



Beyoncé's Music Video Illuminati Comments

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How real is the Illuminati? Investigating Open Source Conspiracy in the age of Black Lives Matter and Vigilant Citizens

Methodology

For this project, we tried to determine recurring tropes that have emerged in YouTube comment sections around the term Illuminati under Beyoncé music videos. Our end goal was to establish a taxonomy of different kinds of user behaviour and performance personas that can be observed in these comment sections.

Using the Digital Methods Initiative's YouTube Data Tool, we scraped the Video Info & Comments from 4 Beyoncé music videos: Crazy In Love feat. Jay-Z (posted in 2009), Run The World (Girls) (posted in 2011), Hold Up (posted in 2016), and APESHIT (posted in 2018). The latter is credited to THE CARTERS as a collaborative project with Jay-Z. We then filtered all 4 data sets using MCO's proprietary spreadsheet software Numbers with a set of 5 terms in order to retrieve comments relevant to the discussion of Illuminati-related topics: illuminati, pale white horse, puppet, occult, and satan.

Video Timeline Comment Visualisation

We were curious which visuals and video frames received most attention within the Illuminati comment discussion space. Within our four separate datasets for the total Illuminati discussion comments, we used regular expression search queries in order to filter out the comments that mention specific timestamps in the video. Using this dataset, we could continue towards visualising which parts of the video received the most discursive attention.

In order to create the below frame timeline visualisations, we first downloaded the videos as local files, then extracted the frames that were mentioned in the Illuminati discussion comments using a custom Bash script.

The four Music Video frame timelines below represent the most referenced timestamps in each video's comment section. The frame size represents the frequency of timestamped comments.

Characters

In order to differentiate between different dramatis personae in the comment sections, we devised a coding scheme to determine what affective and rhetoric approaches appear within the Illuminati discussion space.

We generated a random sample of 200 comments from our filtered dataset to get a representative dataset. We established a range of ideographic categories, allowing us to distinguish and identify different dramatis personae within the comment section. We then manually went through each comment and analysed its rhetoric, tone and content, assigning a label to each comment.

One comment could get multiple personae assigned if applicable.

Each label was accompanied by a definition that would facilitate our labelling process, explained on the right-hand side.

Theorist

Comments theorising about the artist's involvement in the Illuminati at large. Includes interpretations of lyrics and visuals and speculation about the artist's private lives.

Accuser

Comments blatantly accusing the artist of having Illuminati on her, without providing evidence or a theory.

Satirist

Comments satirically, ironically, or humorously engaging with theories surrounding the artist's supposed Illuminati ties.

Conspiracy Denouncer

Comments critically engaging with conspiratorial beliefs.

Lyric Quoter

Comments referencing the lyrics from Beyoncé's song Formation.

Christians

Comments allusively marked by religious imagery & references to the Bible.

Solicitor

Comments trying to obtain exposure or financial gain.

Spammer

Comments inhibiting spammy behaviour.

Confused

Comments confused about the legitimacy or veracity of conspiratorial beliefs.

Miscellaneous

Comments that do not fit into any of the above categories.

Label Frequency Bumpchart

From our initial dramatis personae dataset, we tracked the amount of comments for each category under the 4 videos, allowing us to create a bumpchart using RAWGraphs 2.0. The bumpchart shows the frequency of each category, and its development through time.

The wider the stream, the more frequent the taxonomic label. Additionally, the graph is ranked, indicating trends over time and across different videos.

Crazy In Love

2009 publication year
663,597,089 views
66,166 total comments
520 Illuminati discussion comments



