

Abstract:

Carl Petter Opsahl, *Dance To My Ministry: Exploring Hip-Hop Spirituality*.

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Hip-hop is a deeply spiritual culture, a culture that since its formation has given young people all over the world a sense of place, being and direction in their lives, knowledge of self and knowledge of heritage and culture. By examining a number of rap tunes and graffiti walls, mostly from New York, this thesis sets out to explore different spiritualities and religious traditions informing hip-hop culture. It is not aiming for definitive, closed interpretations. Rather it sets out to open up, unlock interpretational *possibilities* in an intertextual exploration of samples, quotes and visual references drawn from hip-hop culture, African American heritage and sacred texts, as well as advertisements and commercial television.

The work is structured in three parts. Part I consists of three introductory chapters. The first chapter outlines a conceptual framework, developing an understanding of spirituality rooted in a context of contest, oppression and struggle. As a spirituality of survival and resistance, rooted in experience, hip-hop spirituality needs to be contextualized within the oppressive forces shaping it, such as race, gender, class, sexuality and age. Hip-hop spirituality is also understood as a *hybrid* spirituality, contextualized in a situation of struggle and political opposition, creating "a third space" between binary oppositions. Following is a chapter providing a basic introduction to hip-hop culture as it emerged in New York from the late 1960s, emphasizing aesthetic characteristics of the culture's four "core" elements: graffiti, breaking, dj-ing and rap. Also, the spirituality of Afrika Bambaataa's Universal Zulu Nation and KRS One's Temple of Hip-hop is outlined. Concluding Part I is a chapter on Nation of Islam and Nation of Gods and Earths, two religious movements that have been influential in hip-hop culture. They are contextualized in a broader perspective of Islam in USA and black nationalism and basic tenets of their theologies are outlined.

Part II begins with a chapter on graffiti, studying works by artists such as DEZ, Tracy 168, Too Fly, Queen Andrea YMI Crew and TATS CRU. The walls reflect cultural heritage and spirituality rooted in African American, Mexican and Puerto Rican tradition, as well as celebrating hip-hop. There is also a section on memorial graffiti, including a number of pieces memorializing the terror attacks on September 11, 2001. These pieces are explored in the context of spontaneous shrines, as they memorialize the dead not in faraway cemeteries but in the heart of social life. Then follows a chapter on rap and Christianity, beginning with a study on the works by Lauryn Hill and 2Pac. Lauryn Hill's work is steeped in Biblical imagery, while formulating a highly original and uplifting spirituality. In his quest for a Black Jesus, 2Pac combines elements of black theology, black nationalist thinking and gangster imagery. There is also a section on Christian rap and Hip-hop EMass, combining hip-hop and Christian liturgy. Rappers inspired by Nation of Islam and Nation of Gods is the subject of the last chapter of Part II, exploring the work of such artists as Public Enemy, Brand Nubian, Wu-Tang Clan and Erykah Badu. Using interpretative tools such as the "Supreme

Mathematics" and "Supreme Alphabet" of Nation of Gods and Earths, artists embed coded meanings in their songs. The chapter concludes with a section on Mos Def, representing mainstream Islam.

Part III consists of only one chapter, employing the metaphor of "remix" as it engages with material sampled from Part II. Making a distinction between *spiritualities in hip-hop* and *hip-hop spirituality*, the first term applies to the many different spiritual traditions reflected in hip-hop culture while the latter designates a spirituality informed by hip-hop, exploring the ways in which the elements of hip-hop are able to influence or even transform one's spirituality. The thesis ends on a playful, experimental note, sifting the Christian dogma of the Trinity through Afrika Bambaataa's concept of "peace, unity, love, and having fun." Having fun is integral to hip-hop spirituality – it is also a much overlooked category in theological thinking and liturgy. Fun is feared by fundamentalists of all categories, political and religious alike, who deem fun as sin, *haram*, counter-productive. Having fun is God-given. It manifests itself in play and dance, a dance not only of the Trinity, but actual physical dance of the created world. Having fun reflects a spirituality of survival, as evidenced by the emergence of hip-hop in bleak urban settings. Having fun is a call to community.