

Rapping with the Gods: Hip Hop as a Force of Divinity and Continuity from the Continent to the Cosmos

by

Teresa N. Washington, Ph.D.
washingtont@gram.edu
Ann Petry Endowed Professor in English
Department of English and Foreign Languages
Grambling State University
Grambling, Louisiana

Teresa N. Washington is the author of *The Architects of Existence: Àjé in Yoruba Cosmology, Ontology, and Orature*; *Manifestations of Masculine Magnificence: Divinity in Africana Life, Lyrics, and Literature*; and *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Àjé in Africana Literature*.

Abstract

Debunking the myth that rap music was created in the Bronx, New York in the 1970s, this article traces the origins of rap music and hip hop culture to their roots in West Africa and to the ancient Wolof Gods called Raap. The Wolof Gods' impact is most apparent in the divine directive that guides rap artists who are members of the Nation of Gods and Earths, also known as Five Percenters. Not only do these artists continue the tradition of invoking the Gods with lyrical tributes, but they are also contemporary incarnations of Raap who herald themselves as Gods and who use their lyrics to reveal to other Africana peoples their inherent divinity. Despite the watery oblivion of the Middle Passage, concerted attempts at cultural genocide, and centuries of dislocation, the influence of Raap is gloriously evident in the Gods of Rap in their artistic presentation, lyrical complexity, political imperatives, and spiritual depth.

Keywords: rap, hip hop, Gods, Five Percent, Nation of Gods, African continuity

Most contemporary rap music exhibits no evidence of African continuity. References to sexual imbecility and abomination abound, as is evidenced in lyrics that brag, “I got the dumb dick,” and “My little sister’s birthday / She’ll remember me / For a gift I had ten of my boys take her virginity.”¹ Empty headed odes to vanity prevail: “On my mama / On my hood / I look fly / I look good.”² Also ubiquitous are advertisements for European fashion and beverage companies: “I like a lot of Prada, Alize, and vodka”; “. . . I look sick in my six with my Christian Lacroix”; and “Bury me inside the Gucci store.”³ One would be disinclined to associate most rappers with the sacred West African tradition of storing in the mind and sharing in song the history, culture, power, and promise of the people. However, the living libraries of West Africa did in fact give birth to rap music and hip hop culture.

The terms “rap” and “hip hop” originate in the Wolof language of West Africa. “Hep” or “hip” means to have knowledge or insight; “to open one’s eyes, to be aware of what is going on.”⁴ One could surmise that hip hoppers are individuals with knowledge of important social, cultural, and political issues that they share with the masses through the verbal artistry of rap to inspire sociopolitical evolution. The African American phenomenon called rap also boasts a Wolof root, and its meaning is central to this study. In “The Sacred and the Feminine: An African Response to Clément and Kristeva,” Molaria Ogundipe reveals that in Wolof language and culture, Raap are important and potent Gods “of the sea and waters” to whom particular hymns are sung.⁵ Just as it takes true emcees years to master the art of rap, Ogundipe reveals that “[i]t takes eleven years of apprenticeship to learn all the hymns to be sung to a *Raap*.”⁶

When one considers the two-month long journey that enslaved Africans made across the Atlantic Ocean—a body of water August Wilson called “the largest unmarked grave in the world”⁷—one could assert that the resilient Raap ensured African ancestors’ survival and encouraged their progeny to rap and thereby communicate, document, and spread knowledge of ancient and modern struggles, trials, and triumphs. Furthermore, because of the religious terrorism and ethnic cleansing that Caucasian oppressors enacted, it was not safe to give effusive praise to African Gods; indeed, such reverence often resulted in death. So the Raap switched reels, so to speak, and became rapping Gods whose lyrics serve the divine purpose of creating more raps and more Raap.

In tracing the path and proliferation of Raap through the Middle Passage to African America, it becomes clear that not only did these Wolof Gods sail and survive the high seas of a man-made hell, but they were also reborn in both African American rap music and in African Americans themselves, most notably in the Five Percenters who exert a profound influence on the hip hop nation and rap music and who consider themselves to be Gods. Having withstood the horrors of slavery, rape, lynch law, and Jim Crow, Raap were revived in the Gods of the grassroots who are truly at one with the people because they literally *are* the people. These Gods do not demand adoration, prayer, sacrifice, or obeisance; and they do not revel in self-aggrandizement. These unassuming Gods take a page from the revolutionary manual of Kwame

Ture, the call to African unity and Pan-Africanism of John Henrik Clarke, and the Africentric philosophy of Maulana Karenga. Rather than ascend to mystical and mythical heights, they commit “class suicide.”⁸ They submerge themselves in studios, gather in ciphers on street corners, pull the wisdom of the ancients from their souls, and drop science on platters to continue the work that is central to their existence, which is to use their divine creativity to create more Divinities.

The Rebirth of Raap in Rap

One of the most protracted myths about rap is that it started in New York in the 1970s. In actuality, rap—along with many other musical genres, such as the blues, rock and roll, heavy metal, funk, and jazz—is an ancient African art form.⁹ While one can find manifestations of indigenous rap throughout the Continent—from the Yoruba Odù Ifá (divination verses) to the recent example offered by Yoweri Museveni, the Head of State of Uganda¹⁰—geographically, etymologically, rhythmically, and spiritually, Raap is the mother of rap. One of the most important aspects of both rap and Raap is their tie to the Divine. Raap, also pronounced Raab, means God, and some of the most important, profound, and provocative rap is delivered by artists who are Five Percenters or Gods.

There are many analyses that discuss the origin of the Five Percent Nation and its vast cultural and musical influence, such as Wakeel Allah’s *In the Name of Allah: A History of Clarence 13X and the Five Percenters*; Michael Muhammad Knight’s *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip-Hop, and the Gods of New York*; Ted Swedenburg’s essay “Islam in the Mix: Lessons of the Five Percent”; Felicia Miyakawa’s *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop’s Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission*; The RZA’s *The Wu-Tang Manual* and *The Tao of Wu*, and *Manifestations of Masculine Magnificence: Divinity in Africana Life, Lyrics, and Literature* by the present author. With the exception of *Manifestations of Masculine Magnificence*, few studies contextualize the Five Percent Nation as part of a divine African continuum that is as old as time and as far-reaching as the cosmos.¹¹ This omission is ironic because the Five Percent is an essential aspect of that divine continuum, and it may be the continuum’s most dynamic and magnetic manifestation—the Gods certainly have the tightest theme songs.

In order to understand the impact that ancient Raap have on modern rappers and rap music, it is necessary to examine the rebirth of divinity in the Nation of Gods and Earths, also known as the Five Percent Nation, Five Percenters, and Nation of Gods.¹² The Nation of Gods has made monumental contributions to the proliferation of divinity across time, space, and musical genres. But it was not created in a vacuum; as part of the African continuum, the Nation owes its cosmological and ontological insights to a number of sources, including Wolof Raap and their divine orature; Pan-African organizations, philosophies, and philosophers, such as Sun Ra, Rastafari, and the Moorish Science Temple; and such holy tomes as the Qur’an, the Yoruba Odù Ifá, and the Bible. However, the most significant influence on the Five Percent is the Nation

of Islam whose philosophies comprise the core of the Five Percent ethos. It is important to note that Islam, the religion that threatened the veneration of Raap in Africa, took a new form in African America that facilitated the proliferation of Gods of Rap.

W. D. Fard (also known as Wallace Fard Muhammad), the founder of the Nation of Islam, and Elijah Muhammad, the organization's legendary leader, taught their followers that Africana people are divine. In the speech titled "I Want to Teach You," Muhammad avers: "*Every righteous person is a god. We are all God. When we say 'Allah' we mean every righteous person. Allah teaches me that He is a man -- not something that is other than man. The Holy Qur'an refers to Him in such pronouns as 'He' and as 'We' and as 'Us.'*"¹³ Elijah Muhammad uses such Qur'anic surah as Al-Baqarah 49–58 to buttress his assertion that Allah is a divine collective that includes contemporary Africana people. He could also have quoted from the *Bible's* Genesis 1:26, Psalms 82:6, and John 10:34 to enlighten his congregation about their numinosity. However, Muhammad's revelation on divinity is arguably more empowering than the surahs and scriptures because it asserts that, through the cultivation of righteousness, divinity can be developed and expanded infinitely. Consequently, God is not restricted to any particular culture, individual, or era: God is always present in the limitless potential of the Self.