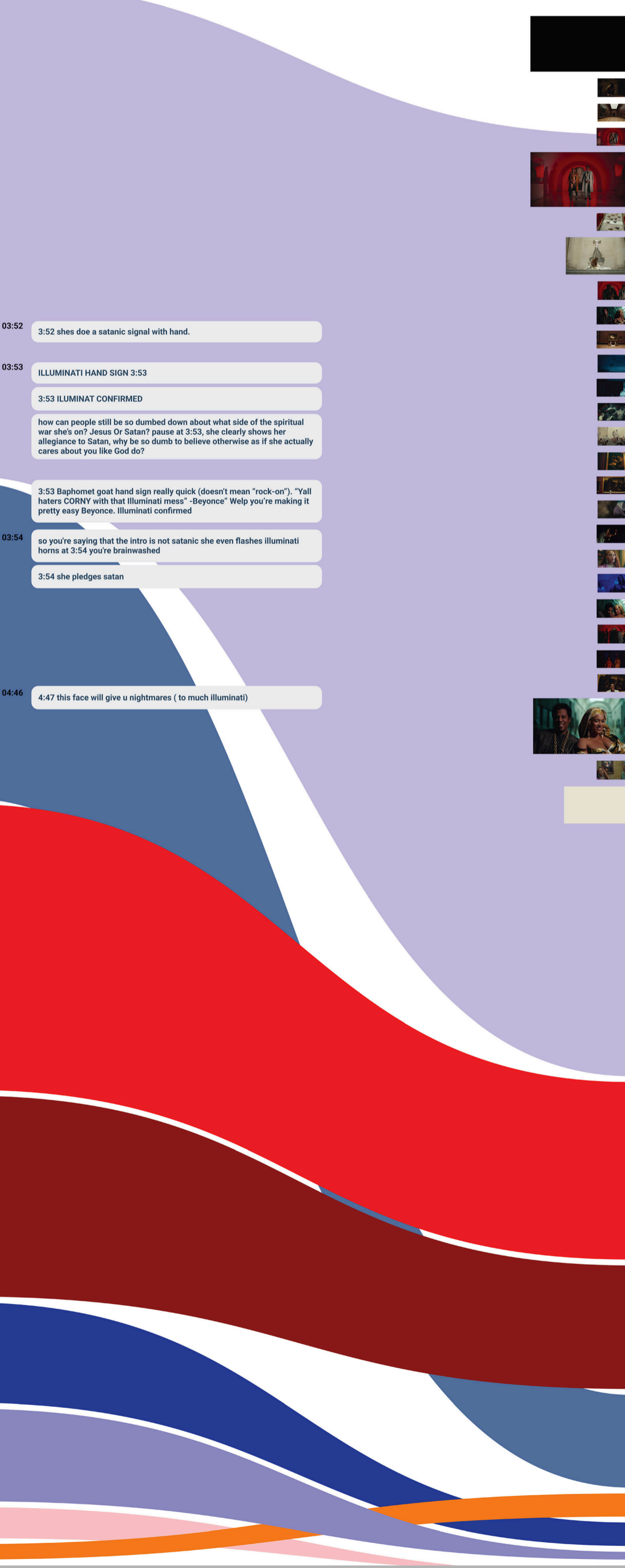
Run The World

2011 publication year
553,523,315 views
238,865 total comments
2448 Illuminati discussion comments



