

## Conclusions: What is Theology & Spirituality in Hip Hop?

And to all future generations of Hip Hop, know this; it is this Love that has delivered this gospel to OUR PEOPLE for OUR correction and survival. This gospel comes to us as the physical manifestation of God's grace and love for Hip Hop.

KRS-One



Often we view religion and science as having a zero-sum relationship. But for many sociologists, religion and science are both narratives that explain social reality—the former based on traditional authority and faith and the later on scientific methodology.

TOM KERSEN



If religion was a thing money could buy, the rich would live, and the poor would die.

JAMES BALDWIN



So, as posed in the introduction, does a Hip Hop 'theology' even fit? Is there an actual motif which Hip Hoppers are espousing within the supernatural realm? Is there an actual religious discourse within Hip Hop or is it a manufacturing of artists for more profit? I began this project with an open mind, intending to explore the socio-theological within a culture that, in full transparency, is close and dear to me. However, within the process, the initial methodology of lyrical analysis yielded only a small sample of songs which had a theological slant in them. This was most troubling, as the culture I had come to study in my previous works was alive with a theological, hermeneutical, and spiritual journey. Theomusicology was a much better fit because it allowed for Hip Hop's true

'voice' to be heard in the context of the sacred, profane, and secular. This project set out to give a critical approach to Hip Hop, its people, its culture, and the environment in which it is formed.

This book has been concerned with exploring the spiritual and theological dimensions, aspects, sensibilities, and features of Hip Hop culture. While the field of theological and religious studies is rich with history, social awareness, gender, and racial sub-fields, Hip Hop Studies is a relatively newer study and one that has emerged over the last decade.<sup>1</sup> This book has explored the context and environment in which Hip Hop was formed. It has argued that Hip Hop is a post-soul theological construction and a space in which those with 'alternate identities' are able to find a space in which to explore God, deity, spirituality, and the issues surrounding the supernatural (e.g. death, the afterlife). This book has also observed the cypher within Hip Hop and the artists which construct a socio-spiritual discourse within their music, life, and poetry. The cypher is central to Hip Hop culture and offers the engine to the actual narrative within Hip Hop. This gave way to probing one of Hip Hop's greatest cypherologists, Tupac Amaru Shakur. This examination gave insight into one of Hip Hop's touted 'ghetto saints' and observed the theological contours of rapper and artist Tupac Shakur. Chapter 1 through Chapter 3 was a way of exploring the various aspects of Hip Hop's spiritual and theological tenet. It gave a broad view of the culture's journey through and in theology, which then opened up to Chapter 4 which surveyed violence, pain, and suffering within the context of both Hip Hop and a God who is, at times, silent toward the suffering experienced in urban and Hip Hop communities. Then, we dealt with race and the messianic symbol in Jesus. Hip Hoppers, by and large, desire a 'messiah' that is relatable, smokes like they smoke, and drinks like they drink—a deity in human form, the Hip Hop Jesus. This, in the end, is the ultimate pursuit of seeking a God symbol to which one can relate.

Hip Hop culture is not, however, a culture likely to be studied as an endeavor of religious research. With its infamous mug of minstrel caricatures, degradation of women, hypermasculinity, and a strong bend toward nihilism, one might overlook the subtle yet complex tones of religion within the actual culture. As with any group of people, numinous elements and divinity are there. The attempt to create an understanding of what 'life' is about and the meaning of that 'life' are also present. Hip Hop is no different.

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1 There is also an emerging sub-field being established by Anthony Pinn and Monica Miller within Hip Hop Studies called religion and Hip Hop. While still in its early stages, it promises to delve more closely into this area of theology and faith in the context of Hip Hop.

Still, Hip Hop, by its mere stance on social issues, advocacy for human rights, and its strong message against hegemonic systems often presents a problematic premise for those in religious settings, particularly those religious settings which adhere to the Abrahamic faith traditions. Hip Hop is not a “traditional” approach to religion and tends to give much more criticism than it does solutions to the problems. Moreover, Hip Hop is not a unified body of belief nor does it possess a ‘majority rule’ in its approach toward a religious premise, which is another post-soul tendency. Thus, within the research, it was difficult to arrive at a solid religious philosophy and theology as there are numerous ones which, at times, appear to be sections of a much smaller segment of Hip Hop. As Monica Miller states:

...the position that the category of what scholars have come to call “religion” is in fact a human doing, production, and manufacturing with a particular social and political history. Seen thus as an act of imagining and doing, religion eludes the theoretical and taxonomical category that has often privileged particular practices and experiences as ‘religious’ (2013b, 178).

As challenging as Miller’s thoughts are here, I still found five theological generalities which do emerge, which give insight and responses to these questions which we will examine first, prior to inspecting the five reoccurring typologies:<sup>2</sup>

1. *The Hip Hop community crafts its own space for meaning and understanding of the mystery of God:* KRS-One, known as the “God-father of Hip Hop” because of his instrumental music, philosophy, and commitment to the culture, discusses the significance of Hip Hop’s unique space to experience ‘life’ and all the love, pain, and suffering that it has to offer. As has been shown in this book, Hip Hop is a community that is able to produce a space and locality in which people are able to find themselves and seek the mystery of who God is in their time, their speed, and without an overarching judgmental dogma that some religions tend to have (e.g. sin).
2. *Doubt is fundamental:* if one thing is clear within all of the research, doubt is an essential element to Hip Hop’s spiritual dimensions. The ability to struggle and hold in tension a God who is ‘out there’ and may or may not be able to ‘save’ is critical for the Hip Hop community. While

<sup>2</sup> These were formed from a culmination of the research and the interviews with various artists.

Zulu, Christian, Jewish, and Islamic faiths tend to have a more established route to 'faith' and 'assurance,' Hip Hoppers push against this 'assurance' (as a result of living in communities being in such dis-assurance and contempt) to provide a healthy tension of disbelief and doubt. Artists like Pastor Troy and Tupac intertwine a doubt that God even exists with a discourse of hope in a brighter tomorrow. Doubt produces a way of understanding for the Hip Hop community. For Hip Hoppers, those who are 'sure' and 'certain' are to be suspected and not trusted—for that 'assurance' typically brings with it dogmatic, rigorous, and judgmental theologies which can then produce hate, violence, and even war when those who do not fit into their scope of assurance make 'life' messy. Hence, the Hip Hop community remains in a state of doubt, which in many ways aids in the growth of the very 'faith' in which they are attempting to grow.<sup>3</sup>

3. *The suffering images of a God are preferred:* if there is one thing that the Hip Hop community understands, it is pain and suffering. Hip Hoppers desire a God who has suffered with them, a God who is able to connect with sources of pain. Therefore, the suffering and beaten image of Jesus and prophets alike is needed. Interviewee Shelly posed a question which arose in various forms during the research: how can one identify with a God who is too perfect, too clean, too neat, too nice, and too peaceful? In essence, Hip Hoppers desire a God who is as grimy, profane, and illicit as they are. They desire a deity which can ultimately relate to the context and disreputable conditions in which the community finds itself—a God who can walk with them through the pain and suffering because that God has experienced it.
4. *Toward a theology of suffering and chaos:* this leads to the next theological typology which is Hip Hoppers' ability to develop theological constructs

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3 It is noted that in the Islamic faith, the prophet Muhammad (born roughly around 570 CE) doubted that the words he received about the Qur'an's text actually came from God. Muhammad perceived it as a figment of his imagination and that he was making the whole thing up. He wondered if a God would even give him such a message and whether God even existed. He almost drove himself insane with doubt, until he hesitatingly began to put the canon into a document. While this narration is often overlooked and even ignored—conservative Islamic scholars argue that Muhammad was 'sure' and 'never doubted' the call of God—it is a crucial piece of the faith, that the prophet himself had major doubts in regards to God and the 'calling on his life.' This is a critical part of the history of Islam and of religion in general: doubt is the key ingredient of faith and of connection to a deity (Esposito 1999; Hazleton 2013b, a).

