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Title: Perceptions of Islamic-Influenced Hip-Hop by White, Non-Muslim Students

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Abstract: I would like to research how listeners to Islamic-affiliated hip-hop groups, such as Wu-Tang Clan, Paris, Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, and Native Deen, perceive the messages and lyrics being presented to them. I would like to look into how both religion and race play into these perceptions, and I plan on focusing on white non-Muslims on the U of I campus. With religion, I hope to evoke responses about how these non-Muslim students perceive the Nation of Islam, orthodox Islam, and the Five-Percent Nation and their reactions to the fact that so many of these top-selling hip-hop artists are members of these religions. With race, in particular, I'd like to focus on the perception of the dominant white majority culture on non-white minority culture through these interviews. I would like to use different methods in the interviews to evoke responses, such as having the interviewee listen to a selected hip-hop track with the lyrics, following along (to help with clarity) and then see what they thought it meant, and any changes in perceptions if they had listened to the song before and had some preconceptions about it. With this research, I think I would be able to come to conclusions about how these groups are perceived by U of I students of white, non-Muslim backgrounds.

Question: Do white, non-Muslim students on the University of Illinois campus comprehend or pick up the Islamic overtones in many of the songs of top-selling hip-hop artists, and how do they perceive the messages of these songs?

Data (Field Notes): How old are you and how would you describe your cultural and ethnic background?

M: 20, white, male, grew up in a really rich and pompous neighborhood, mostly other white kids. Not very ethnically diverse

A: 19, white, raised non-denominational Christian, but non-religious. My community wasn't diverse, but middle and high

school was very diverse and from lower classes.

G: 20, white, male suburbanite, very wealthy neighborhood and mostly undiverse neighborhood.

P: 20, ethnically I'm pretty white, raised in the suburbs... Culturally, pretty much the same... Hippy parents, very "peace and love" and shit like that. The community I grew up in, in terms of school, was pretty much ethnically white, just one black kid in the entire neighborhood, but he was adopted by white people. Only black kid I knew growing up. But the church my parents brought me to was pretty diverse, some Asians, only asian friends ever as a kid... very open to gays, and that kind of stuff, there was a transsexual there which was interesting for a child to see. Religiously, I'm an atheist, but I was raised Unitarian... which isn't really a religion either, it was really spiritual and all about that so I didn't really like it, I stopped going around 13 or something, didn't get anything out of it.

How would you describe you and your family's class status?

M: Upper class.

A: Middle class.

G: Upper-middle or upper.

P: I don't know, lower-middle class, probably.

What do you know about the religion of Islam?

M: Is that the "Allah" religion? Middle-eastern sort of deal. I know about the Torah... err the Koran, I think. I know there's a lot of places fighting because of it.

A: Aren't there like 2 sects? One is related to like Muhammad's brother, and the other is his husband?

G: The Prophet Muhammad wrote the Koran, the values are mostly: there's only one God and Muhammad is his Prophet, there's the five pillars: they have to pray 5 times a day, make the trek to Mecca; Mecca's their holiest place... the Dome of the Rock. I know there's a militant faction. They're requiring holy *jihad*... I know they were mostly considered a religion of peace,

but now its been subverted. Jerusalem is the holiest place for 3 different religions, so it creates a lot of conflicts. I know one of the sects believes in the power of the religion going through family lines, and the other in some other way, I can't remember which one's which.

P: They bombed us! No... (laughter) The religion of Islam has 5 Pillars of something... and last time I studied Islam was freshman year of highschool or something... Some Islamic cultures cover up the women... They have two... Muslims are people who practice Islam, right? I know they pray a lot during the day, face towards Mecca... there are certain things about men and facial hair... My friend is pretty hardcore Islam, so I'm trying to think of all the things he does... Don't wear shoes inside the church, and you kneel. I went to an Islam church once, it was a long time ago.

How do you feel about American–Middle Eastern relations in today's day and age?

