terms and reframing the issue into a matter of values and support. The traditional components of rhetorical analysis tell an incomplete story of the tweet's effectiveness:

Ethos: Tweets from the official POTUS account carry with them the weight of an entire branch of government, but they come from a single person, making them more human and less institutional. Throughout his tenure in office, Obama presented himself as a conscientious humanist, interested in applying a sense of fairness, preservation, and common good

was wrong to bring his device to school. By deeming the clock "cool" – and by referring to it unambiguously as a "clock," not a "device" or "toy" or "project," Obama signaled to local authorities and the general public that Muhamed's work should be respected and treated as legitimate.

Pathos: Obama's use of simple, easy-to-understand vocabulary makes the tweet approachable and relevant to an audience of people in Muhamed's demographic. Ninth-graders would feel included by the language of this tweet, so the gesture of acceptance and inclusion comes across as genuine. Starting his tweet with the word "cool" and ending it with "great" frames

Child of the Depression

by *Gianna Russo*

His gift of Don't waste
Don't let it spoil,
tins of Christmas cookies, marked-down chocolate, half-drunk glass of juice
His gift of Set it aside
Save it
last year's pocket planner, a plastic calculator from AARP,
bookmarks from World of Travel
and the Catholic diocese
His gift of Hold onto it,
plastic food savers stacked like wafers,
flimsy butter tubs, beer cozies from the Tribune,
Watch that, garden gloves,
Take care, key chains from the auto club, ball point pens,
Sometime I might, mesh grocery bags,
rubber change purses, broken watches,
His presents of penlights, flashlights, collar stays,
windshield sun visor from American Cancer Society
Don't lose that
used check register, nail clippers, gold-tone cufflinks,
Put it in a safe place,
scissors for trimming nose hairs, eraser from the funeral home,
I might need that someday.





Measuring Time, Measuring Modernity

by Patricia Campion

How do we, as human beings, experience time in the physical world? On the one hand, time is linear: We are born, grow up, grow old, and die. On the other hand, it is cyclical: The seasons, the rhythm of night and day, the phases of the moon, and the tides all recur in cycles of various durations. All of these we observe in and around us. Yet time, for humans, is also a social phenomenon, an essential entity that we measure and use to structure our lives and connect to each other. When you meet a friend, for instance, you agree on a place and a time. We celebrate birthdays, commemorate significant dates in our history... In fact, our understanding of time is so fundamental to the structure of our societies that sociologists, since the birth of the discipline, have looked at how its measurement has evolved. They found that shifts in the importance we give to cyclical and linear views of time mark fundamental societal evolutions.

Imagine what your life would have been like if you had been born in ancient Mesopotamia, or at any other time before the 19th century. You were most likely a land laborer, either working your own plot independently, or tied as a serf to an aristocrat's vast estate. Your entire schedule (not that you would ever think about your activities that way) was completely organized around the seasons and the availability of daylight: Planting in spring, harvest in summer, tilling in autumn. Like everybody else in the village, you rose with the sun to the sound of the rooster, tended to the animals, and worked in the fields until the sun descended below the horizon. The shorter days of winter meant time to mend tools or buildings and evenings spent with your neighbors listening to the elders' stories around a fire. You ate when hungry, slept when tired. Work was seasonal and flexible, largely dependent on nature's whims, beyond your or anybody else's control.

Yet to try and regain a measure of control over this environment, you probably worshipped the natural elements that govern harvests, such as the sun, the moon, or the wind. Or, like the Greeks and the Romans, your people invented anthropomorphic deities

who control nature: Demeter/Ceres ruling over harvests and the fertility of the earth, Poseidon/Neptune controlling the seas, or Aeolus, his son, commanding the winds. As Emile Durkheim observed, religion is the primary institution of society, because it appeared almost as soon as humans organized in groups (Durkheim 1960). Its focus and structure reflect the structure and needs of the larger society. In pre-modern societies, this structure was based on a cyclical understanding of time.

Your religious celebrations too followed the cycles of nature, even if they didn't appear to. If you were an Aymara in the Andes, Inti, the sun, was your most sacred deity, and the summer and winter solstice, marking the shortest and longest day of the year,

were sacred holidays. They are now officially observed in Bolivia.