within the suffering and chaos. Throughout much of the Christian Bible, characters such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, David, Tamar, Ruth, Noah, Peter, and Judas had a profane nature to them. That is, there was an element to them that was, simply put, human: they used strong language; they abused friends; they lied; they sold out friends for 'booty'; they were sexually carnal; they were what Harvey Cox would describe as the *laos theou*—the people of God (1965, 125). Yet, among these 'people of God' was suffering, and at many levels, chaos and disorder—some were able to give off better personas of togetherness than others, but in the end, all were truly battling chaos. This is part of what Hip Hoppers wish to explore. How could a 'perfect' God put the message of 'truth' in people who are filled with such imperfection? Moreover, how does one deal, spiritually, with the chaotic conditions in which they find themselves without (a) killing themselves, (b) killing others, or (c) becoming a pessimistic cynic? These are theological pursuits that the Hip Hop community, by and large, is open to pursuing. Those in this community see a God who is able to journey with them and a God who will eventually begin to bring some type of redemptive quality to their situation. This, however, will require a God who is willing to be theologically 'messy'<sup>4</sup> which, in the end, Hip Hoppers, on the whole, are okay with because it is chaotic and it provides some solace to their suffering.

5. *Vengeance will fall upon the 'unjust'*: in the end, most religions believe that the 'wicked' will, in some way, be punished. Whether it is returning to life in different forms until the true meaning of life is found or burning in an everlasting fire, the 'wicked' will receive their due 'justice.' For the Hip Hop community, it was found that even pimps, hustlers, and thieves believe this in some manner, and the 'injustice' they have received from society will in some way be recompensed in the supernatural realm for

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4 Some conundrums and, by definition, non-answerable questions have no decisive resolution. For example, who sat in the room with God and the "heavenly hosts" in the book of Job? Why was Lot so willing to give up his daughters? Could there be a different God of the Old Testament who almost enjoyed killing those who did not agree with him, compared to the God of the New Testament who taught about peace, love, and against violence? Is not the story of Jesus pre-dated by Horus who had some of the same typologies within it (e.g. twelve disciples, one traitor, rose to save his people, died for humanity)? These are just some of the theological messes that the Hip Hop community desires a God to sit with, and yet trusting that God will eventually provide answers to 'life' at some later point—e.g. third eye consciousness.

their suffering.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the desire is that God will provide a retaliation, on some level, for those who are oppressed and a place for the ‘unjust’ to ‘pay’ for their ill manners and deeds. Interviewees Laura and Tali exclaimed that somewhere “up there” God had to be willing to deal with the evil doers “down here.” Letty and MC Skillz also stated similar responses when asked “how do you, from a theological position, comprehend and deal with pain and suffering?” God was seen to be, ultimately, a ‘just God’ who will reward those who follow God’s ways.<sup>6</sup>

These five typologies are representative of the broad theological paradigms derived from my research. I argue that a Hip Hop theology does fit and that there is substantial material in it to connect to a group of people performing what Charles Glock and Rodney Stark break up into a taxonomy of religious experience (1965, 43–62):

1. The Confirming Experience: the human actor simply notes (feels, sense, etc.) the existence or presence of the divine.<sup>7</sup>
2. The Responsive Experience: mutual presence is acknowledged, the divine actor is perceived as noting the presence of the human actor.<sup>8</sup>

5 The interviewees who were open enough to divulge their personal lives revealed that in the past, they were a variety of drug dealers, pimps, and street hustlers, but ‘now’ they had been converted and that their former lifestyle was not in line with what ‘God’ had intended life to be. This was also the case in my previous work with gang members in Los Angeles, CA. Almost all recounted to me that this lifestyle they lived was not one that they would choose, but was one that was thrust upon them by geographical location, social circumstances, and economic factors. Most desired to live a ‘better life’ and found some type of peace and hope in a God who would eventually give them rest either in death or heaven (Hodge 2009, 2010, 2013b). Dyson also noted that rappers sought after a more “Old Testament” style God as that God actually handled life the way the “streets did,” an interesting observation (2001, 203–216).

6 Of course the notion and meaning behind “God’s ways” is open to interpretation from a variety of positions. Here, most of the respondents in the interviews were referring to a life that was peaceful, loving, and one where they looked out for their sisters and brothers. While one might argue that you do not need a God or religion for this type of ideological construct. Nevertheless, the interviewees and research with the Hip Hop community points this toward a life ‘with God.’

7 This takes place in or at concerts and spoken word venues (i.e. poetry readings).

8 This occurs when listening to certain artists or viewing particular videos which are transcendental for the person.

3. The Ecstatic Experience: the awareness of mutual presence is replaced by an affective relationship akin to love or friendship.<sup>9</sup>
4. The Revelational Experience: the human actor perceives her or himself as a confidant of or a fellow participant in action with the divine actor.<sup>10</sup>

While Glock and Stark were referring to a general religious experience, from the research, the Hip Hop community is no different, and within this society, Hip Hoppers experience these four taxonomies in a variety of ways. These experiences are part of the larger spiritual experience within the culture which aids in creating meaning, context, and ultimately an ontological discourse for the person. As argued, Hip Hop may perhaps be an indigenous approach to deity and the supernatural by way of its core tenets and mantra. The fact that artists are able to work this out through a theological habitation either in their music, their concerts, or their personal life, is an example of the complexity and intricacy of a Hip Hop theology.<sup>11</sup>

However, it could also be argued that this is also a manufacturing of religious manifestations and used for maintaining the religious marketplace. This could certainly be the case in some cases where artists use religion as a selling point. For example, Mase's conversion to Christianity, then back to mainstream, then back to Christianity was a market value-driven move for his career. It caused him to sell albums and get his name in the headlines. We can also look at Snoop Dogg's conversion to Rastafarianism coming from an extreme position

9 For the Hip Hop community, this is when God reveals God's self in the poetry, music, or event which uplifts the person or community, such as the experience of social and/or economic equality.

10 This is the least common, but it occurs when the Hip Hopper (or community therein) actually feels God's presence and a sense of the divine. Artists such as Tupac, DMX, Lauryn Hill, Lupe Fiasco, KRS-One, and Lecrae have all reported this experience in and around their music and the power within a concert venue (typically smaller events). In this experience, Hip Hoppers often find a God who is compassionate, merciful, and able to embrace their 'sin' and 'shortcomings'. While uncommon, in a similar notion in his book (which is also shaped and colored in the form of an actual Bible), KRS-One argues that this is a crucial piece to spiritual growth and that Hip Hop could actually help in this experience (One 2009).

11 It could also be stated that Blues, Jazz, and R & B artists can do the same with their respective audiences in their respective contexts. Hip Hop could be this generation's Blues and Jazz culture, and, quite possibly, morph into a new genre and musical category over the next twenty years. But, nevertheless, Hip Hop is certainly not the first in music genres to wrestle with theological matters.



of Gnostic ideologies and the public announcement of his name change to Snoop Lion. In this same sense, the 2012 holographic use of Tupac's image at a concert in Coachella California by Dr. Dre and then Snoop Dogg drew much controversy about the sacredness of Tupac's life and message. Moreover, critics argued that Dr. Dre and Snoop used Tupac for promotional and financial promotions and that they were merely attempting to attain publicity in the public sphere—which, in the end, gave them a substantial amount of notoriety as the technology used to create such a lifelike image was groundbreaking. Further, with a sacred entity such as Tupac, the Hip Hop community was torn and the commercialism became, once again, a topic of tension.