P: They're pretty crummy. Because I lot of intolerance, not even trying to understand each other, at all. I don't think things will get better, until... well, they have a lot of peace talks and stuff, but the majority of people in the government, even if they aren't the most visible, have no real interest in trying to understand what's going on over there... like really their motivations, and our motivations, even. So until more people make efforts to do that, nothing's going to change...

Would you say you listen to a lot of hip-hop, or how much would you say that you listen to? When did you start, and what were some of the bands you first started with?

M: A medium amount. I started freshman year of college. The first band would be Jurassic 5.

A: A lot I guess. I started in middle school, and I don't know... whatever was on B96. Maybe Outkast, "Sorry Miss Jackson," you know... B96.

G: I'd say a little bit. I started probably freshman year of college. 50 Cent, Q-Unit, mostly. Aesop Rock.

P: Umm... I don't listen to a lot. There's only like 2 I listen to, and only one of them is currently on my mp3 player, and I listen to

them prevalently. But I'm familiar with other stuff, I've been to 2 hip-hop concerts... The Ying Yang twins, and Tech N9ne... It was pretty weird... I don't really enjoy the concerts that much, like I can't get into it. Like I enjoy maybe listening on my own. I haven't listened to hip-hop for very long, I really hated what was on the radio, mostly... that pissed me off. But I didn't start 'til about last year, I'd say. Started listening to Jurassic 5... but I've never really ran with it and said, "I love this so much."

What do you listen to often, now?

M: Lupe Fiasco, Jurassic 5, Atmosphere, I don't know... I can't think of much else.

A: Atmosphere, Lupe, TI, Kanye, Thalib, I guess. Lil Wayne, Ludakris.

G: Aesop Rock, the Flobots... gangster rap mostly.

P: RJD2... Jurassic 5... I've listened to some Snoop Dogg songs, but I don't think of him as a really good artist... The fact that he makes up words to rhyme, maybe it sounds cool, but he isn't doing anything creative... there's not challenge to writing lyrics like that.

What turned you on to hip-hop? Did you get introduced by friends, or did you start listening by yourself and introduce your friends to it?

M: Probably friends...

A: Pretty much what was on the radio, like the popular music.

G: The internet.

P: My good friend, yeah.

Have you ever heard of the Nation of Islam? What do you know about it?

M: Yes? I guess I've just heard the name... Is it a religion? I'm confused... Oh yeah, maybe the famous group of black people, the Black Panthers? I know like, black power, fist raised.

A: Not really.

G: The Black Panthers, maybe? I feel like Malcolm X is related to it. Louis Farrakhan...? He's like the Pope of it.

P: Nation of Islam? I believe that would be... I don't think there is one Nation of Islam... I think maybe it's the group identity that all Islamic people have? Like they're all one group, and cohesive, even if they aren't all together? (Have you heard of Black Muslims? Like here in America?) Black Muslims? I don't know much about it in America... but I know Islam is really prevalent in Africa, and stuff... I haven't really known of many African-American Islamic followers in America. So I don't know...

Have you heard of the Nation of Gods and Earths, also known as the Five-Percent Nation?

M: No.

A: Nope.

G: No.

P: No.

I explained a bit about Nation of Islam, how it arose from the alienation that black people felt in the late 19th and early 20th century from the dominant white majority: segregation laws, different churches for blacks and whites even though the Church preached equality. It was a way to unify black people together, to create a power structure that could support themselves without the white majority. Black people found it hard to get their own power in American society, politically as well as socially.

Did you know that many top-selling hip-hop artists are in fact Muslim, and use Islamic-overtones in their lyrics and music?

M: I did not.

A: No. Never thought of that before.

G: Nope.

P: I am not aware of that. (How do you feel about it, if you care?)

Doesn't bother me at all... Unless their Islamic-overtones involve like suicide, stuff like that... but that's not even Islam, so I wouldn't call that Islamic-overtones, I guess.