But if you were a Christian, the dates marking the birth and death of Christ were the most important dates for you. Both dates, however, are linked to cyclical events. Christmas day was chosen to coincide with pagan midwinter holidays in the Roman calendar, and Easter is scheduled "the first Sunday after the first Full Moon occurring on or after the March equinox" (Time and Date).

Calendars themselves were mostly kept by religious officers for ceremonial purposes, to remind the populace of the dates of religious rituals. You didn't have one hanging in your kitchen, nor would you think of owning a clock or watch. If you were a Christian, you

only paid attention to Sunday and the time for mass. On any day, religious bells or chants, like the Angelus for Catholics or the Muslim call to prayer, were the only significant markers of time. Otherwise, the passing of the hours, the dates, the months even, mattered little to you. Who needs a watch to work the fields?



Patricia Campion

In the 18th and 19th century, this seemingly immutable order changed dramatically. The scientific revolution, industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization caused tremendous transformations in Western Europe and North America. Economic production, thus far centered on agriculture, shifted to manufactured goods in larger and larger factories. If you were born in this time, you probably would have left your land and your village to become a factory worker and move to an ever-expanding city as part of a mass migration facilitated by the development of transportation networks. In the city, you would witness, and maybe endure, the rise in crime and epidemics. Yet you would have also discovered new entertainment opportunities, such as the theater, saw the development of fashion, and encountered people with more diverse lifestyles that you knew existed. With new jobs, a new living environment, new consumption patterns, and new values, individuals themselves and social groups changed rapidly.

Early sociologists like Herbert Spenser, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber witnessed these transformations first hand and worked to make sense of them. All of them noted that the process entailed a dramatic shift in our use, understanding, and measurement of time. This marked the transition from pre-modern to modern societies (Allan 2014).

You only had to look at what your schedule would have been like as a 19th century factory worker. It would have been divorced from natural cycles, since for the businessmen who owned the company, weeks, months, and years had become the key markers of shipments schedules and profit statements. They wanted production to be measured in

units per day or hour and production to be as efficient as possible—which meant eliminating waste, in time as in anything else. For goods to be produced in an efficient manner, all workers needed to arrive and leave factories at the same time and work at the same pace. Eventually, Frederick Taylor would break down and time manufacturing jobs, and require workers to perform the same gestures to complete a given task, in order to maximize efficiency.

For you, this meant waking before dawn and getting back home after a 14- or 16-hour day, long past sunset. All your activities were organized around your work schedule, which you had to follow diligently to keep your job. You needed to calculate when to wake up in order to have breakfast and get to work on time, and you only took care of personal matters outside of work hours. Factory



Patricia Campion

whistles, then sirens, rather than church bells, marked important moments in the day. They chimed regardless of day, night, or season. The cycle of planting and harvest no longer mattered if you worked in a textile mill or a coal mine. Nor would it matter to your children, who, if they were not working at your side, were mandated to attend school so they could learn the minimal skills required by factory work. Their lives too were organized around artificial schedules set by schools, rather than natural schedules. At an early age, individuals

were socialized to think in terms of minutes, hours, weeks, and months. Your entire family functioned by the clock, which was on display in your home as well as in the factory or school.

How were these time markers established? Why are there 24 hours in a day, 28 to 31 days in a month, twelve months in a year? There are distant astronomic foundations (the solar year) and religious explanations (the seven-day week) for these choices, but they are connected to the necessities of a capitalist mode of production rather than to our natural environment or biological needs. Most tellingly, recent studies have established that modern life has divorced us so far from our natural biological clocks as to alter our sleep pattern (Ekirch 2006). Researchers even suspect that people at different latitudes have different natural sleep patterns,

yet our modern days do not accommodate these differences (Sullivan 2015).

And now, the current digital age signals a further transformation of our relationship to time, one which British sociologist Anthony Giddens best articulates as a characteristic of late modern, globalized societies (Allan 2014). Today, few of us can function without rigorously keeping track of time. Watches, clocks,

and calendars are everywhere, and go everywhere with us on our smartphones. We schedule meetings on our planners, set up alarms and notifications to remind us of our activities, time ourselves when we exercise, slot in quality time with family and friends... Time has become an omnipresent concern, a measure of our worth synonymous with money. What is more, new information and transportation technologies have allowed us to stretch our separation from natural time and space almost indefinitely.