Christian Hip Hop artists (also characterized as “holy Hip Hoppers”) such as Lecrae, Shai Linne, Propaganda, and Sho Baraka offer a certain theological discourse rooted in a professed theological tradition—Christianity. They are not attempting to obscure their messages. They are clear and open about their faith, religious aspirations, and spiritual discourses (more on these artists momentarily). It could also be argued that, in essence, by labeling their music “Christian” or “holy Hip Hop” they are, by default, creating a marketplace for their art. After all, they are getting paid for their music and they charge for concert appearances. Would this not also be considered a construct within the religious marketplace? Also, with the growing sub-genre of “holy Hip Hop,” the title of being “Christian” or “holy” carries with it a crowd of eager buyers for a version of Hip Hop that is “lighter” and without the ‘fat.’ These buyers and audiences tend to be suburban, upper middle class,<sup>12</sup> White, and evangelical. The artists can draw good sums of money and typically draw a crowd of individuals willing to pay for para-merchandise such as DVDs, t-shirts, books, and other paraphernalia. The Christian marketplace is vast and large. It also contains an economic factor which artists understand well, which is why that marketplace is engaged. Thus, what is the line between an authentic Christian message and a message for monetary profit?

The same is true, however, for commercial artists not given the label “Christian” or “holy Hip Hopper.” There is money and notoriety to be had when an artist like Tupac, Nas, or Pastor Troy strongly criticizes the Black church and accuses it of thievery and licentious lifestyles. There is popularity to be gained

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12 This notion of Hip Hop as being “lighter” is often a way for White, suburban, upper middle class adolescents to gain entry into Hip Hop culture. While artists such as Lil Wayne and Jay Z present too much of a threat to the parents, Christian Hip Hop artists offer a much “easier” entry and adaptation into Hip Hop culture. While these artists are not without controversy and criticisms, they still carry a “Christian” title which is better than a title of “secular” or “profane” associated with artists like Tupac, DMX, Remy Ma, and Nas.



when Nas appears in the video on a cross with thorns on his head. People beyond the Hip Hop community consume this and pay good money at concerts to see these artists in action. Part of the argument here is that commercialism tears down any form of grass rooted symbolism and feeling, thus creating a space reserved solely for pecuniary profit and commercial success. This is not allocated just to Hip Hop. The organic food industry, which twenty-five years ago consisted of grass root farmers and “hippie like” groups, now maintains multi-million dollar contracts with entities such as Wal-Mart, Target, and Costco. Once those corporate entities come in, the ‘heart’ and ‘soul’ of the organization is lost, and profit is the sole purpose of existence. Thus, it is the same with Hip Hop and its corporate annexation during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Drane 2000; George and National Urban League. 1990; Neal 1997; Rose 2008; Tate 2003).

Yet, Hip Hoppers in such a genre as “holy Hip Hop” are, at times, continuing the market maintenance (Miller 2013b) of Christian proselytizing. Christian rap groups such as Gospel Gangstaz and Cross Movement both openly claim a Christian religion and in many of their tracks, name “sin” and “worldly” issues while offering a strong message to those who are “lost” to come back into the “fold” with Jesus. These records, as previously noted, sell and keep the Black religious marketplace alive by creating constructions of sin, morality, immorality, and a supernatural remuneration for “wrong deeds” within their music and messages. Artists like these, though unpopular among mainstream Hip Hop artists, create a space where dogmatic mantras are reinforced through the music of Hip Hop. And while it is at the core of Hip Hop culture, it resists dominant authority. Nevertheless, many Christian rap artists appear to capitulate to religious forms of hegemony. This troubling process would be true of Christian churches which do “outreach” to the “Hip Hop generation” but only use Hip Hop as a vehicle, when at the core, the same conservative, evangelical, right-wing based, dogmatic, and authoritative spirit is still present. This is problematic—especially for a culture such as Hip Hop which espouses to be non-judgmental in so many regards—because artists such as these posit themselves as moral authorities against “sin,” “worldly possessions,” and “secular attitudes,” which in turn create a slender path to “salvation” and “morality.” It is, as Monica Miller tells us, “When religion is positioned socially and intellectually as the ‘sanitizer’ of ‘deviant’ cultural production, this conflation produces (and maintains) dominant power” (2013b, 6).<sup>13</sup> For some Christian Hip

13 Miller further argues that within these processes, “...religion becomes understood as a hegemonic, dominant, and hierarchical agent of moral maintenance and deviance management” (2013b, 6). Within these types of maintenance and deviance management sessions,

Hoppers, this has been a troubling reality; they create a type of ‘moral panic’ in a particular audience (such as working class urban contexts) that is already simplistic and rigid in their religious pursuits (Glock and Rodney 1965; Stark and Glock 1968; Stark 1985). However, their core, even though clothed in the style and appropriations of Hip Hop culture, is essentially of a dominant power and continues a hegemonic socio-religious supremacy.<sup>14</sup>

Hip Hop does not stray too far from its Black Christian church traditions. In fact, even artists such as Tupac, who raved against and challenged Black Christian narratives as too traditional, dogmatic, and rigid, fell prey to these dominant forms of religion and Tupac was at times nihilistic in his approach towards the concept of ‘hope.’ We must not forget that KRS-One keeps a strong connection to the tradition of the Black Christian faith and much of the call and response comes from these faith traditions. Hip Hop is not immune to simplistic theodicies which creep into a lot of Black Christian churches. Hip Hop, at times, is the perpetrator of these theodicies. With pop-Hip Hoppers<sup>15</sup> such as Will Smith and The Black Eyed Peas, a theoditized message of “hope” is given and “the way” for that “hope” is often through God. Yet, no real solutions are given to the conditions of the ‘hood, economic inequality,

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theodicies such as “God is always good,” “there is only ONE true God,” and “Avoid secular music” are troped as reality and part of a “moral lifestyle.” These become embedded into religious spaces such as the Black Christian church, some sects, and the Nation of Islam. They in turn create worldviews that create strong rules, norms, and theological mores which keep individuals within religious gates and sacred canopies.

- 14 One of the many commodifiable uses of Hip Hop is that of religious manufacturing. Shirts with the expression “Jesus Is My Homeboy” or “These Are My Church Clothes” are all products of a Hip Hop market that, by and large, is profitable on many levels. When one considers the profits being made by senior pastors in Black Megachurches (those over five thousand members), it would stand to reason that Hip Hop would be a commodifiable product of the Black Christian church as well as take the potential form of “evangelism” and “outreach.” This is part of the complexity and problematic nature of religion in the marketplace.
- 15 It should be noted that within Hip Hop grassroots culture, a sentiment of resentment exists for artists perceived to have sold out and gone ‘pop.’ Legendary group EPMD rapped about this phenomena in becoming ‘pop’ and ‘sold out’ to ‘R&B.’ They, and others like them (Paris, Ice-T, Tupac, MC Lyte), were against the infiltration of commercialism and pop-style. Ice-T, in his VH-1 documentary *Planet Rock*, had this to say: “Rap was a counterculture that went against pop. But when you have Rihanna singin’ on your records and you’re doin’ records with Katy Perry, that’s no longer rap. It’s pop music—that is, pop using rap delivery. When you hear Lil Wayne sayin’ ‘I got a chopper in the car,’ you go, ‘Yeah, right you do.’” The frustration is palatable.