How would you say that you feel about Islam?

M: Indifferent.

A: It's cool and everything, but mostly indifferent. I don't really care.

G: Pretty indifferent. I'm ok with it, but pretty much indifferent.

Would you say that Islam is opposed to, or comes in conflict with, the idea of America or the West?

M: I wouldn't say the religion is, but... I don't know, I'd say the whole *jihad* thing seems to be pretty against America... A lot of the religion brings up the whole issue of *jihad*... (How would you define *jihad*?) Holy war. I wouldn't say they're opposed though. I think the terrorism is probably a bastardization of Islam.

A: I wouldn't say they're opposed, I know there's a lot of Islam-people here in America that are fine. I know that the Patriot Act pretty much fucked them over. (What do you know about the Patriot Act?) I think that basically anyone who is Islam, and anyone who might one day sort of might kind of be a threat might get locked up with no warnings. Like, these were the guys that are like the September 11th people. Took away a lot of liberties. But I don't think they're opposed to each other, and I know Islam is supposed to be peacy.

G: I think the religion itself is not against America, but someone can interpret it in a certain way to have it be against America, or its values. Like I don't think it says anywhere in the Koran specifically about being against and kill any group of people. Just like the Bible, it can be interpreted in a different way than most people think of it.

Would you guys consider the Nation of Islam to be a legitimate form of Islam?

M: I don't really know. I think it sounds its wildly different than

orthodox Islam.

A: Just to go off your description, it sounds like they took the principles of Islam and made up their own way to empower African-American people. I don't know if Allah has a race...

G: I feel its just as legitimate as the hundreds of Christian sects. If you decide to change your beliefs, it's legitimate to you.

Have you heard of the word *halla* or know what it means?

M: No.

A: No.

G: No.

Have you heard of the Wu-Tang Clan or know anything about them?

M: (Showed me a W with his fingers)

A: I've heard of them. Not really.

G: They were on Dave Chapelle's Show, Ol' Dirty Bastard, the RZA.

We listened to *Bells of War* by Wu-Tang Clan, while they read the lyrics along with the song.

After listening to that, what message did you think the artist was trying to portray to his listeners, or what did you get out of it, in terms of general tones or anything that you found interesting?

M: I noticed a few religious themes, mentioning Allah, the truth... A lot of self-promotion. It didn't seem outwardly religious though. It was more lyric driven than most hip hop I listen to. I couldn't really follow what they were trying to say. I thought they were trying to say that Allah is the true God... Islam... The title didn't really mean much to me...

A: With the title, I see a relation to some of the lyrics, like "How many bombs are we gonna drop in the 90 now," I noticed a lot of the use of the N word, which is typical of hip-hop. I noticed a lot

of violence, violent overtones. I'm not really sure... I caught vague religious mentionings, but didn't really understand it.

G: There was definitely a lot of mention about Allah, and talked about Allah several times... but the total meaning? I don't know, they were going in a 1000 different directions. I think perhaps the Nation of Islam was being alluded to.

P: I don't really understand a lot of this. But there are tones, a lot of violence throughout it. I don't really listen to Wu-Tang, I've listened to some... but it seems like they're saying things without actually saying it, which is kinda cool. I get lots of violence from here, allusions towards religion... they mention "Allah," a lot, and there are other things they refer to that sound religious to me, like, "When we touch down you crown renowned kings," but I'm not sure what they mean. I caught the boxing references in the middle, with Holyfield, and Whittiker, but I don't know what they mean. It's really cryptic... "Born Gods is here," are they referring to themselves? Not sure.

We listened to *Freedom* by Paris off his album, "Sonic Jihad"

After listening to that, what message did you think the artist was trying to portray to his listeners, or what did you get out of it, in terms of general tones or anything that you found interesting?

M: I think there were some definite religious overtones... RBGed up? Is that like, red, black, green? I feel like that has something to do with Nation of Islam... The Malcolm X thing, fuck the pigs and the white rich people.