Fard and Muhammad insisted that the only religion worthy of consideration is one rooted in fact as opposed to faith. They also stressed that the only Deity suitable for reverence is one whose existence is actual as opposed to mythical. Muhammad's 1961 "Atlanta Speech" emphasizes the connection between religious demystification and self-actualization:

God is not a mystery today; He is not something invisible. He is not a spirit. He is not something other than flesh and blood; He is in the flesh and in the blood. God is a human being! God would have no joy or pleasure in humans (us) if He himself were something other than a human being. God would have no joy or pleasure in the material universe if He Himself were other than material. . . . There is no such thing as seeing God or the devil after you die. There is no such thing as a heaven up in the sky or a hell down in the ground. All of that is fantasy, false stories made up by your slave master to further enslave you. God is a man! The devil is a man! Heaven and hell are two conditions, and both are experienced in this life right here on this earth.¹⁴

Muhammad's dismissal of mythical heavens, hells, and devils and his assertions about the inherent divinity of Africana peoples extend beyond references in organized religious texts—they find their roots in the holistic spiritual systems of the Kemites (Ancient Egyptians), Kushites, Yoruba, Dogon, Mande, and other African ethnic groups. What is more, the contention that Africana peoples are divine is an ancient one, and evidence of human divinity can be found in sacred orature and ancient monuments and temples throughout Africa. Consequently, while

Muhammad's and Fard's revelations may appear inconceivable to some, these men were actually reminding their followers of the ancient birthright and ontological reality of which slavery, racism, and natal alienation sought to rob them.

To elucidate the political, geopolitical, astronomical, and spiritual significance of Africana people, Fard and Muhammad crafted intricate scientific, historical, and philosophical lessons. Of those teachings, the most important to this study is "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2" which asserts that three types of people inhabit the world:

14. Who [are] the 85%?

ANS. The uncivilized people; poison animal eaters; slaves from mental death and power, people who do not know the Living God or their origin in this world, and they worship that they know not what --- who are easily led in the wrong direction, but hard to lead into the right direction.

15. Who [are] the 10%?

ANS. The rich; the slave-makers of the poor; who teach the poor lies --- to believe that the Almighty, True and Living God is a spook and cannot be seen by the physical eye.

Otherwise known as: The Blood-Suckers Of The Poor.

16. Who [are] the 5% in the Poor Part of the Earth?

ANS. They are the poor, righteous Teachers, who do not believe in the teachings of the 10%, and are all-wise; and know who the Living God is; and Teach that the Living God is the Son of man, the supreme being, the (black man) of Asia; and Teach Freedom, Justice and Equality to all the human family of the planet Earth.¹⁵

With "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2," Fard and Muhammad not only interpret the world in a very simple yet insightful hierarchy, but they also offer a compelling redefinition and reconceptualization of God. Rather than an invisible individual sitting on high and being glorified while he haphazardly doles out blessings and curses, the "True and Living God" is actually a multitude of poor righteous teachers who, as a result of their enlightenment, are charged with battling ten percenters and also, and more importantly, with enlightening and "civilizing" "eighty-fivers" and thereby creating even more Gods.

Similar to other religious organizations that boast pronouncements on human divinity that range from veiled intimations and bold proclamations, the Nation of Islam placed the seed of divine realization and actualization in the fecund soil of humanity but dared it to grow. Of the Nation of Islam's tens of thousands of followers, few had the courage to proclaim their divinity outright because, ironically, they would have been deemed heretics and been ostracized. However, Clarence 13X (formerly Clarence Smith) carefully applied to his life the lessons taught by Fard and Muhammad, and in 1963, Clarence 13X proclaimed and renamed himself "Allah." To paraphrase Ntozake Shange, Allah "found God in [himself],"¹⁶ and, rather than position himself as an overlord, he did something that is unimaginable and unpardonable in organized religions: he taught every Africana person he could reach that they too were Allah.

Referencing "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2," Allah, who also came to be known as Allah, the Father, acknowledged that there is a nation of Gods—five percent of the world—who only need knowledge of self to manifest their divinity. Allah expanded the catechisms of Fard and Muhammad to create relevant and all-embracing definitions of God that were designed to empower the Africana community in general and Africana men in particular. Furthermore, rather than bury it under rhetoric or in another language, Allah made recognition of inherent divinity as effortless as a greeting, "Peace, God," which is how members of the Nation of Gods greet one another. Thanks to the global influence of hip hop, this greeting has become so common that it has been truncated to "Peace, G," and, as a result, the "G" has been erroneously associated with "gangster." However, rather than a killer and destroyer, "G" signifies one who gives life and who builds—a God.

In addition to placing human types into three categories, "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2" states that it is the duty of those who are civilized to teach those who are uncivilized.¹⁷ Allah, the Father, devised a systematic methodology for enlightenment. He supplemented knowledge and recognition of inherent divinity with the academic foundation supplied by W. D. Fard's *Supreme Wisdom Lessons*, which include Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 1, Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2, Actual Facts, Solar Facts, and intricate existential problems, lessons, and riddles.¹⁸ Allah's curriculum also includes the Supreme Alphabet and the Supreme Mathematics which reveal the "alphabetical computation of the mathematical evaluation" of existence by associating certain numbers and letters with specific concepts.¹⁹ Armed with a holistic curriculum, Allah undertook his life's mission of introducing dislocated African Americans to the reality of their divinity.

Allah, the Father, was assassinated in 1969, and his murder remains unsolved.²⁰ However, his work was so successful that from his death was born a Nation of Gods, and the impact of these Divinities is most apparent in rap music and hip hop culture. Signature phrases from W. D. Fard, Elijah Muhammad, and Allah, the Father, such as "show and prove," "break it down," "right and exact," "word life," and "word" along with revelations from "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2" and the Supreme Mathematics and Alphabet, are part of the DNA of rap and, consequently, the global language and identity of hip hop.²¹ Similar to the wide dissemination and misrepresentation

of the meaning of “G,” “Sun,” which is a Five Percent term of respect and recognition for the Africana man, who is symbolized by the Sun because of his life-giving power,²² became widely used and eventually confused with the biological affiliation “son.” In Wu-Tang Clan’s “Wu-Gambinos,” Method Man makes it clear that a divine association is intended when he explains, “I call by brother Sun ’cause he shine like one.”²³

While the deeper meanings of “Sun,” “word is life,” and “right and exact,” may elude the minds of many, for others these terms serve as symbols and signposts that reveal pathways to knowledge of self. With a powerful cocktail of bad beats, tight rhymes, and knowledge of the divine self, African American rappers rebirthed Raap, and thanks to their mastery of lyricism and symbolism, rapping Raap created lyrical labyrinths that their audiences could navigate to arrive at the doorway of their divinity. The RZA asserts that “[a]bout 80 percent of hip-hop comes from the Five Percent.”²⁴ Taking seriously the duty of civilizing the uncivilized, and following the lead of the ancient Raap, Five Percenters found rap music to be the perfect vehicle for transmitting the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding necessary to keep the cycle of divinity spinning.

Conversing with the Continent

For decades, members of both the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Gods described their ethnicity as “Asiatic,” a term coined by Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the Moorish Science Temple of America.²⁵ “Asiatic” was a comforting concept to individuals who had been taught to shun associations with Africa and to be ashamed of their African identity, culture, and origin. However, in the late eighties hip hop turned to its African geographical, intellectual, and genotypical roots and found there infinite sources of political empowerment, philosophical depth, and pride. One group of hip hop Gods who held up to African Americans a mirror that reflected their true identity and depth is X Clan.