Think about it. You come home after your day, looking forward to a relaxing evening watching your favorite show, a British crime series you heard about on an online entertainment news site. Yet your cable (or DVR, or Hulu box, you pick) won't work. You pick up the phone to check for technical issues. None are reported. You start a chat session with customer service. It's eight PM, but your request gets answered promptly, by Dave or Kate. You were, however, directed to a call center in Bangalore, India, where people are just starting their day—and where customer service representatives are given work names that make clients feel more comfortable. Dave (or Kate) checks your account and reports that you have missed your last payment. No worries. While still on the line with Bangalore, you access your account and make a quick transfer from your checking account. Dave/Jess confirms the transaction, and within minutes, service is restored.

What just happened here? You and your entertainment provider took advantage of superconductor cables and fiber-optic technology that allow quasi-instant transmission of electronic data across the Pacific Ocean, time zones (another arbitrary slicing of time and space), and cellphone technology, to solve a problem that would have taken days or weeks to address a couple of decades ago. We now expect instant or quasi-instant responses for a number of services, from paying bills to downloading music or checking

the news. Online services allow us to communicate with others through text, phone, and video in a much more efficient manner than before, wherever they are. Corporations now use teleconferences with their staff at multiple locations, while individual participants are experiencing different moments of the day or night in their respective locales.

On the other hand, the same technology allows us to participate in asynchronous interactions. Discussions in online courses do not occur with all participants present simultaneously. Students log in and post their contributions at the time most convenient to them, read posts that may have been sent hours earlier, and will wait several hours for their classmates to reply to their own posts. In the medical field, images from MRIs, sonograms, and other tests can be sent to technicians in India, to be read while American physicians sleep, so that they can check the results when they get back to their offices the next day. Such dynamics have prompted Thomas Friedman to famously announce that the world was now flat: Economic opportunities are accessible to people across the globe and put us on an equal footing (Friedman 2006).

Anthony Giddens posits that this kind of technology is leading to another transformation of our relation to time, as we move farther and farther away from natural geographic space and natural time referents (Allan 2014). Linear time took precedence over cyclical time tied to natural

phenomena when we became modern. With late modernity, Giddens contends that we are tending towards “radical space-time distancing” (Allan 2014:406). Globalization epitomizes the phenomenon, as it makes what happens in our local setting dependent on events and processes occurring in far-away places and vice-versa. Almost anything we buy—our food, our clothes, our cars, our furniture—depends on global supply chains that link workers and consumers who will never actually meet. Our social systems are structured around abstract rules and principles that do not rely on physical relationships between individuals for society to function.

Giddens finds that this may actually free individuals to have more honest and fulfilling intimate relationships, since they are valued in and of themselves, rather than being part of local systems of moral regulation and social obligations (Stones 2005). What we may find more difficult to deal with is the growing flexibility of late modernity that radical space-time distancing generates. Change has become a main feature of our lives, but its pace can be grueling. We may enjoy the opportunities and flexibility of global capitalism when they allow us to consume a wide range of products, follow in real time events on the other side of the world, or travel the planet, but we still crave stability when we make long-term plans to establish a family or become involved in a community. We may be able to expand our imaginations and the abstraction of social structures, but as physical beings, there is only so much we can stretch. ■

References

- Allan, Kenneth. *The Social Lens: An Invitation to Social and Sociological Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014.
- Durkheim, Emile. *Les Formes Élémentaires de la Vie Religieuse*. Paris, France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960.
- Ekirch, Roger. *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past*. New York: Norton & Co., 2006.
- Friedman, Thomas. *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, Updated and Expanded*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2006. 321-6.
- Stones, Rob. “Anthony Giddens.” in *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, ed. George Ritzer. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005.
- Sullivan, Meg. “Our ancestors probably didn't get 8 hours a night, either.” UCLA Newsroom. October 15. Retrieved April 7, 2017 (<http://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/our-ancestors-probably-didnt-get-8-hours-a-night-either>), 2015.
- Time and Date. n.d. “Calculating the Easter Date.” *Time and Date*. Retrieved May 4th, 2017 (www.timeanddate.com/calendar/determining-easter-date.html).