A: A lot of stuff about police brutality. Black people have it rough... stuff about poverty, things like that. Yeah... I don't know. I guess, some of it talks about being in the ghetto, and some of it talks about international stuff, "Anwhere that it's color, there ain't never peace. Africa, South America, and the Middle East." Places that don't have enough money... I think that red black and green reference is an African-American thing too...

G: The generic "the cops are out to get you" kinda vibe, a couple times "kill a cop, we still win." I didn't notice anything supporting Islam. A lot about war, about how black people have it bad. A mention of Malcolm X right here... but no specific stuff about Islam... If I had to guess, I'd say the artist is a member of Nation

of Islam, though. The general message is that black people have it bad.

P: Well... I think it's a lot clearer, and it's easier to get what they're saying, but at the same time they're alluding to things you'd really have to experience to relate to and understand. Like a lot of the music I listen to, I only like it because I really like I understand what they're talking about, I've experienced the same sorts of things. I understand why this would appeal to black people... or maybe inner-city people, but I just can't relate to a lot of it because I grew up in a totally different environment. Like, "The O.G.s put me up on the jewels of the game, Ain't no wins in the street if you comin' up lame, That's why I walk how I walk and I claim what I claim, Red, Black to the Green with a gangsta lean" so there I think he's definitely explaining why he joined a gang, like his gang colors: red black and green... but I can't say "I understand why he joined a gang," like I know he's trying to explain it, but I just can't really say what it is that he's saying... I guess maybe it's more dangerous not to be in a gang than to be in one? I don't know. (What do you think the title means, or relates to it?) I guess it's mostly about violence, like a lot of violent tones, but its hard to tell when they're talking about home violence, but they also talk about Iraq and stuff over there, but its hard to distinguish between the two allusions a lot. (What do you think that's about, like referring to Iraq, I know they mentioned Bush...?) I think they're saying with all this talk about war, they're forgetting us? Like with all this talk about overseas, they aren't paying any attention to the black people and the problems they have? Probably saying that even their own kind, like the black people, are forgetting about their own troubles here, and that they need to unite and keep fighting for their freedom. They also talk about killing killer cops, stuff like that, so they're promoting home violence, and to fight back against the pigs and shit. I think they're legitimating the violence. "Hungry and starving, that's why niggas bang," so they're saying that there's problems here and they need to fight back to get basic freedoms here. They keep going back and forth from domestic to global issues, like talking about, "anywhere there's color, there ain't never peace, Africa, South America, and the Middle East" I don't know if I agree completely, but that's definitely true, a lot... and it sucks.

What were some of the differences you noticed between *Freedom*

and *Bells of War*?

M: The first one was a lot angrier, less intelligent... not that the last one was really intelligent or anything. There was a lot more mentioning of being a black man, like "Freedom, freedom... I'm a black man... Freedom, freedom... I'm a black man."

A: There were a lot more references in this one, like Malclom X. This one seems a lot more focused, and the other one pretty much jumped around a lot.

G: This one seemed like it was really important to establish their own identity as a black person, whereas the Wu-Tang one didn't say "We're black, they're white," but this one mentions it like every other line.

P: Definitely the same sort of deal, talking about violence and black people. Definitely the violence and the blackness of it. I don't think the other one was inciting people to like act or anything, but this one was more of a call to arms. I'd say that's the main theme of the song, a call to arms. This one, I didn't notice as many Islamic overtones as I did in the other one.

I played *American Terrorist* by Lupe Fiasco

After listening to that, what message did you think the artist was trying to portray to his listeners, or what did you get out of it, in terms of general tones or anything that you found interesting?

M: I liked how the song talks about how anyone can be a terrorist, you know? "the books that take you to heaven and let you meet the Lord there have become misinterpreted, reasons for warfare," shows that... I think that's totally true, and its not just true with the bastardization of Islam leading to terrorism, but other religions have done the same thing in different situations, just a misinterpretation or a slight change of meaning of the same texts.