Eschewing the dubious concept of “Asiatic,” Brother J, the group’s wordsmith, proclaims his ethnicity and power to be “African,” in fact, “*very African*,” and he invites listeners to “step in Brother’s temple / See what’s happenin’.”²⁶ X Clan knows that in order for Africana peoples to understand their divinity they need to know and embrace the many African Gods who brought them into existence and who are residing inside of them and awaiting actualization. Consequently, X Clan’s songs repeatedly invoke such African Gods as Ptah, Ra, Atum, Amen, Ausar, and Aset; and the group’s Òrìṣà, or select guiding God, is Èṣù Èlẹ̀gbára, the Yoruba trickster deity. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. introduced the Western academic world to Èlẹ̀gbára with his book *The Signifying Monkey*, but Èlẹ̀gbára has long been one of Pan-Africa’s most well-known, revered, and frequently invoked Gods, and his significance is highlighted by X Clan. In

addition to invoking Ẹlégbára with samples of Haitian praisesongs and Brother J summoning the God outright—“Ẹlégbà! Meet me at the roads”²⁷— Ẹlégbára is present in the very name and the genesis of the group. The “X” of X Clan is not a reference to an unknown African identity; it represents the home of Ẹlégbára, the God who resides at the literal and metaphysical crossroads of existence.²⁸

Protected by the red, black, and green of African liberation and armed with the ankh, the Kemetic key of life and symbol of the mysteries of the universe, X Clan enlightens multitudes. Most significantly, they impart upon Blackness something deeper than mere beauty. By incorporating the tenets of the Five Percent with traditional African spiritual systems, science, and cosmology, X Clan makes it clear that the inherent divinity of Africana peoples is not an expression of neo-religious egomania but a reality that is as ancient as the African self. By embracing its African roots, X Clan does precisely what Allah, the Father, did with the teachings of Fard and Muhammad; the group builds upon and expands the lessons of its forerunners. Additionally, the charge that is arguably the most important to the Gods remains intact, for in the song “Grand Verbalizer, What Time Is It?” Brother J reveals that X Clan is ever-journeying “To the East” with the goal of “Teaching Gods to be / What it was, what it is, and again shall be.”²⁹

The members of X Clan are more than rappers; they are educators who, by “making God-music in sync with the universe,”³⁰ instruct their listeners about Pan-Africanism and African history, revolutionaries, ontology, and cosmology as well as the power of their numinosity. Taking a verse from X Clan’s lyrical scriptures and highlighting the relationship between identity and divinity, hip hop duo dead prez marries geopolitical, personal, and artistic directives in the song “I’m A African.” After making explicit both their ethnicity and identity—“I’m a African / Never was a African American”—and the fact that knowledge of self brings cultural and political awareness, dead prez inquires of its audience, “You a African? / Do you know what’s happenin?”³¹ With “I’m A African,” dead prez, in its characteristically unadorned and intense style which is described as “natty dread lock / fuck-a-cop hip hop” as well as a “socialist movement” to which one can “bounce,”³² offers a powerful example of the original purpose of hip hop—to educate, provoke, and elevate the community.

Understanding hegemony’s pull on Africana youths and the oblivion that awaits those who have been boiled in the great American melting pot, dead prez consistently educates its audience about identity politics. The aptly named M-1 of the hip hop duo conflates pride in his origin and identity with his spiritual-political imperative in the song “Psychology” as he proclaims, “Fuck what you heard, I’m from Africa / This ain’t no act, it’s mathematical.”³³ M-1 does not embrace his African identity because it may increase his record sales: his ethnicity is an indisputable *supreme mathematical* fact that signifies his divinity. Not only is M-1’s identity not alterable by time, circumstance, or dislocation, but it naturally endows him with political purpose that, far from a window-dressing for demagoguery, is “past the Black radical.”³⁴ Emphasizing

the shared sociopolitical goals of Africana freedom fighters and Gods, M-1's level of consciousness and dedication to the struggle are also evident in his name which is also his weapon of choice. He reveals that he chooses M-1 because it is a "practical" tool for his work, and utilitarianism is the cornerstone of revolutionary praxis.

Choosing the functional over the flashy is a recurrent theme of dead prez, and this philosophy extends to the group's critique of formal education and its hallowed halls. As former students of Florida A & M University, M-1 and stic.man of dead prez are aware of the fact that Western education is often anti-intellectual and routinely anti-African and is not designed to educate students about African history and contributions to world civilization, let alone reveal paths for self-actualization and manifestation of destiny. As the chorus of dead prez's "They Schools" confirms: "They schools ain't teaching us what we need to know to survive / They schools don't educate; all they teach the people is lies."³⁵ Rather than struggle to revise slave-making curricula, dead prez shares with its audience the revolutionary skills and the supreme mathematical understanding of the world that are mainstays of the syllabi of the Five Percent.

At first listen, one would be more inclined to associate dead prez with the Black Liberation Army than the Nation of Gods. But not only are the members of dead prez Gods whose tracks are God-produced and who deftly encode God-symbolism in their lyrics, but the group's messaging reveals the inherent interconnectedness and shared values of Africana movements that many have categorized as disparate.³⁶ While the necessities of physical and political combat are recurrent themes in dead prez's lyrics, the duo effectively uses its art as bullets and cudgels in the war for a complete liberation that is born of a true education.

Despite the ever-escalating cost of tuition, education is free. Public libraries, community wisdom keepers, ciphers, and consciousness-raising rap albums are some of the various educational outlets that are available to all.³⁷ Indeed, one can and should consider rap from Raap as course materials required for matriculation in the school of the Gods. The significance of education and elevation in rap is also apparent in Reflection Eternal's song "2000 Seasons" which is a dialogue between the group and Ayi Kwei Armah, the Ghanaian author of the historical novel *Two Thousand Seasons*. Talib Kweli of Reflection Eternal frames his rap with Armah's wisdom as the song begins with Kweli reading from *Two Thousand Seasons*' prologue:

For whom do we aspire to reflect our people's death? For whose entertainment shall we sing our agony? In what hopes? That the destroyers, aspiring to extinguish us, will suddenly suffer conciliatory remorse at the sight of their own fantastic success? The last imbecile to dream such dreams is dead, killed by the saviors of his dreams.³⁸

Kweli makes it clear that his song “2000 Seasons,” like its literary progenitor, will not be an exposition of how to dance in one’s chains or sing eloquently in a cage. “2000 Seasons” will promote honest self-evaluation and demand holistic evolution.

Kweli begins his rap, proper, by defining himself in veiled Five Percenter terminology: “I’m not a human being into no spiritual shit / Spiritual being manifested as a human, that’s it.”³⁹ Guided by his spiritual consciousness, Kweli informs members of his audience that the majority of them—85%, perhaps—are “volunteer slaves” in a nation that advertises itself as the leader of the free world.⁴⁰ Under the façade of blinding bling and abundant booty is the diseased, crippled, blighted reality that Africana people are stumbling and struggling in an annihilation campaign that is many millennia old. Kweli reveals that while the West’s reign of terror is fomented by the manipulation of laws, “psychologies of war,” and high technological means of destroying entire nations and ethnic groups, he places his confidence in “war tactics” like those of “Shaka Zulu” and in African science and technology.⁴¹

As evidence of the technological and architectural superiority of the African ancients and their creations, Kweli offers irrefutable proof: “The Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Pyramids of Giza? / No comparison.”⁴² Kweli reminds his audience of the permanence of the only one of the seven ancient wonders that is still in existence. Not only is the Great Pyramid the most perfectly constructed building in the world, but it is impervious to all threats including fortune-seeking thieves, 747s, earthquakes, tornadoes, *ad infinitum*. Most important, Kweli cues his listeners in to the fact that the pyramids are the product of African genius—his genius. This is important because so many Africana peoples believe the lie that they are “niggers” and the fabrication that Egypt is in Europe that they are not aware of their vast contributions to world history, architecture, and civilization.⁴³

Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* gives an unflinching account of the plight of African victims of the West and the brainwashed masses who believe the propaganda that America is “God’s Own Country.”⁴⁴ Some twenty-six years after *Two Thousand Seasons* was published, Kweli finds that the mirage-fronted quicksand about which Armah warned his audience continues to swallow Africana people whole. Kweli describes the West as undertaking a “genocide mission” that has left innumerable fathers “missing” and countless sisters “whoring.”⁴⁵

Throughout his lyrical quest to inform eighty-fivers about their ancient identity and their current misdirection, Kweli receives guidance from Armah. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah describes the desert and its inhabitants as being synonymous with disease, death, and destruction. Kweli informs his audience that the Sahara’s sands stretch across the sea to clog the brains and blind the eyes of America’s hip hop nation. Kweli finds himself rapping against the grain to an audience that is blissfully blighted and blinded by the desert’s neon mirage, an audience that is “stuck off in America freezing for like 2000 seasons.”⁴⁶

Kweli uses castigation as a tool to spark self-evaluation and liberation, as he accuses members of his audience of “raping and crossbreeding,” “deceiving and misleading,” and “causing mass confusion, drug abusing.”⁴⁷ Those who are not killed by their excesses find themselves “all caught up in institutions.”⁴⁸ Many individuals are introduced to their divinity while they are incarcerated, so Kweli’s reference to the prison industrial complex has powerful resonance: Even those who have completely defiled themselves and others can find a mirror that reflects their actual identity and their hidden divinity. No matter the level at which one currently subsists, Kweli reveals that the path out of Babylon’s dystopic abyss is knowledge of self and recognition of one’s divinity and its attendant responsibilities. Kweli closes “2000 Seasons” by informing his audience that his lyrics are not written to please the Artists and Repertoire executives of record companies or to fit a commercial formula. He uses his lyrics as literal “catch phrases” to capture, captivate, and initiate the transformation of as many people as possible.