Hair: An Avenue to Consider Black Identity Over Time

by Janis Prince

The Tress Czar. The Mane Director. Chief Hair Officer or C.H.O. Regardless of the title, I am sure that Beyoncé employs such a person. I know this based on the evidence:

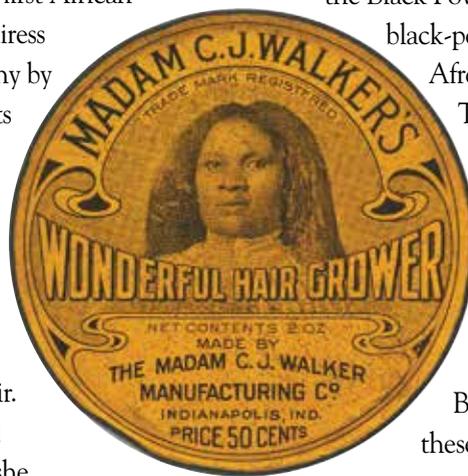


her long, flowing tresses are always blowing in the wind, even when I feel none! Having seen Queen Bey perform live and indoors, I observed that someone (several people?) must have been charged with making sure that a fan (fans?) followed her every foot-stomping move

low down, and across the stage. And I'm sure that her other-worldly success is directly tied to her C.H.O.'s existence. Of course, Queen Bey can SAAAANG! My argument, however, is that the way her hair is "handled" separates her from her peers. More seriously, what does looking at black women's hair and hairstyles tell us about "the times" in which we live and the state of black racial identity and racial politics in this historical period?

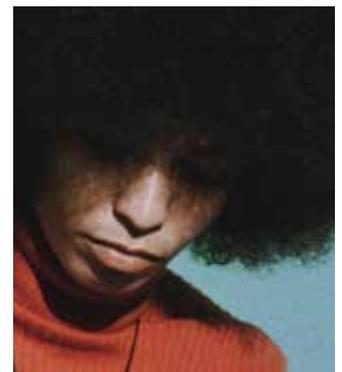
Historically, hair has been an important aspect of the African American journey. Women, then, as today, cared about the styling of their hair, and in those days of legally segregated neighborhoods, black beauty salons served several important roles. During the Jim Crow era, employment opportunities remained narrowed to working in kitchens, fields, or factories. But at the time, it was "doing hair" that broadened the employment opportunities for African

Americans – a significant number of whom were high-school dropouts. It is especially noteworthy, then, that during the first half of the last century black women learned to do hair in privately owned beauty schools owned and operated by other blacks. Many black women were able to move into the middle class by "doing hair" (Blackwelder). The story of Sarah Breedlove Walker, known as Madam C. J. Walker is the best example of this: she was the first African American millionaire who became wealthy by selling hair products to black women. Walker sold a "straightening" comb that – as the name implied – straightened the texture of black hair. She also developed hair products that she stressed were healthy and useful for addressing hair loss. Eventually, Mrs. Walker owned a chain of beauty schools and salons that provided employment opportunities for many other black women.



The Civil Rights Movement and its milestones helped to end Jim Crow. In many photos of that time,

we see African American women with straightened hair: movers and shakers in the Civil Rights Movement whose politics did not necessitate natural hairstyles. Straight hair connoted respectability. However, by the late 1960s/early 1970s, as the Civil Rights Movement gave way to the Black Power Movement, Angela Davis' black-power salute and her signature Afro became emblems of the time. There were loud calls to "Say it Loud, I'm black and I'm proud" as wailed by singer, James Brown. This era ushered in an emphasis on black pride and natural hairstyles. Jim Crow. Civil Rights. Black Power. We might think of these as the "old days." Fast-forward to more recent times and "reading" hair becomes more complex. Today, we have a celebrity-focused culture, less clearly defined black political movements, and arguably more ambiguity about the politics of black women's hair and hairstyles. Current black,



female celebrities, with a few notable exceptions mentioned below, have natural hairstyles, but presumably many are committed to black empowerment. Whoopi Goldberg has worn



locs since blasting onto the scene in the early 1980s. Viola Davis walked the 2012 Oscar red-carpet with nothing on her head but a “teeny weeny afro”--or “twa”--instead of a wig or hairpiece; the actress has also attended a few other awards shows and appeared on magazine covers with her “twa.”



describing her as taking braids to a “new epic level.” Also in 2014, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article on “Head-turning Hair Fashions for Fall: Banks, Rows and Tails” in which a section on cornrows managed to avoid mentioning the style’s black/African roots, but noted that they are moving from “urban,

Actress Lupita Nyong’o stands out in the celebrity world as a naturalista with tight



curls who often wears very short hair styles. Nyong’o’s 2016 Met Gala updo was inspired by sculpted African hairstyles which signify rank and affluence, as well as by Nina Simone. Simone’s

influence on Nyong’o is noteworthy as the late singer/pianist was especially famous not only for her artistry, but also as a civil rights and black power advocate.