A: (Since you already know this song, before I play it, any ideas about the message beforehand?) I like how it references a bunch of different races, like "give the red man something, slot machines..." but a lot of different ones. (After playing) I've never really read the lyrics while listening to it, so I actually got a lot more out of it now that I did that. I never noticed before, "747 on the Pentagon lawn" I liked how he really emphasized how there is

terrorism in America, but it's not just Muslims, like, everyone does it, "camouflaged Torahs, Bibles, and glorious Korans, the books that take you to heaven and meet the Lord there" umm... I like this song. I guess black people and Muslims are both discriminated against, is part of what they're saying. Also, this makes me think of Christian-based terrorist organizations, and people don't make as big a deal about that... I mean those are American Terrorists, in America... and I think that's the main message. (What do you think this song's saying about America?) Well, "break em off a little democracy" that's what America does: kinda relates to Iraq... you know, we took out their dictator and told them they could vote, and encourage them to vote, but not set it up all the way... but pretty much force them in that direction. Like I guess it would be impossible to find out what each person really wants in their government, but it's what America does, we decided that democracy is the only way to run a government, so we force it on other people. And I don't really know if that's good for countries, and they might have different beliefs in those countries.

G: I think that there are different religions besides Islam that can lead to terrorist organizations from it, definitely, but what I don't like about this song is saying "this system is putting us down" you know? "break em off a little democracy turn their whole culture to a mockery, give em coca-cola for their property, give em gum, give em guns, get em young, give em fun," (What do you think that's saying about America?) Like its saying that they don't have a choice, but the American culture is giving it to them and that's the only reason that they're being ruined by it. It's just saying that in his opinion, that people don't really don't have the ability to break free from their oppression and they take whats given to them.

P: "The ink of a scholar is worth 1000x more than the blood of a martyr?"... Interesting... I don't know. The religious tones definitely pop up again in this song. This song is more like anti-violence though, I think. When it comes to the terrorists, he's saying that the holy books have been misinterpreted and that's really not the right way to go. "We read them with blind eyes," they are reading them and only seeing what they want to see, not necessarily what the books say. I feel like there's a non-violent overtone, and that even though we think of Islam as the source for terrorism, but he's saying that in America, Christianity is

sometimes a source for terrorism as well. By saying that Islam is somehow causing it is bullshit, it's religion in general. Like he's mentioning how radical Christians are poisoning water supplies and stuff, and maybe it isn't as prevalent, at least not here, but it's still there, and to blame it all on one religion isn't really right. I feel like the reason that it's coming out Islam more now is because those people are going through so many hardships right now that it creates an environment that facilitates radicalism. I don't think he's promoting any certain religion in this song, though, besides to stop interpreting these things with blind eyes. It's definitely different from the other two, the most different so far. I like this one a lot. ... Even the police, he alludes to as being like Al Qaeda, to them being terrorists.

What differences did you notice between this song and the other two songs that we listened to?

M: The Wu-Tang one was like "Islam, Allah's the shit," and the Paris one was more, "Black power, Nation of Islam," that sort of thing, but this one was more "we all have a lot of the same problems," and didn't emphasize that the black man was the only one with problems. I guess if you listen to lyrics of Wu-Tang clan, you notice some of the lyrics referring "Allah" and stuff like that, but with this one, it's a lot more universal.

A: His point was better worded than the others, whereas the others jumped around too much. They talked about other things, but this one was better written to send a point out.

G: He seemed less inclined to say who he was, while the others were more explicit in saying "I'm a black man, listen to me, because I understand it" While he uses the "N" word but he doesn't flaunt his own race to make his point in any real way. It wasn't like every other line, and it wasn't "look at me, look at me, I'm black," and I think that's a better way to present things.

