

Apeshit at the Louvre

by [Mark Tapson](#) (February 2019)



Modern Narcissus (after John William Waterhouse), Dan Cretu

As 2018 drew to a close, *The Washington Post* published an

arts-and-entertainment piece titled, "[To understand culture in 2018, you must understand Ariana Grande and Pete Davidson.](#)" Considering that Grande is a Grammy-winning but ultimately forgettable pop singer and Davidson is another in a decades-long line of ultimately forgettable *Saturday Night Live* comedians, the assertion that they are the key to understanding culture in America today says something significant about our culture, and it isn't good.

The *WaPo* article argued that Grande and Davidson happened to be linked, albeit coincidentally, to certain trending topics in 2018, such as the #MeToo movement and mental health issues. But this is less insightful than the assumption of the article itself, which is that the state of our culture can be charted by Things That Happen to Celebrities. Celebrity—a shallow, transitory degree of fame—has dominated American culture for so long that we now simply conflate the two. *Pop* culture is American culture, and has been for over fifty years. For most people from the Baby Boomer generation on down, what used to be called—without irony or sarcasm—"high culture" has faded into irrelevance at best and oblivion at worst.

"A high culture," writes philosopher [Apeshit](#)" —you read that right—on Beyoncé's *Everything is Love* album, was filmed in a deserted Louvre in Paris. It featured glimpses of 17 of the most recognizable (to those with any familiarity of high culture) pieces in the museum, including the Mona Lisa, Winged Victory, the Venus de Milo, Jacques-Louis David's *The Coronation of Napoleon*, and Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*.

The video shows Beyoncé, her husband, and her dancers voguing and grinding among the most spectacular collection of artistic

brilliance in the world, with the camera periodically pausing on closeups of paintings. Referencing luxury watches and designer brands, Lamborghinis and private jets, diamonds and stacks of cash, the [“The Guardian noted](#) that the video “was seen as an important comment on the representation of power in art, and on race and colonialism, as well as being a conversation starter for young visitors.” Unfortunately, that is a conversation that divides us through identity politics rather than unites us through art.[wrote](#) in his *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture*, what was done before can be done again. Our mission must be to reacquaint ourselves with “the best that has been said and thought in the world,” as Matthew Arnold put it.

As an ironic postscript, the Carters’ video, viewed online more than 150 million times, may have done high culture an accidental favor. The Louvre broke all ticket office records last year with more than 10 million people streaming through its glorious halls—a 25% rise in visitors, the highest number for a museum of its kind, beating record attendance at the National Museum of China and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The Louvre credits that record in no small part to the Carters’ video. The museum now offers both a 90-minute [guided tour](#) and a self-guided tour featuring all the works of art highlighted in the “Apehit” video. The UK *Telegraph* even posted an article titled, [“How Beyoncé and Jay-Z reinvented the Louvre.”](#) They didn’t reinvent it, of course, or even add to it; they merely exploiting it for self-promotion and to score political points.

Nevertheless, the power of the artwork featured in it resonated with viewers who might not otherwise have been exposed to it. It demonstrates that pop culture *can* be used to steer people from decadence to transcendence, from the now to

the eternal—this is why conservatives must get in the game.

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