social isolation, political demoralization, and disenfranchisement of the urban communities who are buying their music. Moreover, these areas are often overlooked, in order to preserve “peace” and maintain an “optimistic” outlook on life.<sup>16</sup> These are similar to the teachings and general messages of “hope” given by Black preachers and are often not too far away from the five-step process for “success” and prosperity gospel troupes which often give false hope to a group of people already struggling financially. So, it stands to reason that Black pastors such as Creflo Dollar appear in Nelly videos with the backdrop of Atlanta behind them.<sup>17</sup> “Name it and claim it” theologies along with prosperity based notions of God wanting a person to succeed financially are tangible with Hip Hoppers who have, in essence, already “made it.” In other words, it is very easy to “give God the glory” when you have a million dollars in the bank. It is not difficult to claim that “God blessed me” when life appears to be moving in a successful way. Yet, for the people whose lives are not shaping up in this manner, it is as if a double standardized message is being received. Without critical thought and inquiry, one might actually believe they are “cursed” or, even worse, living in “sin” because their life is not “working out” like the ones they see in videos and on television. Compound this with a hyper-celebrity culture present in American society, and one begins to construct a theology that presents itself as a success driven, goal attaining, financially-based system in which God only rewards those who “follow his rules” in the moral manner “he desires.” Money, God, heaven, and success are all conflated into a theological narrative which often leaves out the systems, policy, and historical contexts which created the inequality in which people in urban enclaves live. Therefore, it is easy to overlook the context and geographical history of a certain location like South Central Los Angeles—which was once a bright and vibrant middle class neighborhood before it was considered to be the ‘hood—and place blame for those “evils” on the “devil” while telling those who believe otherwise, that a God will deliver them and that they should have “faith” through the tough times.

16 This is from an observation on the music of Will Smith, The Black Eyed Peas, MC Hammer, Beyoncé, Usher, Wiz Khalifa, Drake, and Chris Brown whose music, while very popular, tends to focus more on optimistic non-critical elements of life and society. Artists such as these are often criticized by members of the Hip Hop community for being too “soft” and/or “sell-outs” to the real problems of the urban context. It is interesting to note, still, that their music sells. In the end, someone is buying this and believing, even in some miniscule manner, that their message is one of “hope.”

17 Atlanta is largely known as the Black Christian church “Mecca” and big name Black preachers such as T.D. Jakes reside there as well as in their Megachurches.

We now that turn to the five central typologies of Hip Hop's theological sensibilities where we will explore further these notions of God, commercialism, and sin.

### Five Central Typologies of Hip Hop's Theological Sensibilities

The dearth of theological study in Hip Hop scholarship is, by and large, in need of organization of ideas and thought. Therefore, though growing and developing, these typologies seek to contribute a sense of organization for current and future Hip Hop scholars (particularly those investigating Hip Hop and theology/religion).

First, *Hip Hoppers create their own view of God, Jesus, and church in association with suffering, pain, and inequality*. Chapter 2 through Chapter 5 demonstrated these characteristics. Yet, for the Hip Hop community, the construct of God, Jesus, Allah, Mohammed, and other forms of deity still come into question. For example, take the construct of the Black Jesus. When Notorious B.I.G. adorned his now infamous Jesus Piece (a gold diamond encrusted medallion of the Jesus image), it was a White Jesus. The question becomes why was it not a Black Jesus, one that was more contextual and relevant? After all, Hip Hop is seeking the relevant and relatable. This might suggest that even though the Notorious B.I.G. was connected with a movement that questioned moral authority, he was still very much affected and influenced by the colonialist socio-religious worldviews that dominate the Western world (e.g. White Jesus, the Bible as 'moral authority,' salvation through one's savior). Just because a rapper is attempting new endeavors does not mean that they are immune to the worldviews and theologies which preceded that new endeavor.

This was most certainly the case for DMX, Tupac, and Lauryn Hill, all of whom celebrate, arguably, a Christian God. Yet, what is a Christian God? What did the centralizing of the Christian church in Rome create sociologically, psychologically, spiritually, and philosophically? In addition, how did a normalizing of Christianity into a Western, Greco-Roman culture, make other, more contextual forms of Christianity in Northern and Central Africa outcasts because they did not fit the normalized forms of "morality?" It has been noted that Western and Central African countries were practicing indigenous forms of Christianity, ones foreign to a Roman Catholic tradition. Yet, when brought over by slave traders during the sixteenth century, they were forced to submit to a Western Euro-tribal form of Christianity (Evans 1992; Franklin and Jr 2000; Frazier and Glazer 1966). Over centuries of colonizing through 'missionary work' and the politicizing of Christian morals, this created a religious

worldview that is difficult to overcome. It is, as one might say, “in the water” and we now have innumerable generations of Black and Brown individuals who—even though in spirit they may be revolutionary and object to the dominant culture—in their religion still draw from the same hegemonic structure which has oppressed many for centuries. In other words, it is difficult to tell whether Tupac is indeed claiming a “new religion” or whether it will be one still rooted in Western tradition. That said, cultural transference from one generation to the next will always have some vestiges from the previous one.

So, while Hip Hoppers do in fact create a contextualized, relevant, and applicable God for their environment, one might dispute that this “god” is any different to the one proposed by, say, Billy Graham or Pat Roberts. The Hip Hop God is more ethnically and culturally appropriate yet it still possesses the typical evangelical tropes.

Nonetheless, there is something unique about the Zulu Nation, Nation of Islam, and the Five Percenters that may possibly usher in a more relevant form of deity. Rappers like Lupe Fiasco, a proclaimed Muslim, and Jasiri X, who has ties with both the Nation of Islam and Zulu, all have a renewed approach to deity and God within the contexts of suffering and pain. It is a God that moves well beyond the Western, Greco-Roman God which has adorned Western religion for a very long time. Additionally, with post-soul contexts existing within Hip Hop, a conglomeration of Christianity, Zulu, Nation of Islam, Five Percenters, and Judaism may be on the spiritual horizon for the next generation of Hip Hoppers.

Second, *the post-soul context helps to create a climate in which to question authority, rebel from current religious standards and worldviews, and to create a new path to God and church.* Due to the fact that the post-soul context is concerned with questioning hegemonic authority, deconstructing traditional values for examination, and is about communal experience over autonomous ones, Hip Hop is a candidate for this context because it too is concerned with the deconstruction of what is defined as “normality.” From the inception of Hip Hop, the central mantra has been to challenge the forces that have created tradition, norms, and established modes of thought.<sup>18</sup> The post-soul is crucial for Hip Hop to survive and for it to have the ability to call out the evil in chaotic social climates such as the George Zimmerman acquittal, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the Los Angeles uprisings in 1992, the overthrowing of the

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18 With this in mind, it is now possible to argue that Hip Hop has, in the commercialized sense, created a hegemonic standard which needs to be challenged and deconstructed much like early Hip Hoppers did with disco, rock, and 80s pop-music.

government in Egypt, and the rise of a democratic voice in Iraq. All of these events have a Hip Hop spirit and ethos fueling its continual deconstruction of societal norms—no matter where the geographical location may be.

This is a crucial element that makes Hip Hop one of the few cultures and musical genres (rap) that can be taken in almost any context of oppression and still be relevant and innovative. For disenfranchised people around the globe, Hip Hop becomes not only a voice and musical escape, but a movement in seeking justice, equality, and impartiality.

Interviewees Cobra, Teek, and John all recounted the strength of Hip Hop and that it in fact “saved them” from death. This was a sub-theme within all of the interviews and in my previous work as well. Hip Hop is seen as a savior, without a deity or religious dogma. Hip Hop and the mere point that it allows one’s voice to be heard, acknowledged, and affirmed, is a great space/place for those who are socially oppressed and overlooked. This may be why Hip Hop is so popular globally.

Third, *the felt need from the Hip Hop community aides in creating a spiritual avenue in order to make meaning of suffering, pain, and inequality.* For many Hip Hoppers, the concept of “sin” is less of a personal one and more of a systemic and institutional ideology that is in “everything, like the Matrix” as Huck and DJ Harper told me. Suffering, pain, and inequality, therefore, are looked upon not as a “sin” concept, but as sin created from the abuse, misconduct, corruption, and spiritual desolation of those who are leaders and who are allegedly ‘in charge of’ and/or against their communities.

