



KENDRICK LAMAR Oil on Canvas. Image by Tamara Hill ('26)

## An Honest Review of Kendrick's Superbowl Halftime Show

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Reporter

On February 9th, 2025, the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles had their Superbowl game in which the famous rapper Kendrick Lamar and his special guests; SZA, Serena Williams, and Samuel L. Jackson made their performance in the halftime show.

Roc Nation reported that Kendrick's Superbowl performance is the most watched Super Bowl Halftime show in NFL history with over 133.5 million viewers. Kendrick's performance consisted of songs from his most recent album GNX, while also playing some of his classic songs like "HUMBLE", "DNA", and "All The Stars."

In addition, he included his 2024 hit single; "Not Like Us", which quickly became one of his own signature hits, winning him both awards at the Grammys for song of the year, and record of the year. Surrounded by the backup dancers that choreographed to represent the American flag, Kendrick was sending a clear message in his performance against Anti-black hate and violence.

Actor Samuel L. Jackson opened the performance dressed as "Uncle Sam" who had

spent the whole show analyzing Kendrick's every move, to not do anything "too loud" or "too reckless." His comments symbolize how black people are treated in society when they don't "behave" properly.

As a result of this, Kendrick stands in the middle of his backup dancers dressed in red, white, and blue and went into a stars and stripes formation, while Kendrick performed "Squabble Up" leading up to his singles "HUMBLE" and "DNA."

Kendrick and his dancers went into formation on a bigger stage in a matter that represented the appearance of a prison yard. At one point, the set was even arranged as the square on a PlayStation controller button, which represented how Americans are playing a game of "Surviving America", hence Jackson's introduction to the performance as "the Great American Game."

Before the start of "Not like us, Kendrick had a grin plastered across his face while staring into the camera during the "Hey Drake" lyric before performing the diss track. Rumored ex girlfriend of Drake, Serena Williams,

walked onto the stage near the backup dancers, which was a reference of the rivalry between the two rappers.

All in all, I personally think that Kendrick Lamar's halftime performance was a fun watch, and admire how Kendrick speaks through his music.

His use of symbolism during the performance was used to engage with his viewers, specifically his black audience, promoting real social issues, and historical struggles.

The costumes and the choreography tied in together with the theme performances overall theme of cultural identity, while also signifying American unity. The red, white, and blue costumes were an explicit reference to the American aspiration justice and equality, which Lamar is critiquing.

Overall, by putting together powerful visuals, and cultural references, Kendrick's performance was a great serve of realities that happened in history, and with engaging his viewers on a profound level, while also inspiring them to consider the deeper meanings behind his work.