P: The other two, I think, were both promoting violence, and one was more focused on religion, but they were both addressing people and oppression. I don't think this one was really talking about race, whereas the other two really focused on race a lot. In this song, he doesn't really mention at all being black or being white. He mentions to the Ku Klux, and I guess that's another example of American terrorism, you know? The chorus... doesn't

really seem like it fits in as well, it doesn't seem to fit into the rest of the song. And it's weird that he doesn't talk about race at all until the very end... It almost seems like he wrote the song but needed a chorus, and needed something to relate to the end, which sounds cool, but doesn't relate to the rest of the message of the song. (What does the end mean?) It's an indictment against how we've treated minorities in the past, because what he says is pretty true. Like the Indians, Asians, and black people... how its still ongoing, too. Like in the past, we enslaved the black man, we gave Indians liquor to control them and basically destroy them... In today's day and age, they still have the casinos and everything, and while we didn't really make them start that enterprise, we forced them to have to do something to help themselves financially but it's ruined them

Did you know that Lupe Fiasco's birth name is Wasalu Muhammad Jaco? Does that make any difference to you about who he is, or what he represents as an artist?

M: No it doesn't really make any difference, but I guess if he went by that name as a rapper instead of Lupe Fiasco, he probably wouldn't be as popular. I mean its just like a lot of rappers, you know, Snoop Dogg, lots of different personas.

A: Doesn't make any real difference, maybe if people knew that he would be more recognizable as an Islamic-influenced rapper, but I didn't notice him being very preachy or anything in his songs. He isn't like a Muslim person spreading Muslim messages.

G: Its pretty simple, I mean like no rappers go by their real names, it wouldn't fit with the rap image in America.

We listened to *Love* by Mos Def

P: I think that the main thing the song's about is how love is his main influence for writing music. The only time, going off Islam, is that he mentions Allah twice, right next to each other, and before that part of the song I didn't really notice him talking about religion. But after that, I don't know if it was because I was looking for tones of religion, but I started noticing a lot of possible religious tones, like "I'm bringing light..." but if that is what he's saying, it's a definitely less violent, probably more traditional view of Islam. I guess he doesn't talk about his beliefs

or anything, but the feeling of the song, how it's written, but the song is about love and calm and stuff. He probably follows a more peaceful, orthodox Islam as opposed to like the Wu-Tang and all that. I guess I don't really have much to go off of besides the tone and the couple times he mentions Allah having good, positive, messages and characteristics. He might be at all like that, I don't know... it's hard to get anything from the song besides that he probably is Muslim. Is he saying he's a Prophet? Because it kinda sounds like he's saying that, "I'm reachin the height that you said cannot be, I'm bringin the light but you said we can't see, Saw the new day comin, and it look just like me, Sun burst through the clouds, my photo ID," that seems weird to me... like his photo ID bursting through the clouds... it sounds like he's talking about himself being pretty important. I can't help but feel a connection between that and religion, and he must really think a lot of himself.

We listened to *Umi Says* by Mos Def

M: He really wanted me to believe him. He had something he really wanted to say, but he never really said it. He didn't get to it. My next point: he really wanted black people to be free. He kept talking about how he put his heart and soul into this song, and that he wants black people to be free, but it was pretty vague. Something about "abi" and "umi," which are maybe grandparents? That's the feeling I got from it. It felt like a jam band song, just building up to nothing forever.

A: I wasn't really sure where he was going... at one point, he talked about wanting to be with his kids and his lady, and how writing music means a lot to him, and he says, "Shine your light, shine your light!" and I felt like it was going somewhere... What he wants to be... And he was like "yeah, I gotta be a soldier," but I never knew what he was fighting for. He seemed to be saying, "black people stand up, you gotta shine your own light," but I didn't really know what he was referencing.