As the Nation of Gods and the hip hop nation grew intellectually, references to the African and Divine blossomed; this is especially true of neo-soul artists who often meld poetry, rhythm and blues, and Five Percent philosophy into a heady blend. D’Angelo is one of the most well-known artists of this genre, and in *Voodoo*, his second album, there are both veiled and overt references to Five Percent wisdom. In the song “Devil’s Pie,” D’Angelo invokes “Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2” and warns, “With eighty-five dumb and blind / There can be no compromise.”⁴⁹ “Devil’s Pie” is an appropriately titled complex account of a person who has knowledge of self but is caught between embracing the “devil’s” temptations and the Gods’ obligations. When D’Angelo admits in the song, “I myself feel the high of all that I despise,” he is speaking as a victim of the snares of two thousand seasons of orchestrated destruction and depravity.

The Sahara’s blinding sandstorm may cause him, and all of us, to drift, but it will not obliterate from his consciousness D’Angelo’s knowledge of his origin, identity, and divinity. In the song “Africa” D’Angelo muses on the tragedy of being an African who is not only dislocated and “far from home” but who is also living in a land “meant for many men not my tone.”⁵⁰ Although he is geographically separated from the continent where Voodoo, philosophy, culture, mathematics, and language were born, D’Angelo recognizes that within him are the tools for eternal healing, re-membling, and numinosity, and he proclaims, “Blood of God is my defense / Let it drop down to my seed.”⁵¹ The divine blood to which D’Angelo refers is his own. Within him are abundant life-giving and life-sustaining tools that comprise the foundation of his existence and that directly support the life of his “seed,” the son to whom “Africa” is dedicated. With his divine and empowered blood, D’Angelo has the ability to protect his progeny “for all eternity.”⁵² Rather than seeking solace in a symbolic soaking in Jesus’ blood, D’Angelo agrees with the Five Percenters that “knowledge and wisdom, understanding’s what we need.”⁵³

In the song “Africa” D’Angelo reveals that his son, like D’Angelo himself, is on a curvilinear mission to heal, evolve, and elevate, and his duty is to prepare his son for the divine self-cognizance that will lead him to “remember what [he] already [knows].”⁵⁴ The pair is not only bound in their future development, but they share an ancient relationship that predates their terrestrial births. D’Angelo concludes “Africa” by telling his son, “You and my soul are one / Through all the time and history.”⁵⁵ D’Angelo uses the song “Africa” to forge an eternal cosmic bond that re-members the Continent to himself and to his son, and he uses the power of song and encoding to educate his progeny about the daunting struggle, divine inheritance, and eternal obligations that await him. Numerous Africana worldviews hold that, while they are in the spiritual realm, children select the parents that they need or want to be born to.⁵⁶ Appreciative of his son’s decision to spend his life with him, D’Angelo closes “Africa” by offering his thanks to his progeny.

Gods of Rap at War

While there are many moving Five Percent-oriented songs about love, exuberance, and grace—Erykah Badu’s “Ye Yo,” Lord Jamar’s “The Sun,” and Wu-Tang Clan’s “Sunlight” are rich examples—the majority of the Gods’ songs are replete with reminders that Africana people are at war. When one contrasts Africans’ historical accomplishments and their contributions to humanity and world civilization to their inglorious exile to foreign lands and the physical and mental slaveries to which they have been and continue to be subjected on the Continent and throughout the world, it is easy to understand the Gods’ focus on battle.

Elijah Muhammad repeatedly stressed to his congregation the importance of preparing for Armageddon. He argued that rather than fighting for America in any of its cyclically fomented wars, “the American Negro should be saving his energy and ammunition for ‘The Battle of Armageddon,’ which will be waged in the wilderness of North America. This battle—and this is one of the central teachings of the Nation of Islam—will be for freedom, justice, and equality. It will be waged to success or under death.”⁵⁷ Despite the numerous distractions in this era, the Gods stay on message, and while commercial entertainers are busy gyrating into oblivion, the Gods are oiling and loading lyrical and literal machine guns.

In Killarmy’s song “Allah Sees Everything,” Islord demands his audience wake up and realize, “We in the middle of a war zone, Black,” and the battlefield was created and is dominated by the “Caucasian man.”⁵⁸ Dismissing the Christian trinity as mere myth, Islord makes it clear that all the Africana man has is “one man,” but that individual is the true and living God who is equipped with spiritual and material weaponry. Having initiated his listeners into their Divine selves, Islord leads them to war: “With your God U Now to god you right now / Cock back with off safety one in the head / Enough said.”⁵⁹ Islord employs compelling plays on words to emphasize the Africana man’s ultimate obligation. The phrase, “God U Now” is a Supreme Alphabetical representation for the word “gun.”⁶⁰ Following his encoded call to arms,

Isord uses elision to meld the words “guard” and “god” and verbalize and make active one of the most powerful nouns in the English language.⁶¹ The phrase, “to god you right now,” is a reiteration of the fact that salvation is the responsibility of the individual, and, as such, the powers of guarding and saving are intrinsic characteristics of every Warrior God.

African history is replete with Warrior Gods. Kemet’s Ausar, the Lord of Perfect Blackness, and Ramses the Great enjoy eternal regard. The Kandake, or Divine Queen rulers, of Kush overawed Alexander of Macedonia and stunned Augustus Caesar into submission.⁶² Ògún, the Yoruba God of iron, technology, and weaponry, and Šàngó, the Yoruba God of divine retribution, are invoked on every continent. Oya is the Yoruba God of transformation who is praised as “the wife who is fiercer than the husband” and the “woman who grows a beard on account of war.”⁶³ Niger’s Saraounia Aben Soro, the Queen Who Instills Fear in the Hearts of Her Enemies, confounded French colonizers.⁶⁴ The dislocated descendants of these and countless other African Warrior Gods find themselves in foreign lands fighting wily foes.

Gil Scott-Heron reveals the nebulous nature of the war in his song “Winter in America.” He describes a terrorized and demoralized country in which “[a]ll the healers done been killed or put in jail,” but rather than rail against these injustices, the masses mill about befuddled and lost: “Ain’t nobody fighting ‘cause nobody knows what to save.”⁶⁵ Winter provides the perfect symbol for the West’s literal and figurative relationship with Africana peoples as even the climate is hostile to African existence. In Goodie Mob’s song “Black Ice (Sky High)” Andre 3000 muses, “There’s even lower levels you can go / Take Sun People put ‘em in the land of snow,”⁶⁶ and provides a poignant reminder that the concept of the “African American” is a creation born largely of forced exile. One could effectively argue that African Americans are not and cannot be fully at home in America and that living in the West constitutes a perpetual assault against the nature, humanity, and divinity of Africana peoples.

Social psychologist Wade W. Nobles describes Africana peoples as being held hostage in America and asserts that if one calculates from the mid-1700s, when it is thought that enslaved Africans were first brought to America, to the mid-1990s when Nobles was writing, “African American families have been held hostage for more than 89,000 days.”⁶⁷ Nobles offers not only a sobering tally but also a remarkably appropriate description of America’s relationship to its Africana citizens. As disturbing as Nobles’ assessment of this monumental tragedy is, the reality is more chilling. As William Loren Katz reveals in *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*, enslaved Africans first arrived in the United States of America in 1526 courtesy of an enslaver named Luis Vasquez de Ayllon.⁶⁸ With this information, the hostage crisis becomes one of 177,025 days and counting: The battle of the American Winter has been lengthy indeed.

While some individuals are blissfully oblivious to the struggle and others are too dazed to stand and defend, some warriors have amassed *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*,⁶⁹ and this title of a Killarmy album serves as a code for the covert battle being fought against Western world domination, and it reassures listeners that African Gods are eternally equipped with weaponry that protects, educates, and elevates. In the song “Dangerous Mindz,” Too Poetic of the Gravediggaz informs his audience that the oppressors who are not slain by an army of poor righteous teachers will be exterminated by the omniscient forces of justice and reciprocity: “[E]vil men will soon be on the receiving end of Universal Law.”⁷⁰ Too Poetic enjoins his listeners to recognize their divinity and responsibilities and join him in battle: “I’m callin’ on the meek and the poor / to fight back and never forfeit the day you have to go to war.”⁷¹

In his verse on “Dangerous Mindz,” The RZA invokes Nimrod to assist him in the annihilation of opponents, “[I] cause war like the grandson of Kush,” and he celebrates success in battle with a ritual that revises pagan European practices: “I’m hangin’ devils’ heads on a evergreen bush.”⁷² The RZA traces his genealogy to Nimrod, who is described in the Bible as an African hunter, warrior, ruler, and master architect who is the progeny of Kush, the African empire-builder. In addition to having knowledge of his own ancestry and divinity, The RZA is aware that holidays like Easter and Christmas have little if any tie to the Christian religion; they are holdovers of pagan Caucasian rituals. Consequently, after invoking Nimrod to facilitate the destruction of ten percenters, The RZA takes the Christmas tree back to its pagan roots, so to speak, but with a twist: He decorates the tannenbaum with the heads of vanquished ten percenters.