It is similar to what Lynette stated:

I think God has a special place for those who are either knowingly or even unknowingly doing harm to God’s people. I didn’t create sexism, but the men who created commercials that show women as servants and sex objects did. I didn’t create the job losses that so many people are experiencing now, but the greedy bankers who run the banks did...those are sins that are huge and so large...you can’t put that on the people who wanted to get a loan so they could own a home and get a piece of the ‘American Dream’ you just can’t...they were doing right; they were playing by the rules; these other cats weren’t...

For Hip Hoppers, Hip Hop and rap becomes a space in which these corporate sins can be acknowledged and deconstructed. The personalization of sin and evil upon which so much of Western Christianity has built its theological constructs are done away with, and the macro sin of JP Morgan Chase Bank, Wells Fargo, Fannie Mae, AIG, and Citi Corp are examined and confronted. Further,



the very essence of whose suffering is important (as discussed in Chapter 4) and whose suffering gets attention are aspects Hip Hoppers continue to place at the table of leaders of societies.<sup>19</sup>

Within community, there is strength. In my previous work, I looked at the strength within the community spaces of Hip Hop and found that Hip Hoppers find transcendental meaning when they find others who are suffering just like they are. The problem itself may not be resolved, yet having someone who can relate to your current struggle is a comforting thought—even more so when that person is of the same ethnic, cultural, and social background as Hip Hoppers (Hodge 2010).

Fourth, *human action is directed toward problem solving. In this case, Hip Hoppers create a way to problem solve through their music, poetry, and lyrics.* Through the fog of sexism, braggadocio postures, male dominated messages, and commercialism, Hip Hop culture, is, by the very nature of its core community, about seeking solutions to the problems of life. Often overlooked and unseen from the media's eye is the daily grind of Hip Hop organizations such as the Save The Kids Foundation, Rap Sessions, Poetry Behind Walls, the Left Of Black web series, and the Hip Hop Congress, all working toward progressive solutions which not only aid people, but also aid the communities in which they serve.

Organizations such as these have popular rappers such as Chuck D, M-1, MC Lyte, Boots Riley, Talib Kweli, Common, Mos Def, Martha Diaz, and David Banner who not only speak out against macro social inequality, but also support local community activists solving local problems. Also, while this study has been concerned with the socio-theological nature of Hip Hop, issues such as date rape, incest, alcoholism, discrimination against LGBTQ people, drug abuse, systemic racism, the classroom to prison pipeline, economic disparities, political demoralization, the privatization of prisons, urban ecology, and

19 Even Black leaders such as Cornel West and Jesse Jackson have come under direct fire from the Hip Hop community. Cornel West, whose *Poverty Tour* is corporately underwritten by Wells Fargo and Wal-Mart, is a hypocrisy for most Hip Hoppers who not only call out, but also challenge the very message of West and Tavis Smiley. West's multi-million dollar penthouse in Manhattan and twenty thousand dollar plus honorariums are also part of that critique from the Hip Hop community. Jesse Jackson Jr.'s recent conviction also reveals Hip Hoppers claim that their own leaders have "lost touch" with the real issues. Jack told me "It's like these mutha-fuckers have lost all touch with reality and still think we in the Hip Hop community still got love for em. Nope! How the hell you gonna talk about Black issues and you don't have the damdest clue of what being broke really is in the 21st century? You tell me that? All them goddamn leaders are a fucking joke."

environmental racism are large issues facing not just the Hip Hop community, but those living in urban centers and who are displaced from gentrification. Issues such as the ones listed have prompted organizations like these to put pressure on rappers such as Jay Z, Kanye West, Young Jeezy, Lil Wayne, and Nikki Minaj to speak on and address the issues facing communities in which they once lived.

However, the biggest service organizations like these do for the Hip Hop community is that they problem solve in communal settings. They use the core of who and what Hip Hop is to create a voice and use political, digital, and social avenues to distribute that message. As seen through the music, the culture, and the context of where Hip Hop is conceived, the Hip Hop community, by and large, seeks to find solutions to the problems facing their community.

And, fifth, *distrust of current systems, institutions, and social structures is a part of the worldview of Hip Hoppers within a Post-soul context*. This is the undergirding cosmological mantra for the Hip Hop community. Critique, critical engagement, distrust of traditions, distrust of power structures, and the questioning of authority is what made Hip Hop a culture to begin with. Rappers, a growing civil disruption, and the societal shift over the last forty years has seen a set of musical genres emerge, such as Grunge, Punk, and underground Metal, that also question and challenge the norms set before them. The Hip Hop community is merely one of a growing number of groups that call out the “powers that be” and bring into question the very facets of what society defines as ‘reality.’ I would argue that Hip Hop, however, is the loudest voice and gives social, cultural, and pedagogical fuel to other groups who also call for justice, equality, and egalitarian communities.

While we have examined artists such as Pastor Troy, Tribe Called Quest, Paris, Public Enemy, and Ice Cube, who all have a distrust for systems, let me return to and highlight religious and spiritual artists such as Propaganda, Jasiri X, and Shai Linne who profess a stated faith, but also distrust parts of those institutions in which they negotiate that faith. For example, in the song “Precious Puritans,” artist Propaganda gives a critique on the centuries of colonialism, White racism, and Christianity dominated by White Evangelicals who, as Propaganda asserts, damage “churches of color.” He posits that if White evangelicals do not acknowledge the “bones of their past,” the racial gap between Whites and people of color will “never be bridged” (Thorn 2012).

In an interview, Propaganda states:

The song was really designed to be a bait and switch. The indictment on the puritans is really a secondary point. They were not perfect in living out their theology. They had issues just like all of us. And I’m just as much guilty as them. The *real* point is the last line, “God uses crooked sticks to

make straight lines.” God uses us despite our depravity. That’s the main point...I’m guilty too!

Now about the secondary point. I think we as a culture tend to romanticize the past. We tend to treat people, preacher, politicians, etc. like comic book characters. Where the good guys are ALL good and the bad guys are ALL bad. And that’s just not true. Real life is nuanced. I started noticing, as I traveled more and more, that we have the tendency to pedestal those preacher/theologians we agree with, and demonize those we don’t. To me it seemed like we, the good Calvinists, spoke of the puritans almost like they weren’t mere men with flaws. I, personally, can’t hear someone speak of that time era in history and not think of slavery. We can’t take people out of their cultural context. Point being ‘there is not ONE group of believers that has figured out the marriage between proper doctrine and action.’ We need to remember that as we pull from our past church leaders, they aren’t inerrant. They are flawed men like you and me. They are “crooked sticks” that the Lord was pleased to use for his maximum glory.<sup>20</sup>

Propaganda, along with other prominent Black Christian rappers, have taken a stronger role as social critics, while embracing their Hip Hop roots, within their music. This refreshing stance—while a few decades overdue—is also part of the post-soul critique of dominant forms of religion. In this interview, Propaganda is almost made to defend what he raps about. While this is not uncommon for other rappers with controversial lyrics, within evangelical Protestant circles, critiques are often seen as deviant; especially from males of color, or to be more specific, Black males. So, the song received its line of criticism etched in socio-religious rhetoric from leading evangelical voices and bloggers: “spiritually divisive” (Duren 2012,); “dangerous” (Strachan 2012); giving Puritans a “bad rap” (Beeke 2012); and creating “bad theological” ideology (Leake 2012).