G: I think its about black people being free. Umm... I don't know, he kinda got his point across, at least to me. I felt like at the beginning, he was establishing his position, "nothing is for certain," and talked about wanting to just be with his family and not be bothered with all the outside stuff that affects him. But then he talked about "abi" and "umi" and how they were saying

for him to use what you're given, and do the best you can with it. So he has to rap, obviously. He wants black people to be free... free from what? That's vague... He wants them to come together, and unite, but besides that I'm not sure.

What would you say were the main differences between this song and the other 3 songs?

M: This one was a lot more positive and less condemning of white people, I'd say. I also didn't really notice any religious messages in this song at all, at least that I saw. He was more about the independence of black people in general. It was less of a rise up on a large scale, but a more of, "you need to rise up yourself," and stuff like that.

A: This one was a lot more about empowering people on a person-to-person level, I think? The other ones were like, "we need to rise up against the *they*," like the "other." This was more like, you personally need to shine your own light. It could be more like, uniting people from a lot of different religions, too... like he mentions "One God," so that's sort of religious, but there's one God in a lot of different religions.

G: This one was a lot more positive, not angry at all. There is no object of the evil, like the other ones pretty much named "whitey" as the enemy, or at least Paris and Wu-Tang did. There's no enemy in this song. There are definite similarities in the message, and this song is definitely supporting the struggle of black people over any other topic, but it's a less violent and more positive message, I guess. Just a lot differently... like the other ones made more references to like Malcolm X, and maybe a more radical sort of view.

P: (Talks a bit about Love and diffs earlier)

We listened to *Paradise* by Native Deen

After listening to that, what message did you think the artist was trying to portray to his listeners, or what did you get out of it, in terms of general tones or anything that you found interesting?

M: (Laughing) Where did you find that song? This one is obviously really orthodox Muslim, he was extremely clear about the point he was trying to make, which was that you have to do the things he

says in order to go to Heaven or paradise or whatever, and if you don't, I guess you're going to Hell. He did not take his time getting to his point. He didn't mention any enemies really, except I guess the media, and that was different, I guess. He kinda reminded me of that crazy priest from *There Will be Blood*, you know, just really radical and pushing his beliefs on other people. Where did you find this? Did you look up "crazy shit," on Google or something?

A: (Laughing) Ok, well this song seemed like a really pompous sort of message, like he was telling other people how they could get to paradise, but HE is looking out for them and HE is really righteous. But I just don't know if Allah really wants people to be writing songs about how righteous they are, it just doesn't sound appealing at all and I don't know how much it fits with God's message, but then again I might be wrong. I guess people do that with Christianity and stuff too, but it just sounds really weird, "You know that we want to go to Heaven When you pray to Allah, When you pray to Allah, When you pray to Allah" is just so laughable to me. The other songs, like Wu-Tang and Paris at least, seemed at least sorta normal, but this one has like, "Sisters acting like they're hot, Muslims smoking pot, It happens a lot" (laughter) like that is really pretty radical to me, very condemning and not like the other songs at all. As far as the message goes, this one was like "Pray to Allah, get your shit straight, don't be acting like a music-video ho." Because otherwise you won't be able to get into the afterlife, I think (laughter). This song makes me laugh. I also noticed a ton of unnecessary Arabic words, I guess? Like they were all squeezed in at the end, and I didn't get that at all. Maybe he was just showing off, or something.

G: (Laughing) The thing is, it just reminded me of, you know, those Christian rock bands, which usually just preach about love and stuff I guess, but the thing that gets me the most is that those bands are like, "Jesus loves you, and love one another, and in general things will be ok," but this song was like, "Do what I say, or you're going to Hell!" and that really turned me off of it. Like he seems to be angry at me. Like I'm his enemy.