The cultural awareness, lyrical élan, and political depth of the Gravediggaz’s lyrics cannot be found in commercial rap. But it is interesting to note that the philosophies of the Gods can be found in various Africana cosmologies, worldviews, and artistic genres. A resounding example of shared philosophy and political directive surges in the reggae classic, “Get Up, Stand Up” by Bob Marley and Peter Tosh. The entire song constitutes an attack on the “heavenly father” myth and a demand for the listener to stop praying, fully self-actualize, and fight. In the second verse Marley chastises people who think a “Great God will come from the skies” to liberate and glorify humanity.⁷³ He urges his listeners to manifest their own divinity in their lifetimes. Peter Tosh is even more forthright when in the third verse he compares Christianity to a con game designed to obfuscate the fact that “Almighty God is a living man.”⁷⁴ Not only does Tosh make it clear that he is not fooled, but his lyrics serve as a wake-up call to his audience who may have been lulled to sleep by the lies of ten percenters and by the mewling of eighty-fivers.

“Get Up, Stand Up” is one of the most popular and respected songs in the world, and it is a song fully in accord with Five Percent philosophy. Jah Rastafari is routinely described as being either a supernatural entity or Haile Selassie, but Mutabaruka, the renowned Jamaican poet, actor, activist, philosopher, and Rasta, reveals that those associations are erroneous and the result of Christianized misinterpretations and political manipulation.⁷⁵ In an interview with Ian Boyne

on “Religious HardTalk,” Mutabaruka demystifies the concept of Jah and avers, “Man is really a divine being in earth. There is no entity outside of himself that is signaling him.”⁷⁶ Mutabaruka goes on to assert that not only does religion prevent human beings from reaching their full potential as Divinities, but also that the world would be a better place without the Bible and religion “because the search for self does not lie in a supernatural connection with any being outside of yourself.”⁷⁷

The RZA echoes Mutabaruka’s findings and argues that divisiveness and strife are inherent aspects of religion. Exhibiting his knowledge of etymology, The RZA reveals that the problem with religion originates in the word’s root, as religion “basically means to rely on something. If you’re relying on anything other than yourself you’re always gonna have a problem.”⁷⁸ To avoid being dependent on any person, place, or thing, Five Percenters stress the fact that they are not a religious organization but a way of life; that way of life is I.S.L.A.M., an acronym that can be translated through the Supreme Alphabet in a number of ways, including *I Self Lord Am Master*, *I Stimulate Life And Matter*, and *I Sincerely Love Allah’s Mathematics*. In the organic holistic worldview of the Five Percent and Mutabaruka, the very concept of religion is antithetical and opposed to divinity.

One could glean from Mutabaruka’s assertions that the most arduous and rewarding spiritual journey one will ever make will occur internally; for there, inside the infinitude of the Self, are the powers, weaponry, skills, intellect, and wisdom of the ages. Perhaps it is the case that with knowledge of one’s identity and responsibilities as an Eternal Immortal, the wars in which one is engaged take on a different character. The chorus of Wu-Tang Clan’s song “Impossible” celebrates the fact that the Gods will always be victorious: “You can never defeat the Gods / Impossible for you to defeat the Gods.”⁷⁹ Given this, one could argue that the real Battle of Armageddon, the real jihad or struggle, has more to do with the Gods’ personal and communal actualization than with physically destroying ten percenters.

Killarmy’s apocalyptic charge “Wake Up” offers a stunning exposition of earthly and cosmic battles underscored with codes as dense and layered as Dark Star Sirius B and delivered with the intensity of an AK-47. But in his verse, Hell Razah lets his listeners pause and peer into the cosmos and the future. Hell Razah describes the Gods’ unification as facilitating the ultimate revolution: “Soon as we unite the sky crack / A group of UFOs form the seven in the heavens.”⁸⁰ The divine unification Hell Razah envisions is one that is intergalactic in scope but still undergirded by the principles of the Supreme Mathematics, as the seven that is formed in the cosmos is a reference to Gods uniting across time and space. Hell Razah reveals that the unity of the Gods will, in and of itself, be sufficient to render the devil irrelevant and signal his “death day.” And devils will not die alone; eighty-fivers who refuse to manifest their divinity and wait in vain for an external savior will also be obliterated.⁸¹

Ninety-Three Million Miles Above and Beyond

Whether they follow the way of life of the Nation of Gods, Rastafari, or traditional African spiritual systems, the wordsmiths that I discuss have deep knowledge of various philosophies, spiritual systems, organized religions, and sacred texts, especially the *Bible*. In addition to being familiar with the biblical confirmations of inherent divinity in Psalms 82:6 and John 10:34, the Gods understand the important roles of Africans in Christianity and the Africanness of Jesus Christ. The ubiquitous Caucasian depictions of Jesus may confuse many, but the Gods know that they share both physical and divine attributes with Yashua ben Yoseph.

In “Dangerous Mindz” The RZA highlights the similarities between his divinity and that of Jesus. Both have hair that “grows in knotty spirals,” and The RZA confirms that his feet “resemble Christ’s description from the Bible.”⁸² While The RZA avows that he can also walk on water, his skills surpass those of Jesus. Not only is The RZA “immune to all physical torture” but because he is conversant with modern modes of mobility he can simply hop in his Porsche and drive away from his enemies.⁸³ The RZA’s divinity will not make him assume the posture of an eternal lynching victim; it leads him to the storehouse of existence and moves him to embrace the power of divine creation literally. The RZA, like the African Gods who surround him, understands the power of the penis. Rather than be neutered by religion or be raped by dogmatism, The RZA revels in the fact that his penis rises up every morning “like a Phoenix.”⁸⁴ Unlike Christ, The RZA boasts a fully functioning phallus with which he can impart sensual bliss and sexual healing while releasing the sperm that galvanizes the souls of new Gods.

The Gravediggaz’s song “Dangerous Mindz” is a study of cohesion. In his verse, Too Poetic reveals that his visage can be found “etched inside of pyramids,”⁸⁵ and this is a revelation that every person of African ancestry will have upon visiting the monuments of Kemet. In his attempt to give his audience more tools by which to comprehend his provenance and power, Too Poetic asserts that he is as “ancient as Amen.”⁸⁶ Too Poetic is not referencing the borrowed closing for a prayer but the primeval source of all, the African God Amen, whose name means “The Hidden One.”

As the seafaring Nubians and Kemites of 1600 BCE, Abubakari II and the Malian mariners of 1310 and 1311 CE, and the lyrics of the Gravediggaz and Talib Kweli make abundantly clear, Africana people are a global people. Furthermore, many Africana people understand the significance of being *cosmic* people. To risk stating the obvious, the Earth is in space, and it is part of a gargantuan galactic community. The cosmologies of the Dogon, Mande, BaKongo, Kemites, Kushites, Dagara, Yoruba, and Igbo, to name but a few African ethnic groups, offer ample evidence of a Pan-African knowledge of and relationship with the cosmos. Human beings’ interconnectedness with not just the flora and fauna of the Earth but also with the stars, nebula, and galaxies of the universe is a recurrent theme in contemporary Africana life, literature, and lyrics.