Shai Linne also criticized Black and White leading evangelicals in his song “False Teachers.” This track specifically named individuals who, the rapper believes, have “falsely led the Children of God,” focusing on money, fame, notoriety, and economic prominence. Shai Linne goes so far as to call them “evil” and “liars.” This, as one could imagine, drew criticism not just from conservative Christian evangelicals, but also progressives and liberals. The song issues a strong critique of leading Christian leaders such as T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, and Paula White in a manner similar to that of N.W.A., Ice-T, Tupac, and

20 Taken from an interview Propaganda gave after the release of “Precious Puritans” in 2012.

Public Enemy in their critiques of the presidency and political leaders. Similar to Propaganda's critics, Linne's accusers were using socio-religious discourse that ranged from "wrong messages for young Christians" to "sinful." Linne, who received a large amount of tweets, Facebook posts, and emails, decided to respond to his critics, particularly to that of Paula White—a White, female evangelical that Linne specially names as a 'false teacher.' Interestingly enough, his critics were most outspoken about his challenge to a White, blonde, attractive, successful, and prominent woman. This is noteworthy since the continued significance of race lingers inside Christian evangelical circles; it would seem Linne hit a nerve. Linne's response to this was:

I want to address a few of the false teachings themselves. I went straight to the Paula White Ministries website and your Youtube page so I could hear what you have released as representative of Paula White's teaching. There are many things I could speak on, but I'll highlight three here.

Paula White did a series called 8 Promises of the Atonement, that at the time of my writing this, is currently featured on your ministry website. In it, she states that physical healing and financial abundance in this life are provided for in the atonement of Christ. See the following video at the 25:00 mark where Paula White teaches "salvation includes healing." She says it again at 28:30. But then she goes even further. If you keep listening, she talks about commanding her body not to be sick because of the blood of Christ. She ends this section by boldly declaring around 29:40:

"You are not going to die of sickness. When you go, it's going to be because of your appointed time of old age and full of life"

For Paula White to say this to a large crowd of people is both false and irresponsible. She has no idea how those people are going to die. The truth is that Christians do get sick. Many godly believers die at young ages from sickness and it is not due to their lack of faith or because they haven't embraced what's theirs through the atonement. It's because God is sovereign.

■ Please check the unpaired quotation mark in the sentence "See now that I".

As He says in Deut. 32:39, "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand."

Psalm 139:14 says "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."

God sovereignly (sic) determines when we live and when we die. And if He appoints or allows a sickness to take our lives, it is because His infinite wisdom determined that it be so.

LINNE 2013

Note Linne's Biblical references, rebuttal, and theodicy at the end, something to which Christian rap artists fall prey all too often. His response goes on for about three thousand more words and offers very little response to the Black males he identified as 'false teachers.' Still, artists such as Linne and Propaganda are a shift from the elementary messages embedded within evangelical Christian/holy Hip Hop over the last twenty years and a reconnection with Hip Hop's more militant roots.

Jasiri X, who claims faith as a Muslim, receives much more support from his Muslim community and little to no push back from those within his religious tradition—granted his music and messages do not critique his faith or Muslim background—as he focuses much of his music and messages on social, economic, educational, and gender equality. He is very grassroots and involved in social justice events such as the Troy Davis execution, the Oscar Grant killing, and the Trayvon Martin trial. Jasiri conflates his message of social action with a sense of spirituality and personal consciousness. However, he does not proselytize in his music, nor does he “call those to God” as some Christian rappers do. Instead, while distrusting hegemonic powers, he strongly urges his listeners to take action. I mention Jasiri here in the conclusion because he is underground and does not make the top ten list of albums sold, unlike for example Lil Wayne or Jay Z. He deserves mention as he continues the core of what Hip Hop culture is about and questions authority, distrusts power structures, and challenges the systems in which he and his listeners live—not only in his music, but through his lifestyle as well.

We will now look at why Hip Hop is a post-soul tenet, and its post-soul centrality.

### Hip Hop's Post-Soul Centrality

Slavoj Žižek asserts beautifully that for anyone wanting to discover a true sense of reality, they must first begin with and in the 'shit of life' and to go where 'the shit starts' (2008). Hip Hop does that. It begins with the 'shit' within life in which most of the community finds itself: the 'hood. It begins with a reality that is foreign to those living outside the ghetto context and offers the essentials of doubt, nihilism, uncertainty, reservation, and a pursuit of God that is laborious—a post-soul ideology indeed.

While religious zealots<sup>21</sup> would have one believe that Hip Hop is completely secular and profane, Hip Hop did not create the profane nor the secular. Those

<sup>21</sup> One of the largest Christian zealots is G. Craig Lewis, a Black Christian minister, who claims that all aspects of Hip Hop culture are evil and “from the Devil.” Lewis even claims

elements of life and society existed long before Hip Hop arrived into our culture. Hip Hop merely picked up where others left off and speaks to a lot of the truth with irreverence. Much of what rappers rap about did not originate with Hip Hop. From the use of Christianity to enforce slavery, to the Catholic Church's silence toward Hitler during WWII, to Muslim fanatics who blow themselves up "for Allah," evil and the profane have been a part of societal contexts for a very long time. So, to look at Hip Hop as being to blame is both erroneous and incorrect.<sup>22</sup>

The "Hoy Profane," as Teresa Reed puts it, is a deep part of the rich religious tradition in Black popular music. Reed (Reed 2003) states that, "The relationship between sacred and secular has been a source of controversy in both the African-American and the West-European musical traditions." This controversy has roots that go back into the early nineteenth century when Blacks were developing their musical genres. Most Whites considered "Black Gospel" an abomination in the eyes of God and did not see Black Gospel music as a valid form or source of spirituality (Hustad 1981; Southern 1983). Moreover, slaves concealed their narratives and music to avoid punishment by the slave-owners and to embrace their late-night worship (Reed 2003, 17–21). Fast forward into the twentieth century and there is the emergence of blues and jazz as musical forms to which people are gravitating. However, there is a distinct line in the sand that marks the differences between what is morally "right" and "wrong." Reed further asserts, "The emergence of the blues against the backdrop of the burgeoning black church at the end of the nineteenth century further ensured

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that rap music labeled "Christian Hip Hop" is also "Satanic" and that true Christians avoid it. This type of worldview appeals to those who 1) despise Hip Hop to begin with, 2) misunderstand Hip Hop's theological complexity, and 3) appeal to a one-source-solution type of approach to problems, conflict, and suffering. Lewis is popular and has a five DVD collection documenting his "research" on how Hip Hop (and music labeled 'worldly') is both satanic, and evil. Ironically, though, in 2012, he released his own rap as a way to fund his ministry.

- 22 This particular study of profane music within Black traditions is nothing new. There are many scholars that discuss this issue at length. The parameters of this book limit the scope of this section to paragraphs, but that in no way diminishes the work that has gone before it. For an in depth study, I recommend Jon Michael Spencer, ed., 1992. *Sacred Music of the Secular City: From Blues to Rap*. Vol. 6. Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Cheryl L. Keyes. 2002. *Rap Music and Street Consciousness*. Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press particularly Chapters 1–4; Eileen Southern. 1983. *The Music of Black Americans*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company; Christa K Dixon 1976. *Negro Spirituals: From Bible to Folk Song*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press; Howard Thurman. 1975. *The Negro Spirituals Speak of Life and Death*. Richmond, VA: Friends United Press; & Jon Michael Spencer. 1993. *Blues in Evil*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.



the recognition of two distinct categories of music: one that was appropriate for church use and one that was not” (2003, 9). This type of anti-worldly and secular stance continued with other musical genres/cultures such as Jazz, Blues, Rock & Roll, and the hybrid Black Gospel/blues sound established in the late 1950s.

