

# No, rapper Kendrick Lamar did not “protest” Trump at the Super Bowl—he wallowed in backwardness

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This year’s Super Bowl, the National Football League’s annual championship game, has become the center of media attention in particular because of its halftime show featuring rapper Kendrick Lamar. Claims have been made in certain “left” and liberal quarters that Lamar’s presentation represented some sort of rebuke to or protest against Donald Trump, America’s would-be dictator.

These claims are absurd. They cover up the fact that Lamar and much of the hip hop world wallow in social backwardness and represent the antithesis of opposition to big business and capitalism. Hip hop *is* big business, and is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of “free enterprise.” There was nothing in Lamar’s performance that hinted at criticism of the new administration, the multi-billionaire Elon Musk wrecking operation on social programs, the drive to “ethnically cleanse” Gaza, the placing of anti-science quacks in charge of public health and Trump’s generally fascistic aims and plans.

The general context in which Lamar performed Sunday night has some significance.

The Super Bowl has become preposterously elevated over the years to the level of a virtual national celebration. It is telling about the degraded state of American society that a three-hour sports event, with its gladiatorial overtones and heavy doses of militarism, nationalism and outlandish wealth, has become not merely a staple, but one of the linchpins of its cultural and political life.

Every year cities vie for the privilege of hosting the Super Bowl, which is promoted and staged to the tune of hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars. The game this year generated roughly \$500 million in economic activity for New Orleans—or so officials claim. Needless to say, little of that income will reach the working class in one of the poorest large cities in the US, with 22.9 percent of the population surviving below the poverty line, nearly double the national average (12.6 percent).

The bankrupt American ruling class, incapable of solving a single major social problem, stages the modern-day equivalent of ancient Rome’s “bread and circuses,” forgetting that such events 2,000 years ago at least provided free grain to onlookers.

This year’s Super Bowl was noteworthy for the variety of its deplorable aspects. There was, first of all, the presence of Trump, who became the first sitting president to attend the game.

Moreover, the witless and bombastic Hollywood director Michael Bay (*Armageddon*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Transformers*) was hired by the US Secret Service to come up with a recruitment television ad, at the cost of \$2 million. The ad, entitled “A History of Protection”:

begins by revisiting key moments in United States’ history, and pointing out that “we’ve been there for all of it,” highlighting the

longstanding nature of the agency [Secret Service].

Shots from the video highlight the tearing down of the Berlin wall, various presidential speeches, and the response to the 9/11 terror attacks. The ad also included images of President John F. Kennedy before his assassination in 1963 and a photo from the attempted assassination of President Donald Trump during his 2024 campaign. “Our heroes are humble. They have an inner pride to keep this idea alive,” the video’s narrator states. (Police1.com)

This piece of anti-communist, patriotic bilge was inflicted on the viewing audience of some 120 million people.

The end zone area of the New Orleans Caesar’s Superdome, once adorned with the slogan “End Racism,” was conspicuously redesigned with the phrase “Choose Love” this year. Rapper-celebrity Snoop Dogg and retired NFL star Tom Brady appeared in a commercial titled “No Reason to Hate,” produced by Robert Kraft, the billionaire arch-Zionist and owner of the New England Patriots, and his Foundation To Combat Antisemitism (FCAS). The obvious subtext of the commercial is that “hatred” of Israeli mass murder is a form of antisemitism.

Meanwhile, rapper Kanye West bought a television ad in the Los Angeles area during the Super Bowl to promote his Yeezy fashion brand, but anyone who went to its website saw only one article of clothing being promoted—a t-shirt with a Nazi swastika on it.

This came upon the heels of West’s antisemitic rant on X in which the rapper declared “I’m a Nazi,” called Hitler “so fresh” and wrote that “he loves when Jewish people come to me and say they can’t work with me,” among other racist posts. West also stated that he is “never apologizing for my Jewish comments.” (*Variety*)

Lamar is not a fascist like West, but both emerge out of the intense degradation and debasement of American popular culture in which racialism and other forms of right-wing ideology have been accepted and accommodated to for decades. It is high time to call things by their proper names. This is largely a cesspool of social and political reaction.

During halftime, in his 13-minute segment, Lamar, fresh from winning five awards at the Grammy Awards last week, performed as his centerpiece “Not Like Us,” a “diss” record directed toward his fellow performer, the Canadian rapper Drake, along with various other hits.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote of “Not Like Us,” it is a juvenile exercise in “name-calling and one-upmanship,” which received wall-to-

wall coverage last year as the entertainment industry sought to drown out opposition among youth to the ongoing genocide in Gaza amid mass protests internationally.