In his autobiography *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman* Malidoma Somé describes the technologies of the West African Dagara people which include suspending gravity, entering the time-space continuum, sojourning in the spiritual realm, and traveling to and conversing with the stars to obtain detailed information about one's curvilinear existence. Certain Africans are endowed or entrusted, depending upon the manner of acquisition, with such abilities because of their cosmic origins, connections, and responsibilities. Somé elaborates on the purpose of African Divinities and divine technologies:

I had heard that we usually come to Earth from other planets that are more evolved and less in need of mediation. Our errand on this planet is informed by a decision to partake in the building of the Earth's cosmic origin, and to promote awareness of our celestial identity to others who are less evolved. Our elders taught that some of the universe's inhabitants were as much in need of help as others had the need to help them. This Earth was one of many places where those who needed help could easily become recipients of it.⁸⁷

Mirroring the efforts of Africana writers to re-member themselves to their divine progenitors, hip hop artists remind Earthlings that not only that we are not alone, but also that we are not necessarily Earth-bound. When Andre 3000 raps, "Alien can blend right on in with your kin / Look again cuz I swear I spot one every now and then" and when R&B singer Kelis croons, "There is nothing special about me; I am just a little star / If it seems like I'm shining it's probably a reflection of something you already are," they are not speaking metaphorically.⁸⁸ Andre 3000 and Kelis are sharing their experiences as cosmic beings with complex earthly relationships, profound powers, and intergalactic responsibilities.

Another Raap of rap who understands his curvilinear and interstellar responsibilities and mobility is Rakim, whose full name is Rakim Allah. In "Guess Who's Back," Rakim uses the wisdom of the Supreme Mathematics to reveal that he is not only God, but he is God to the third power who was "born with three sevens in [his] head."⁸⁹ Rakim Allah's three government names—William Michael Griffin—all have seven letters. In the Supreme Mathematics, the number seven relates to the letter G because it is the seventh letter of the alphabet, and G represents God. With three highly symbolic sevens signifying his identity, Rakim Allah cannot help but manifest his divinity. Furthermore, as the bearer of magnified and compounded numinosity, Rakim Allah has wisdom that "philosophers and anthropologists / astrologists, professors from your smartest colleges / with knowledge of scholarships" cannot comprehend.⁹⁰

The meaning of Rakim Allah's divine name deepens the power of the three sevens endowed on him at birth. In an interview with Wakeel Allah, the author of *In the Name of Allah: A History of Clarence 13X and the Five Percenters*, Rakim states that the Arabic name "Rakim" means "Writer," which befits his occupation as a wordsmith; however, to him, "Rakim" is a compound construction of "Ra," the Kemetic God of the Sun, and "Kim," which signifies Kemet, the Land of the Blacks.⁹¹ The name Allah, which many Five Percenters adopt, provides a clear confirmation of both the bearer's divinity and the divine potential of humanity as the first letters of the five major extremities—*Arm, Leg, Leg, Arm, Head*—spell "Allah." With his identities signifying compounded astronomical and terrestrial divinity, Rakim Allah embraces his destiny as an immortal with eternal responsibilities.

Cognizant of his curvilinearity, Rakim Allah reveals that when his present life is over, he will be interred in Cairo with his notebook, as is befitting a "great God from Egypt."⁹² Rakim's notebook is a powerful signifying force not only because it will be the foundation of the "next Bible,"⁹³ but also because that text solidifies Rakim's cosmic continuity. The Gods of Kemet were interred with scrolls and scriptures that are similar to the rhymes in Rakim's notebook. Caucasian Egyptologists termed these texts "books of the dead," and this mistranslation reveals the inability of Westerners to comprehend the principles of African divinity and immortality.⁹⁴ The dead have no need for books: The Kemites were interred with the Books of the Coming Forth By Day.⁹⁵ These scrolls, incantations, and inscriptions ensure the immortality of the soul through time and space. With his notebook as his vehicle of celestial projection, Rakim Allah will enter the galactic womb, "align with the stars," and be eternally reborn so that he can continue disseminating soul-power as he "bless[es] the mic."⁹⁶

Rakim's lyrical musings on his cyclic numescence find a complement in Zora Neale Hurston's humble revelations on her immortality and numinosity. In a chapter titled "Religion," that is included in her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Hurston dismisses myths of heaven and death and finds strength in science:

Somebody else may have my rapturous glance at the archangels. The springing of the yellow line of morning out of the misty deep dawn is glory enough for me. I know that nothing is destructible; things merely change form. When the consciousness we know as life ceases, I know that I shall still be part and parcel of the world. I was a part before the sun rolled into shape and burst forth in the glory of change. I was, when the earth was hurled out from its fiery rim. I shall return with the earth to Father Sun, and still exist in substance when the sun has lost its fire, and disintegrated in infinity to perhaps become a part of the whirling rubble of space. Why fear? The stuff of my being is matter, ever changing, ever moving, but never lost; so what need of denominations and creeds to deny myself the comfort of all my fellow men? The wide belt of the universe has no need for finger-rings. I am one with the infinite and need no other assurance.⁹⁷

In her meditation on the sublimity of existence, Hurston reveals herself to be the embodiment of Life. She has no fear of death because in the Africana worldview there is no death, and this fact is also articulated in Western science through two of its most elementary principles: the first law of thermodynamics and the law of conservation of mass. Relying, like the Five Percent, on “actual facts,” science, and mathematics, Hurston is not moved by propagandized images of angels, and she eschews prayer because she is equipped with the skills to manifest her destiny—or, to be plain, she is the answer to her prayers. In full possession of what Toni Morrison refers to as “ancient properties,”⁹⁸ Hurston was enjoying her immortality long before her body took its last breath.

Jazz legend Sun Ra, whose broadsides and philosophies alternately inspired and were inspired by the Nation of Islam, understood all too well his astronomical nature.⁹⁹ Hurston, not unlike Sun Ra, anticipates a dazzling reunion with the Sun of her origins while respecting her infinite bond with the Earth. The Five Percent also revere their cosmic sources of self. In cognizance of their role in fomenting life, the Gods refer to themselves as Suns and as Suns of Man.¹⁰⁰ In the song “The Sun,” Lord Jamar sings a praisesong to his celestial self: “Just look at me shining as I rise in the East / I welcome you with the universal greeting of ‘Peace.’”¹⁰¹ Although he warns his audience, “Don’t look directly at me / My light is too intense,” if Lord Jamar’s listeners have difficulty comprehending his relationship to the Sun and the Sun’s relationship to the Earth, he spells it out—“G – O – D”—repeatedly in the song’s chorus.¹⁰²

While male Gods extol their solar supremacy, the Earth is the body often associated with women of the Nation because it rotates around the Sun in a manner that some Gods describe as subordinate. For example, in the Gravediggaz’s song “The Night the Earth Cried,” Gatekeeper juxtaposes his astronomical superiority to female inferiority when he chants, “I’m God: Control nine planets / Wisdom revolves around me; understand it.”¹⁰³ While female Five Percenters are honored as “Wisdoms” and as “Earths,” some Gods feel the need to delimit the sphere of Wisdom’s influence and to diminish Earth’s revolutionary significance. However, without the Earth, life as we know it and the rays of the Sun are irrelevant. Furthermore, Woman is the architect of all human existence—including that of Man. In cognizance of the centrality of women to life and numinosity, many male and female Gods refuse to allow the disease of gender bias that has contaminated organized religions to infect their spheres.

Mary Ann Vieira, the female emcee of Digable Planets, adopts a powerful name to describe her divinity: As “Mecca” she is Islam’s holiest city, and it is to her that Muslims orient themselves and prostrate in prayer. In Digable Planets’ song “9th Wonder,” Mecca reveals the astronomical complement to her terrestrial icon, and, in doing so, she shows and proves that her divinity is a supreme mathematical reality: “Now you see that I’m 68 inches above sea level / 93 million miles above these devils.”¹⁰⁴ Mecca stands five feet eight inches tall physically, but astronomically she is the Sun, which is 93 million miles from the Earth. Boasting in the core of her being innate life-giving powers that are as essential as those of the Sun, Mecca claims her rightful identity as a God whose brilliance is equal to, if not greater than, that of any male.

Erykah Badu's appeal for gender balance among the Gods in the song "On and On" is achieved with understated pronoun use and a logical suggestion: "If we were made in his image / Then call us by our names."¹⁰⁵ There is neither room nor need for gender oppression and hierarchies among the Divine, especially not when women are born, like Badu, with "three dollars and six dimes," which signifies 360 degrees, the sum total of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in the world, according to Five Percent philosophy.¹⁰⁶ The repository of women's amalgamated celestial and terrestrial power—the bank of her immeasurable riches—is also the source of all human existence—the womb.