Hip Hop and the blues, for example, are connected, as noted previously in this book. The blues speaks to a style of “living” according to Anthony Pinn. The blues, like Hip Hop, speaks to that musical form of spiritual expression and moves the individual to ponder deeply the issues of life. Pinn further states:

The blues, then, is a recognition of the value of African Americans through their ability to shape and control language and thus a world—a world full of sarcasm and tenacious black bodies. This has been a mature depiction of life that recognizes the often absurd nature of encounter in a way that avoids nihilism and calls into question the nature of social crisis. This music teaches that life can be harsh, but these crises are not always ‘unto death,’ and in some cases are quite laughable...it teaches that life is survivable and more. (2003b, 6–7)

This represents an attempt to enter into the tension at much deeper levels than a traditional theology would allow most individuals to do. As a result, what blues and jazz do, through Hip Hop, is continue the “...experimentation with black orality” which is “...the hallmark of rap, taking the themes and sensibilities housed in musical expression for centuries and giving them a postindustrial twist” (Pinn 2003a, 14). This, in turn, creates post-soul discourses in Hip Hop that help establish community, non-linear thinking, and collectivist values.

Still, for many in Black church traditions, this is all too “worldly,” “secular,” and “not of God” because it does not fit into the prescribed tradition of how a religious person’s state should be. Yet, there are contradictions when Black Christian performers and gospel artists sample Hip Hop tracks and songs, place them in their own music, and call it “Christian music.” The Hip Hop community sees this, and objects to the hypocritical condition. For instance, of Kirk Franklin,<sup>23</sup> a Black gospel artist who has on numerous occasions used Hip Hop samples and music, Christina Zanfagna states, “But in the face of current popular culture, where aesthetics often exist for their own sake, Franklin and other holy hip-hop artists are making noble attempts to align popular black

23 Franklin is among the many Black gospel artists such as CC Winans, Fred Hammond, Mary Mary, and Donnie McClurkin who use rap music and elements of Hip Hop culture in their music and fashion, yet would argue that Hip Hop is both “worldly” and “secular.”

aesthetics with relevant spiritual messages” (2006, 4). Moreover, Dyson states a poignant statement which embellishes the elements within the Hip Hop’s theology of the profane and that is, that “It is a central moral contention of Christianity that God may be disguised in the clothing—and maybe even the rap—of society’s most despised members” (2001, 209). In this disguise, Hip Hop is able to produce a relevant post-soul message of hope, aspirations to social justice, and engage with the tension between the ideal (how it is ‘supposed to be’) and the reality of life conditions. Dyson points out the post-soul context in which and with which Hip Hoppers are willing to live. This brings us to the neo-secular aspect of Hip Hop’s theological discourse that is part of the post-soul context.

### *The Neo-Secular Sacred within Hip Hop*

Within the gray and blurred areas between the sacred and the profane lies what I call the neo-secular sacred within Hip Hop. This concept is directly derived from my doctoral research on Tupac’s Gospel message and is a concept that has loosely and indirectly been discussed by scholars such as Craig Detweiler & Barry Taylor (2003), Tom Beaudoin (1998), David Dark (2002), and John Drane (2000). The concept of the neo-secular sacred comes directly out of the theology of the profane. It is the area in which the reality of life (e.g. white lies, sexuality, hate) all come together and still find theological connections with a God who can sit with the person in those tensions—not the idealized abstraction of good intentions (e.g. change this and that then God will ‘bless you’), but the day-to-day nitty-gritty of life in hostile contexts. I would contend that God, from whatever faith tradition, is able to still love and comfort the individual in this state. God is not worried about dogmatic norms nor liturgical traditions, only the heart of the individual. In this sense, it is God’s very *love* of the “sinful” nature of humanity that draws God close to the person. If there were no “sin,” there would be no love. After all, who wants a perfect person? There are moments in Hip Hoppers’ lives when they decide to engage and embrace the profane element to life and give up any sign of being pristine and “sacred.” The neo-secular sacred is exactly that—the ability to be loved in that “mess” and “funk” and to accept life as it is, yet still approach God with an “as you are” ethos rather than an attempt to “get it right” prior to engaging God. The neo-secular sacred searches for deeper meaning to life and embraces the not-so-perfect aspects to life that often seem to come up when we least expect them to. The neo-secular sacred is that fine line which exists within most people which forms the quirks, idiosyncrasies, peculiarities, oddities, “bad sides,” and rough nature to urban living. In other words, without sin, there is nothing to love; with sin, we are made to be loved by God.

Inside this theological paradigm, there is the opportunity finally to be human and be authentic with yourself and your God. The neo-secular sacred within Hip Hop has existed from its inception as both a culture and musical genre. Yet, it is better revealed as the post-soul takes shape, and in artists such as Tupac who possess contradictions in their life. Hip Hop, as we have seen, has its roots in the controversial holy profane, so it should be no surprise when Hip Hoppers embrace this element of God. For Hip Hop, the neo-secular sacred begins to answer some of the questions they have regarding pain and suffering, but, at the very least, give some hope in something beyond “this life.” It also allows for certain contradictions that humans possess—to flourish while they “work out” the details with God. Christina Zanfagna, again, states that “Hip-hop’s spirituality—its mystical allusions, contradictory images, and profaned exterior—can be ‘tricky’ and elusive to the average outsider not born or ‘baptized’ in the streets” (2006, 3).<sup>24</sup>

The neo-secular sacred within Hip Hop is, overall, about a transcendent experience and finding a transcendental force in the most obscure places of life—those obscure places just happening to be “profane.” Therefore, the neo-secular sacred concept has three major elements to it that help it take shape within Hip Hop:

1. *It has a panentheism manner:* the term panentheism (not pantheism<sup>25</sup> which is a completely different concept) (Grk. *pan*, “all,” *en*, “in,” and *theos*, “God”) was first coined by K.C.F. Krause (1781–1832) for the view that God is in all things. This particular element of the neo-secular sacred also sees the world and God as mutually dependent for their fulfillment. In other words, God needs imperfect humans to fulfill God’s ultimate *Missio Dei* (The Mission of God)—which for Hip Hoppers is largely a message of hope and peace. This means that God acknowledges the “profane” within life, yet uses it to promote that same life—because that is what is real, and the nitty-gritty. This also means that God can use anything God so chooses to use in order to broaden the message of love and peace. So, if God is in all things, then it must include the secular—or that which

24 Zanfagna further states, “It follows that rap music embodies the pluralism of current religious energies as well as the spiritual touchstones of hip-hop’s exalted predecessors, such as James Brown’s wails for black power, the ‘sexual healing’ of Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder’s prophetic preaching, the meditative bedroom lamentations of Al Green and Prince’s lyrics of erotic deliverance” (2006, 3–4).

25 Pantheism views God as all and all as God and also refers to the belief that all religions have some aspect of the truth; God is too big to be enclosed in any one religion.

is supposedly “devoid” of God—even the things that are not so pretty. This fits nicely into an omnipresent theological paradigm and sees God as a part of everything, including that which most people care not to talk about. Panentheism, therefore, begins to find God in the oddest places of them all: the murk, the mire, and the sludge of life; this is a key element to the neo-secular sacred theological concept.

2. *It sees life as having both good and bad elements to it:* in this view, life is seen as both evil and good; both are always present. Now, whether we choose to (or the “Cosmos” does) is yet to be determined when it comes to how we engage with good and evil. The neo-secular sacred theological concept simply argues that both are present in our lives and that all of us are capable of ultimate good and ultimate evil. When one begins to deny the other—whether it be the good or the bad—one essentially denies the self. The secular—which the Oxford dictionary defines as “Of or pertaining to the world”—is a constant within all of us unless we choose to remove ourselves from contemporary society. The neo-secular sacred is this: embracing the two conflicting, at times opposing, forces within life that make us all “tick.”
3. *Rejects religionism as the only form of reaching God:* Religionism is the belief and ritualistic practice of dogmatic, rigorous, religious traditions. Religionism believes that within those rituals God is found at a higher level. Religionism is “either/or,” never in between or maybe; it either is or it is not. Religionism, when practiced, produces similar outcomes for many people and while there are instances in life when religionism may produce simplistic results (albeit non-realistic), the neo-secular concept rejects it as the only way of attaining a “direct line” with God. Religionism, for many Hip Hoppers, only covers up reality and ushers in inauthentic behaviors within people. For Hip Hop, religionism explains away life, problems, hurts, hopes, dreams, systematizes God and makes God into an idolistic icon which no one can reach. Within religionism, rational answers are preferred over the ambiguous and indefinite conclusions that the neo-secular sacred concept brings. For the Hip Hopper, when religion turns systematic, rigid, and impractical, it renders itself useless and results in a drone chasing the next spiritual high.