Today’s discussions of black hairstyles are also instructive. For those who imagine we live in a color-blind

country, cornrows being referred to as boxer braids when worn by white women may seem trivial. However, within the context of America’s racial history, this can be understood as yet another means of cultural appropriation and Eurocentric history. Cornrows and plaits--or box braids--go back to Ancient African civilizations, and as such, black women have worn those styles for centuries. Yet, *Vogue* magazine attributed Nyong’o’s hairstyle to Audrey Hepburn, an opinion that was mocked and caricatured on social media. The iconic fashion magazine ignored the black and African roots of the hairstyle in favor of the famous white actress’ iconic look. There are several other similar stories. In April of 2014, Cornrows were rebranded “undercut braids” by *Marie Claire* magazine in an article that featured mostly white celebrities wearing that style. In that same year, the magazine also tweeted a picture of Kendall Jenner with cornrows,

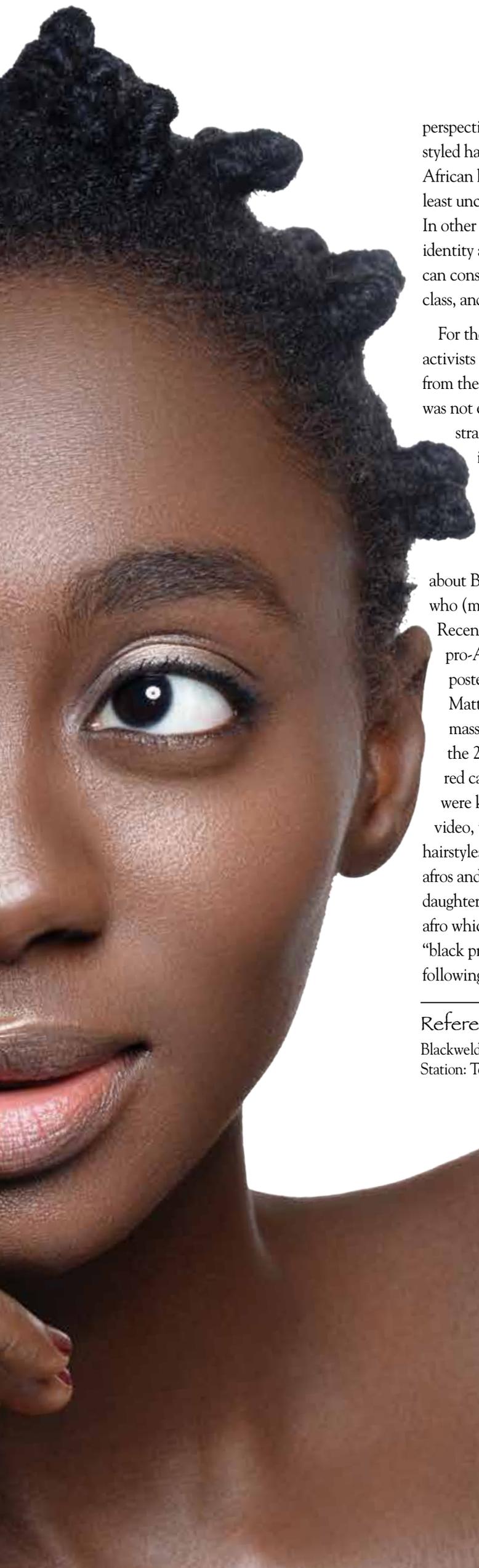
hip-hop to more chic and edgy”. Given that urban and hip-hop are often used as code words for black, the appropriation seems particularly bold-faced in this piece. Pictures of cornrows in that story were of white women only. The most recent version of such appropriation and disregard for black history and culture was in 2016, when the *New York Post* “uncovered” a new trend of “boxer braids” being worn by mixed martial arts fighters in the UFC. It turns

out the “boxer braids” were cornrows! What was so new? Cornrows worn by white women. However, cornrows have never been out of style among black women all over the world.