In the song "Ye Yo" Badu elucidates the numinosity of the female anatomy and uses the dynamism of her divinity and humanity to inform Seven Sirius, her appropriately named Sun/son, that she alone has the power to provide him with eternal protection, perfection, and immortality: "The Sun's in the East and the moon reflects / Like the knowledge and wisdom I manifest."¹⁰⁷ With the compounded power of the Sun and Moon resonating in her being, the mother instructs her son: "If you want to go to heaven lay up on my breast / I'm Ye Yo; your Ye Yo."¹⁰⁸ Badu artfully interweaves celestial facts and Five Percent wisdom with neo-Yoruba linguistics for "Ye Yo" is a "Baduazation" of the Yoruba word "Yèyé," which means "Good Mother." With this song, Badu and Seven Sirius become both living manifestations of astronomical forces and the embodiments of divine knowledge and wisdom.

The Sun and the Earth are the celestial symbols most often heralded in Five Percenter lyrics, but the Gods' association with astronomy goes beyond our solar system and extends into infinite ellipse of the cosmos. In the song "Deep Space," Lord Jamar invites his listeners to join him on a trip to the "seventh dimension," the realm of the Gods, where he will ascend "like Christ on the third day."¹⁰⁹ Unlike Jesus, however, Lord Jamar will not disappear into the imagined domain of an amorphous entity. Lord Jamar enters the seventh dimension to reconnect with his cosmic forebears so that he can share their celestial wisdom with his terrestrial audience.

Confessing that "the Milky Way can't satisfy [his] sweet tooth," Lord Jamar counts among his kin "a constellation of stars," and he mocks scientists who can only observe galaxies "from afar" on Earth.¹¹⁰ Lord Jamar continues his role as intergalactic tour guide in "Deep Space" so that he can lead his audience to the threshold of a fundamental truth: "Let's take a trip through the galaxy / Mystery god is a fallacy."¹¹¹ Astronomers, satellites, and space probes have yet to find a gigantic Caucasian man with billowing hair scanning the cosmos and answering some prayers and ignoring others. Like Marley and Tosh before him, Lord Jamar encourages his audience to cease the search for a myth and embrace their actual and factual divinity as does he.

May Raap Bless You

Whether it is afforded respectful recognition or not, the Five Percent Nation is one of the world's most important artistic, spiritual, social, and political institutions. Unlike the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, the revolution fomented by the Gods is a perpetual one. Rather than place all hope in a leader only to suffer discombobulation and disintegration when that leader is assassinated or expires, the Gods each constitute his own leader, her own God. What is more, the Gods' reciprocal obligation to civilize and enlighten others ensures the birth of new divine leaders—through wisdom if not the womb—everyday.

Lil Wayne, 2 Chainz, and Nikki Minaj may be some of the most recognizable names in hip hop—at the moment—but the Wolof Raap are reincarnated in artists like Killarmy, Mecca, The RZA, Sun Ra, Mutabaruka, and Erykah Badu. The reason that these artists and their songs do not often receive the recognition and rotation of others is because they stand in opposition to the commercialism, hyper-sexuality, racism, and dismemberment that the West glorifies. In a society that strives to convince its inhabitants to “forget where you came from and dance,”¹¹² the Gods create art that educates listeners about their true identity, their infinite powers, and their soul-deep responsibilities.

The Wolof Raap did indeed survive the horrors of the Middle Passage, and upon every shore that their waters caress, Gods of Rap spring forth. The ancient and sacred praisesongs of the Deities are reborn as underground hits that educate the masses, spark recognition of divine identity, and illuminate the path of evolution. The contemporary Gods, like their forebears, are courageous and formidable. They reveal biting and often frightening truths without fear of reprisals—for what would God fear? Undaunted, unashamed, and under-appreciated, Gods rise from the same waters that nurtured their ancestors and chant celestial promises to the unborn. Thanks to rapping Raap, the umbilical cord that connects Africana peoples with their inherent divinity pulsates with deific beats, and throbs with numinous rhymes. Just listen.

Notes

¹ Level featuring Mz. Trill, “Dumb Dick,” *Street Credit 2: Disorderly Conduct (The Mixtape)* (Easy Hustle Entertainment, 2010); and Eminem featuring Bizarre, “Amityville,” *The Marshall Mathers LP* (Interscope, 2000).

² Charlie Boy, “I Look Good,” (Dirty 3rd Records, 2009).

³ Jay Z, “Can I Get A...” *Vol. 2, Hard Knock Life* (Roc-a-Fella, 1998); Lil Kim, “Crush on You,” *Explicit* (Big Beat/Wea, 1996); and 2 Chainz, “Birthday Song,” *Based on a T.R.U. Story* (Island/Def Jam, 2012).

⁴ Joseph Holloway and Winifred K. Vas, *The African Heritage of American English* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 142.

⁵ Molara Ogundipe, “The Sacred and the Feminine: An African Response to Clément and Kristeva,” in *The Sacred and the Feminine: Imagination and Sexual Difference*, edited by Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey-Sauron, (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 95.

⁶ Ogundipe, “The Sacred and the Feminine,” 96.

⁷ August Wilson, “Preface,” *King Hedley II* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000), x.

⁸ Maulana Karenga, “The African Intellectual and the Problem of Class Suicide: Ideological and Political Dimensions,” in *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, edited by Molefi K. Asante and Kariam W. Asante (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1985), 92–93.

⁹ The blues was born in the same region of Africa as rap. For a resonant revelation of the African origins of the blues see *The Blues: Feel Like Going Home*, directed by Martin Scorsese (PBS, 2003). Also read Robert Farris Thompson’s discussion in *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage, 1983), 104. For information on the development of rock and roll and heavy metal from the blues, see “Can’t You Hear the Wind Howl?” *The Life and Music of Robert Johnson*, directed by Peter Meyer, narrated by Danny Glover (Winstar, 1998), and listen to Jimi Hendrix!

¹⁰ In 2010 President Museveni dazzled his constituents and the world when he offered a freestyle rap to show that the genre has deep East African roots. For Museveni’s original rap: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3fSwwPARqo&NR=1> accessed 24 October 2012. For the remix: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BjOHc_R0PA accessed 24 October 2012.

¹¹ My attempts to elucidate the Five Percent's position in the continuum of inherent Africana Divinity include this article which is a condensation of issues upon which I elaborate in my book *Manifestations of Masculine Magnificence: Divinity in Africana Life, Lyrics, and Literature* (Orifin, Ilé Àjé: Oya's Tornado, 2014).

¹² "Nation of Gods" is the phrase that I coined and prefer to use because it positions males and females equally as Gods: No sexist language, no hierarchy, just Gods. See Washington, *Manifestations of Masculine Magnificence*, 127–128.

¹³ Elijah Muhammad, "I Want To Teach You," *The Final Call Online* 20 March 2014 http://www.finalcall.com/columns/hem/teach_you.htm accessed 10 August 2011. Capitalization is retained from the original.

¹⁴ Quoted in Louis E. Lomax, *When the Word is Given. . .* (New York: Signet, 1963), 108–109.

¹⁵ W. D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad, "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2," *The Nation of Islam* 20 February 1934 <<http://www.thenationofislam.org/muslimlesstwo.html>> accessed 19 December 2007.

¹⁶ Ntozake Shange, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem*, in *Totem Voices: Plays from the Black World Repertory*, edited by Paul Carter Harrison (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 274.

¹⁷ Fard and Muhammad, "Lost-Found Muslim Lesson No. 2."

¹⁸ Master Fard Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom Lessons, The Nation of Islam* <<http://www.thenationofislam.org/supremewisdom.html>> accessed 30 October 2012. See also Wakeel Allah, *In the Name of Allah: A History of Clarence 13X and the Five Percenters* (Atlanta: A-Team Publishing, 2007), 152–154.

¹⁹ Michael Muhammad Knight, *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip Hop and the Gods of New York* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 49–64.

²⁰ Allah, *In the Name of Allah*, 278–292.

²¹ The RZA, *The Wu-Tang Manual* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 43 and Allah, *In the Name of Allah*, 315–317.