Hip Hop has the space to open up a complex spiritual life. To this, Paul Tillich comments on religion and both its glory and perils:

Religion opens up the depth of man’s spiritual life which is usually covered by the dust of our daily life and the noise of our secular work. It gives

us the experience of the Holy, of the something which is untouchable, awe-inspiring, an ultimate meaning, the source of ultimate courage. This is the glory of what we call religion. But beside the glory lies its shame. It makes itself the ultimate and despises the secular realm. It makes its myths and doctrines, its rites and laws into ultimates and persecutes those who do not subject themselves to it. It forgets that its own existence is a result of man's tragic estrangement from his true being. It forgets its own emergency character (1959, 9).

The neo-secular sacred ultimately remembers its "emergency character" while also making room for Tillich's glory of the Holy. These two worlds coexist within most humans, causing confusion for many, denial for others, and for the very few, acceptance of who we, as humans, truly are: both fallible yet capable of great deeds.

The neo-secular sacred within Hip Hop gives much more room for individuals to expand their knowledge about God and does not constrain them within narrow religious and doctrinal boundaries. In this manner, the neo-secular sacred could possibly be a better approach to spirituality using Hip Hop as merely one of its vehicles and allowing for the yin and yang of life to flow more naturally without guilt, shame, and rules which no one can live up to.

### Further Research in Hip Hop & Spirituality

If we draw no other conclusion, Hip Hop is a complex culture. It presents a host of interdisciplinary studies that would yield great results. This book is a qualitative study, and while the narrative of voices reveals much, it leaves many questions unaddressed. Questions such as:

- What are the average number of White listeners who are spiritual or religious, that listen to Hip Hop?
- Building from the previous question, what correlations might there be between race and religion within Hip Hop culture? How might racism seep into sacred text and exegetical interpretations?
- What are the spiritual uses of rap music and Hip Hop Culture among those with PTSD?
- What is the number of Satanic Hip Hoppers and what are their socio-spiritual worldviews?
- How does Hip Hop deconstruct its problems with gender, sexual identity, and sexual orientation to better support LGBTQ groups and women?

Hip Hop studies is moving beyond lyrical analysis and into methods which include ethnomethodologies, film analysis, case studies, psychologically controlled studies, and quantitative surveys. Religion and Hip Hop needs this and the subfield is, at present, still an open door for exploration and further investigations into sexuality, race/ethnicity, class, education, and politics, all within a religious tone.

While this book has presented a theomusicological study, an ethnography would yield stronger analysis and require more time in the field with artists and Hip Hoppers alike. Further, longitudinal studies would also help the field of Hip Hop and religion. As the religious landscape of the U.S. changes, one might be interested in seeking to better understand how Hip Hop's own complexity affects that religious change and whether it offers any new insight to religion as it forms. In other words, is KRS-One's claim that Hip Hop is its own religion a valid one, or simply the idealistic thoughts of a Hip Hop legend? The study of Hip Hop and religion is in its initial stages, and the years ahead will have younger students asking stronger questions and posing new challenges.

Further, with rising Hip Hop communities in Iraq, Afghanistan, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, further research within these contexts will be needed. We have only just started to uncover the multi-facets of popular culture in Islamic nations and the power of Hip Hop in its discourse. Artists like Jasiri X are numerous in countries like the ones just listed, yet are rarely heard of in U.S. Hip Hop contexts. U.S. Hip Hop, while large, is taking a backseat to the grassroots communities located in countries like France and the United Kingdom. As more female Muslim activists arise, rap will be central to those movements and the study of those movements and rhetoric will be crucial to better understand the facets within them. There is also a growing number of scholars from Ghana, Nigeria, and Niger who are undertaking research regarding the commercialism and sexuality of Hip Hop within their context. These will be powerful studies from non-Western voices who can attest to the weaknesses and strengths of Hip Hop culture in localities around the world.

While this book had its delimitations of region, number of artists interviewed, time restraints, and budget, it still presents a study that is needed not only in the field of Hip Hop studies, but in the critical study of religion. While Hip Hop studies in general tends to be seen as jovial, non-academic, 'popular,' and without scholarly merit (although this view is changing as more work is published with academic merit), and is often overlooked and misjudged as being a passing fad, it still needs multiple voices to help shape its tone and academic weight. Much like the idea of film studies during the late 1970s and



early 1980s as being a questionable field of study, Hip Hop studies is emerging as an academic contender and I would imagine that within the next decade, majors will be constructed around this field, as it presents a multidisciplinary approach to understanding and comprehending a host of issues. Hence, this book has added a much needed voice to this field.

Additionally, in the changing climate of Higher Education, Hip Hop studies presents not just a popular field to study, but one that is practical and feasible for students where they can receive project-based pedagogy while engaging with something to which they are already listening. The socio-religious aspect of Hip Hop will further one's educational pursuits by examining the various intricacies of the profane, sacred, and secular with Hip Hop as its lens. Further, emphasis on practical knowledge and the practical application of theoretical models is made easier through Hip Hop pedagogical models which includes areas of S.T.E.M. (Emdin 2007 2008, 2015; Hill 2013; Petchauer 2012). Hip Hop Studies also contributes to the field of business, with its wide array of entrepreneurialism.

My hope is that this volume will add a richness not only to the field of Hip Hop studies, but to the ever growing sub-field of Hip Hop and religion. Emerging scholars will need to push past lyrical analysis, in the same way that film and media scholars push past plot analysis, and give breadth to the ever changing religious and social landscape of Hip Hop. Once again, this study has concerned itself with just over 8,500 songs. Its timespan is between 1987–2011, and it contains interviews from those in the Hip Hop community. It uses Spencer's theomusicological methodology as a framework of analysis. Nevertheless, the field of Hip Hop and religion remains vast and complex, and future researchers could concern themselves with studying trends, themes, and cultural memes which are spiritually and theologically infused within the Hip Hop context. KRS-One's thesis—that Hip Hop is its own religion and spirituality—has the potential for inquiry and investigation to examine the validity of his claim. The commodification of deity and social manufacturing of religion in the Hip Hop marketplace also remains open to study, along with the connections to Black Christian religion and the ever growing prosperity Gospel. Rap artists such as Mase, DMX, DMC, and Curtis Blow (who have all claimed an aspect of Black Christianity) deserve their religious and spiritual inquiry as well. This book has briefly touched on the commodification and commercialism associated with Black Christianity, which has deep roots in Hip Hop culture. More importantly, Islamic, Zulu Nation, Five Percenter, and Gnostic spiritual belief systems are an open field of study within the field of Hip Hop and religion. Converge these studies with gender performativity and that offers a formidable and new direction for the research.

Hip Hop is more than a culture and form of music; it is a lifestyle. My other hope is that this volume will aid the broader academic community in seeing Hip Hop as much more than a music culture with loud, obnoxious, misogynic males who care for nothing more than their economic and sexual glorification. While those are most definitely aspects of the culture, Hip Hop is so much more, and the hope is that this volume has helped to distinguish the complexity that is the Hip Hop culture.