When asked about some of these recent dustups over the cultural appropriation

of black hairstyles, Bo Derek said, “It’s a hairdo! That’s all it is.” Arguably, this form of celebrity cultural appropriation originated in 1979, when Derek appeared in the film *10* wearing beaded cornrows. Do you agree with her assessment? Is hair/style simply hair/style? Is it (ever) personal or political? At what point does the personal become political? Consider that beauty standards in the U.S. – and increasingly across the world – are based on white models of beauty. Therefore, the closer we all are to whiteness in manner and appearance, the more beautiful we are considered. The tight, curly textured hair common among blacks should be tamed and straightened to appear more like that of whites. Black pride flipped that script! From a black pride





perspective, black women sporting European styled hair and hairstyles are shunning their African heritage, and are ashamed-- or at least uncomfortable--with their blackness. In other words, black hair is related to racial identity and is one avenue through which we can consider larger concerns related to race, class, and gender.

For those black women Civil Rights activists we see in black and white photos from the late 1950s and 1960s, black pride was not equated with black “natural” hair; straightened hair was simply a ticket into middle class blackness. Few would question their black bone fides, based on their commitment to the uplift of the race. One might make the same argument about Beyoncé and other black women who (mostly) wear their hair straightened. Recently the singer gave her support to pro-African American issues. She has posted messages about the Black Lives Matter movement to the BeyHive, her massive online following, and shared the 2016 MTV Video Music Awards red carpet with mothers whose sons were killed by police. In her “Formation” video, the singer wears a variety of braided hairstyles and features black women with afros and other natural hairstyles. Her young daughter is also in the video wearing an afro which features many other touchstone “black pride identity images” including the following:

- It is set in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and opens with Queen Bey atop a sinking police car.
- A man holds “The Truth” newspaper in the video, with a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King on the cover with the headline, “More Than a Dreamer.”
- A little boy in a hoodie throws his hand up to a line of riot-gear clad police who also put their hands up. Cut to graffiti that reads “Stop shooting us.”

The day after the video launch of “Formation,” Beyoncé performed the song at the 2016 Super Bowl halftime show. This time, she and her backup dancers all wore outfits that channel the Black Panther Party. All of this while employing and utilizing the skills of her C.H.O. with black pride lyrics for our times:

*I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros
I like my negro nose Jackson Five nostrils*

I have joked – somewhat – about the importance of Beyoncé’s C.H.O. in contributing to her phenomenal success. Today we can’t seem to rely on – if we ever could – how one wears her hair, to make safe bets about racial identity politics. But the importance of natural black hair styles in telegraphing black identity politics remains important, for some African Americans, including superstars like Beyoncé. Clearly, hair has served as a lens through which to consider racial identity and racial politics over time. ■

Reference

Blackwelder, J. K. 2003. *Styling Jim Crow : African American Beauty Training During Segregation*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press

An Arabesque on Time

by Angelo Olivetti

Once upon a time, this sentence didn't exist. Wait a minute! This sentence (rather that sentence, the one over there...before the second sentence in this paragraph) only exists in time, so it could not not have existed "once upon a time."

That sentence had to exist before. And then again. There. When I wrote it. Back when. Before the second sentence. And, now, if I choose to write it again. (I choose not to. Not now, anyway.)

How could a sentence exist "once upon a time" anyway? Or, how could it not exist, "once upon a time?" What am I saying? What is going on here?

The "once upon a time" really means a time before time, a time before manifestation, before I produced the sentence; so, "once upon a time" means a space before I got the sentence on the page, before it was placed back there by me, back when I wrote it.

But, does "once" really mean that the sentence only existed once upon a time, in a timeless spaceless non-place...only...once. Then, what happened to the sentence when I wrote it, back when? Then. Back there. It didn't exist in space and time, and it didn't exist only once.

Could the sentence have not existed more than once? Perhaps it didn't exist an infinite number of times. Or, it did exist an infinite number of times, which really would amount to the same thing. Or, maybe "once" was a lie. I wrote a lie. I didn't mean to, but maybe I lied, just not knowing any better.