Lamar's repugnant smear of a fellow performer as a pedophile, also with its nationalist, anti-Canadian implications, is presented as a significant protest! In fact, in his vicious, sinister claims Lamar is taking a page from the extreme right wing, like those who mounted the Pizzagate conspiracy theory in 2016, which invented a pedophilia sex ring and human trafficking tied to the Democratic Party. Such "protests," in fact, are giant, empty diversions and only add to the political confusion.

After first pretentiously declaring "The revolution 'bout to be televised, you picked the right time but the wrong guy," Lamar's performance descended into absurdity and banality.

A lot of his act, frankly, was embarrassing, with dancing and choreography that a run-of-the-mill American television variety show a few decades ago would have been ashamed to present to the public.

The rapper's gestures, including an all-black cast of dancers dressed in red, white and blue and offering "black power" salutes, as well as the numerous but vague references to race and racism, are typical fare in nearly every Lamar performance. The appearance of Samuel L. Jackson as "Uncle Sam," or an Uncle Tom, didn't improve matters.

There isn't the slightest opposition to the capitalist status quo—including to war, genocide, inequality, or dictatorship—contained in such posturings.

As noted in the media, Lamar flitted across the field decked out in designer clothing, with a \$500,000 vintage Buick GNX behind him. The *New York Times* reported that Lamar's jeans alone cost \$1,300, and "do not come cheap."

This is all a fraud, and a transparent one at that, for anyone who cares to open his or her eyes.

But then there are those whose profession consists in keeping the public as blind and as ignorant as possible, with "left" dressing in some cases.

Nancy Armour in *USA Today* commented that

While Lamar, who has Grammys and a Pulitzer Prize, didn't say anything overtly political, he didn't need to. While performing "Humble," he created an American flag with his backup dancers — every one of them a man of color. It was a powerful image, one that both rejected Trump's attempts to whitewash our country while embracing the diversity that is actually what makes this country great.

From this, to the claim by *New York Times* reporter Jason Jones that

Each time I watch the performance, I've caught something different. This was more than just a rap performance; it was a critique of American culture on what many consider an unofficial holiday in America, Super Bowl Sunday. It was definitely a gutsy decision.

In what possible fashion was this a critique? Lamar's music is an essential, in fact, one of the most lucrative portions, of that "culture" at present. Jones adds at one point, "That's not to say the show was all deep thinking only." True indeed!

The *Times* correspondent went on:

Some of Lamar's biggest fans will say the show didn't send a strong enough political message. Others will bemoan songs from

the beef [with Drake] being performed. Another group will long for a show full of the classics. For many of the critics, the show required way too much thinking. [!] Lamar managed to give his fans a bit of everything, which was pretty amazing to do in 13 minutes.

Again, these are people who can come up with excuses and justifications for anything.

The most abject apologist, however, was Dave Zirin in the *Nation*, the sports writer-for-hire of the pseudo-left (*In These Times*, *Socialist Worker*, *The Progressive*, *Democracy Now!*, etc.)

Zirin manages somehow to turn the Super Bowl spectacle into a victory for "the 'Subversive Genius' of Kendrick Lamar" who "Sent Trump Home a Loser." He writes: "Lamar unleashed an artistic inferno rooted in Black culture, Black poetry, and Black resistance."

Straining in his sophistry, Zirin defends Lamar against those who

were praying that Lamar would say something about Trump or Musk to the tens of millions of viewers. They wanted him to take on all the weight of this moment. It's an understandable desire, but it's also unfair.

Zirin carries on:

But Lamar, who is more an abstract master of symbology than political rabble-rouser, performed something right in Trump's face that I think people will be decoding for years. It was a textured, deeply layered, colossal middle finger to the worst of US history, Trump, and anyone who would try to obliterate Black culture in this country.

What nonsense. Lamar for one is far from being obliterated, with an estimated net worth of \$140 million. He has profited immensely from the Super Bowl appearance, with Spotify noting that plays for his discography spiked 175 percent the day after the game and his songs occupied the six top spots in the daily top 10 on Monday.

Lamar is another wealthy operator trying to con susceptible youth into thinking that his cool, menacing sauntering around the stage has something "anti-establishment" about it. Zirin, the *Times* and the others are accomplices in attempting to perpetrate this fraud.



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