-
- ²² Allah, *In the Name of Allah*, 141.
- ²³ Wu-Tang Clan, “Wu-Gambinos,” *Wu-Chronicles* (Priority, 1999).
- ²⁴ The RZA, *The Wu-Tang Manual*, 43.
- ²⁵ “Moorish Science Temple of America, Inc.” *Moorish Science Temple of America, Inc.* 30 August 2008 <http://www.moorishsciencetempleofamericainc.com/MoorishHistory.html> accessed 6 May 2012.
- ²⁶ X Clan, “Grand Verbalizer, What Time Is It?” *To the East Blackwards* (4th and Broadway, 1990).
- ²⁷ X Clan, “Tribal Jam,” *To the East Blackwards* (4th and Broadway, 1990).
- ²⁸ Davey D, “Interview with Brother J of X-Clan,” *Davey D’s Hip Hop Corner: Anti Thug* <<http://www.daveyd.com/interviewbrotherj.html>> accessed 10 August 2011.
- ²⁹ X Clan, “Grand Verbalizer, What Time Is It?”
- ³⁰ X Clan, “Tribal Jam.”
- ³¹ Dead Prez, “I’m A African,” *Let’s Get Free* (Relativity, 2000).
- ³² Dead Prez, “I’m A African.”
- ³³ Dead Prez, “Psychology,” *Let’s Get Free* (Relativity, 2000).
- ³⁴ Dead Prez, “Psychology.”
- ³⁵ Dead Prez, “They Schools,” *Let’s Get Free* (Relativity, 2000).
- ³⁶ Mat Caputo, “dead prez: Let’s Get Free 10th Anniversary Feature,” *Hip Hop DX* 30 July 2010 <<http://www.hiphopdx.com/index/interviews/id.1575/title.dead-prez-lets-get-free-10th-anniversary-feature>> accessed 12 August 2011.

³⁷ Music can be heard for free from various internet sites like YouTube, which may also include videos. One can listen to and learn from the music while one saves the money to *purchase the music and support the artists*. It is also possible to buy individual songs for under a dollar and get one's divine artistic fix while respecting the vessel of artistry!

³⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: Heinemann, 1973), xiii.

³⁹ Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons," *Fortified Life/2000 Seasons* (Rawkus/UMGD, 2002).

⁴⁰ Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons."

⁴¹ Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons."

⁴² Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons."

⁴³ While shopping at a home improvement store 31 March 2010 I had a discussion with an African American woman about fifty years of age who revealed, "I've been to Egypt but not to Africa." Shocked that there were still people who did not know that Egypt is in Africa—including people who had visited the Continent—I launched into a mini history/geography lesson about not only where Egypt is but also about the Africans who created it and where they are now.

⁴⁴ While I was a doctoral student at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria, a huge banner that was flown on the "white house" building that housed the electronics department read, "America: God's Own Country."

⁴⁵ Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons."

⁴⁶ Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons."

⁴⁷ Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons."

⁴⁸ Reflection Eternal, "2000 Seasons."

⁴⁹ D'Angelo, "Devil's Pie," *Voodoo* (Virgin, 2000).

⁵⁰ D'Angelo, "Africa," *Voodoo* (Virgin, 2000).

⁵¹ D'Angelo, "Africa."

⁵² D'Angelo, "Africa."

⁵³ D'Angelo, "Africa."

⁵⁴ D'Angelo, "Africa."

⁵⁵ D'Angelo, "Africa."

⁵⁶ See Washington, *Manifestations of Masculine Magnificence*, 30.

⁵⁷ Lomax, *When the Word is Given*, 48.

⁵⁸ Killarmy, "Allah Sees Everything," *Dirty Weaponry* (Priority, 1998).

⁵⁹ Killarmy, "Allah Sees Everything."

⁶⁰ Knight, *The Five Percenters*, 150.

⁶¹ See also Sun Ra, *The Wisdom of Sun Ra*, compiled by John Corbett (Chicago: White Walls, 2006), 125.

⁶² Jeremiah Wright, *Africans Who Shaped Our Faith* (Chicago: Urban Ministries, 1995), 272.

⁶³ William Bascom, *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 459; and John Mason, *Orin Òrìṣà: Songs for Selected Heads* (New York: Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1992), 314.

⁶⁴ Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts*: 58.

⁶⁵ Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson, "Winter in America," *Winter in America* (1974; reissue, Tvt, 1998).

⁶⁶ Goodie Mob, "Black Ice (Sky High)," *Still Standing* (LaFace, 1998).

⁶⁷ Wade W. Nobles, "African American Family Life: An Instrument of Culture," in *Black Families*, edited by Harriette Pipes McAdoo, 3rd edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), 85.

⁶⁸ William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (New York: Atheneum, 1997), 22.

⁶⁹ See Gregory Allan, “Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars: *An Introduction Programming Manual, The Lawful Path* <<http://www.lawfulpath.com/ref/sw4qw/>> accessed 18 August 2011.

⁷⁰ Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz,” *Wu-Chronicles: Chapter II* (Wu-Tang Records, 2001).

⁷¹ Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz.

⁷² Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz.

⁷³ Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, “Get Up, Stand Up,” *Legend: The Best of Bob Marley and the Wailers* (1973; Def Jam, 2001).

⁷⁴ Marley and Tosh, “Get Up Stand Up.”

⁷⁵ Mutabaruka, “Mutabaruka on Religious HardTalk,” part 2 of 11, *YouTube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzZYAZ3ngKk&NR=1> accessed 12 August 2011.

⁷⁶ Mutabaruka, “Mutabaruka on Religious HardTalk,” part 1 of 11, *YouTube* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdAXGmYRSIY> accessed 12 August 2011.

⁷⁷ Mutabaruka, “Mutabaruka on Religious HardTalk,” part 2 of 11, *YouTube*

⁷⁸ Ismael AbduSalaam, “The RZA: Do the Knowledge (*Tao of Wu*),” Part 1, *All Hip Hop* 15 October 15, 2009 <http://allhiphop.com/stories/reviewsbooks/archive/2009/10/15/21979105.aspx> accessed 16 August 2011. See also “religion” and its relationship to “rely,” in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, third edition, edited by Anne H. Soukhanov, et al. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992), 1525.

⁷⁹ Wu-Tang Clan, “Impossible,” *Wu-Tang Forever* (Relativity, 1999).

⁸⁰ Killarmy featuring Sunz of Man, “Wake Up,” *Wu-Chronicles* (Priority, 1999).

⁸¹ Killarmy featuring Sunz of Man, “Wake Up.”

⁸² Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz,” *Wu-Chronicles: Chapter II* (Wu-Tang Records, 2001).

⁸³ Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz.”

⁸⁴ Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz.”

⁸⁵ Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz.”

⁸⁶ Gravediggaz, “Dangerous Mindz.”

⁸⁷ Malidoma Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 232–233.

⁸⁸ OutKast, “Aquemini,” *Aquemini* (La Face, 1998); and Kelis, “Lil Star,” *Kelis Was Here* (La Face, 2006).

⁸⁹ Rakim, “Guess Who’s Back,” *The 18th Letter* (Universal, 1997).

⁹⁰ Rakim, “Guess Who’s Back.”

⁹¹ Wakeel Allah, “It’s Been A Long Time: Interview with Rakim Allah,” *The A Team’s Blog: My Space* 23 January 2007 <http://www.myspace.com/allahteam/blog/221128665> accessed 20 October 2012.

⁹² Rakim, “Guess Who’s Back.”

⁹³ Rakim, “Guess Who’s Back.”

⁹⁴ Anthony T. Browder, *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization: Exploding the Myths*, volume 1 (Washington, D. C.: The Institute of Karmic Guidance, 1992), 87.

⁹⁵ Browder, *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization*, 87.

⁹⁶ Rakim, “Guess Who’s Back.”

⁹⁷ Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1996; reprint, New York: Harper Perennial, 1942), 226.

⁹⁸ Toni Morrison, *Tar Baby* (1981; reprint, New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1987), 305.

-
- ⁹⁹ Sun Ra, *The Wisdom of Sun Ra*, 5.
- ¹⁰⁰ Sun Ra, *The Wisdom of Sun Ra*, 5.
- ¹⁰¹ Lord Jamar, "The Sun," *Deep Space/The Corner, The Streets* (Babygrande, 2006).
- ¹⁰² Lord Jamar, "The Sun."
- ¹⁰³ Gravediggaz, "The Night The Earth Cried," *The Pick, The Sickle, and the Shovel* (BMG Records, 1997).
- ¹⁰⁴ Digable Planets, "9th Wonder," *Blowout Comb* (Capitol, 1994).
- ¹⁰⁵ Erykah Badu, "On and On," *Baduizm* (Kedar/Universal Labels, 1997).
- ¹⁰⁶ Erykah Badu, "On and On."
- ¹⁰⁷ Erykah Badu, "Ye Yo," *Live* (Umvd Labels, 1997).
- ¹⁰⁸ Erykah Badu, "Ye Yo."
- ¹⁰⁹ Lord Jamar, "Deep Space," *The 5% Album* (Babygrande, 2006).
- ¹¹⁰ Lord Jamar, "Deep Space."
- ¹¹¹ Lord Jamar, "Deep Space."
- ¹¹² Me'Shell NdegeOcello, "Shoot'n Up and Gett'n High," *Plantation Lullabies* (Maverick, 1993).