Then, two questions follow: how could I lie about such an important matter, and not know it? And, if I am telling the truth, that the sentence existed or it didn't exist an infinite number of times beyond space and time, how does the sentence get out of infinity, into being just that one sentence in time? The one I wrote. This is all presuming of course that now I am telling the truth.

It would seem it is all going to come down to me writing the sentence and you trusting that I am telling the truth. I have to write the sentence. Just thinking it wouldn't do at all. It would have to get on the page, like this:

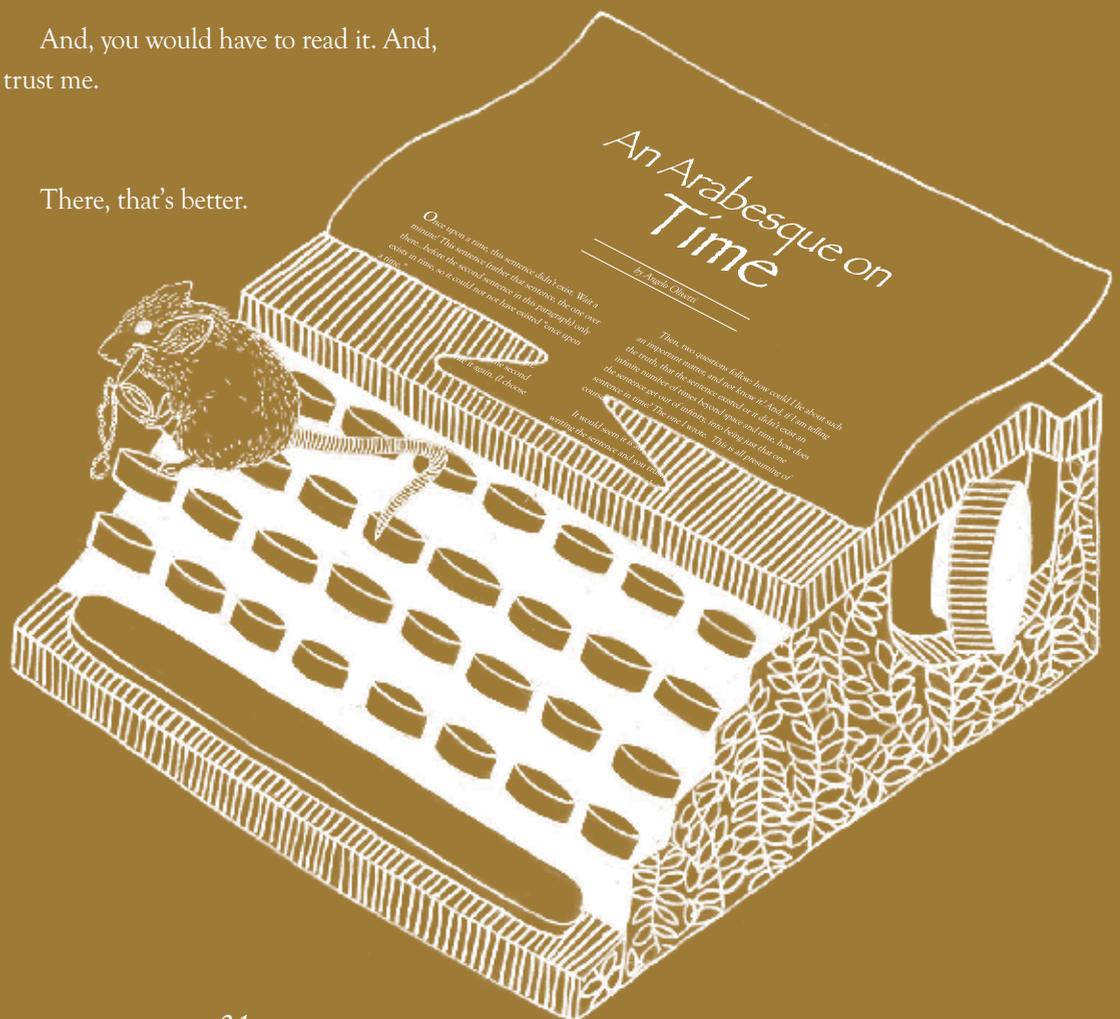
"Once upon a time, this sentence didn't exist."

Just like I did at the beginning.

But, without the " " .

And, you would have to read it. And, trust me.

There, that's better.



REBUS

School of Arts & Sciences
Saint Leo University