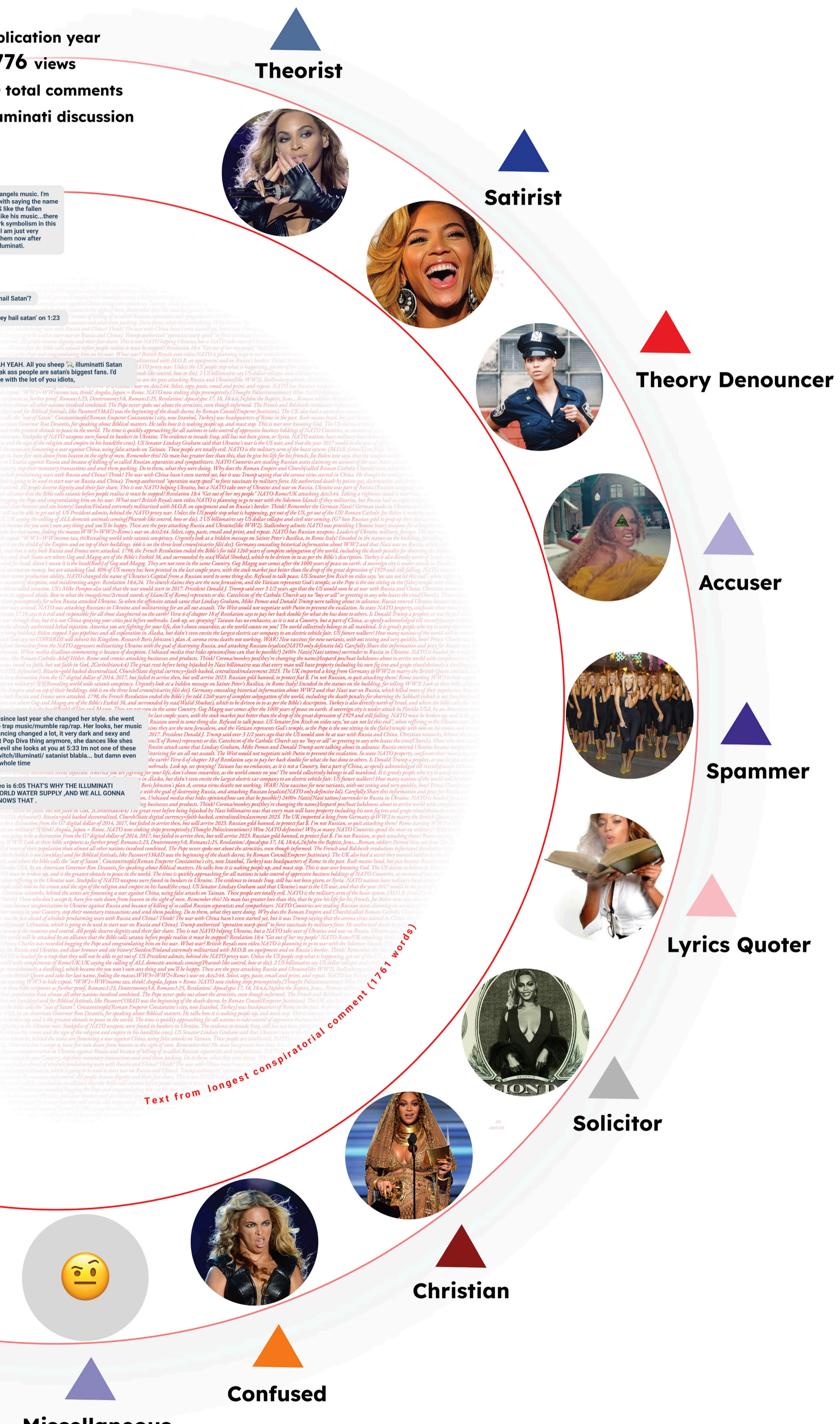
Hold Up

2016 publication year
214,704,163 views
75,182 total comments
1661 Illuminati discussion comments



APESHIT

2018 publication year
269,72,776 views
176,436 total comments
5190 Illuminati discussion comments



Text from longest conspiratorial comment (176 words)

0:05 Clearly the fallen angel music, I'm not even comfortable with saying the name of this garbage. LOOKS like the fallen angels music, sounds like his music... there is just so much evil dark symbolism in this stupid song video that I am just very uncomfortable with it then ever after watching it. It bleeds illuminati.

1:23 did she said 'hail satan'?

It is just me or I hear 'hey hail satan' at 1:23

YEAH YEAH YEAH YEAH. All you sheep... illuminati Satan blah blah blah. You weak ass people are satan's biggest fans. I'd rather just than them be with the lot of you idiots.

3:52 shoes do a satanic signal with hand.

ILLUMINATI HAND SIGN 3:53

3:53 ILLUMINAT CONFIRMED

3:53 Baphomet goat hand sign really quick (doesn't mean 'rock on'), 'all sisters COBBY with that Illuminati mess' 'Beyoncé' 'Who you're making it pretty easy Beyoncé. Illuminati confirmed

3:54 she pledges satan

4:47 this face will give u nightmares (so much illuminati)

4:47 this face will give u nightmares (so much illuminati)

It's all because the video is 6:05 THAT'S WHY THE ILLUMINATI POISONED ALL THE WORLD WATER SUPPLY AND WE ALL GOONNA DIE, AND BEYONCE KNOWS THAT.

0:26 can u not see it she an illuminati she looks innocent then BAM devil overboard!

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