P: That one is kinda preachy. I feel like it was the rap-Islamic version of Christian rock. I don't see this as being mainstream, popular music at all. But he's still saying "be good in this life and you'll go to heaven" but his views of good are more traditional,

like don't follow temptation and drugs and everything. Like the other artists that were talking about being good were sending more of a message of "don't do harm," like Mos Def... There's two views about how to be good, and a lot in between. Like for me, one polar is being good by not causing harm to others and by not really committing sins in that respect, and that's how I am, I think, but I still like drink and do drugs and stuff. I definitely commit many sins by religion, but I feel like a good person still. The other polar is to hold yourself back from things, and that's another view of being good. This guy is obviously on that pole, and he's very interested in the afterlife. And he seems more interested in that than in this life. He definitely has the most traditional Islamic views, and he is probably the most orthodox of the artists. He definitely says "Allah" the most. He seems to almost have a juvenile view of heaven, "Anything you want, you can have when you think of it," that's like what kids in Sunday school think about when they think of heaven. I feel like when people get older they develop a different view of what heaven is. Like is that paradise, just *having* things? I don't think even Americans, who are obsessed with materialism, wouldn't think of heaven as that. But I guess he thinks he is righteous, holier than thou tone of being better than you. He never makes any exceptions, like "I'm not perfect," he pretty much thinks he is perfect. Definitely not violence in this, no swears or anything, pretty straightforward.

Would you listen to any of the artists or songs that I played after today, do you think?

M: Lupe I would, but I already listened to him. I wouldn't listen to anything that was really overbearing with religion or religious themes, so definitely not the last one. I'm not really into the whole Nation of Islam thing, and I'm not really black, so Wu-Tang and Paris didn't really appeal to me at all. So I guess no, not besides what I had already listened to.

A: Um, yeah I'd listen to the Wu-Tang, I liked the flow of it. Like I don't really know if I like the actual lyrics and stuff, but he the beat and the flow was really smooth and enjoyable. The other stuff, besides Lupe, but probably not. For the Mos Def song, like it didn't seem like he was really rapping too much, so it wasn't even really that hip-hoppy to me. Native Deen, I obviously

wouldn't listen to.

G: None of them really appealed to me, like I wouldn't ever listen to any of these songs again. The Wu-Tang one, I just didn't understand half the things they were saying, which could have had something to do with it being hard for me comprehend the way they talked. Lupe I didn't really like. Mos Def, I wouldn't listen to that song again, but I've heard other Mos Def songs and liked them, so I guess I would listen to him again. Native Deen I wouldn't listen to, ever (laughter). The Paris song was just annoying, with the chorus.

Going through each of these artists, who do you think their intended audience was?

M: Black people. More specific, Islamic black people, or Nation of Islam black people. But mostly, black people. Lupe had a broader intended audience I think, especially since he wasn't so adamant to only talk about black people, but still he was aiming towards black people mostly I think. For Mos Def... I guess, black people, yeah, stand together. (What about Native Deen?) Muslim people.

A: I thought Lupe was aiming for a larger audience, and also specifically Americans. Native Deen, I guess, Islam-people. Maybe bad Islam people? The other ones, I guess, black people. With Paris and Wu-Tang, mostly black people, but they made some specific references to Islam, so maybe Islam black people. With Wu-Tang, it seemed to be mostly just black people, though.

G: They all were going towards black people, I think, except Native Deen, which was Muslim people. I thought Paris and Wu-Tang were for black people, like I got a Black Panther sort of vibe, so that's very much towards black people.

P: Wu-Tang was trying to sell to more inner-city black people. In gangs or around gang activity. That sounds very white of me to say, but they were definitely talking about street life, and being in gangs, and why, and violence. So inner-city blacks who feel frustrated with how the world is and where they are, and who can relate to a lot of what they're saying better than I ever could. (Why better than you ever could?) Not because I'm white, necessarily... because I'll never experience what its like to be black, but growing up in the city without any money... like my family doesn't

have that much money, but we live well, and if I grew up on the street with a lot less money, if I had to deal with all these things, I'd be able to relate to it better, and now I'm incapable of really understanding it. Like any attempt of me to say that I understand their struggle would be presumptuous of me. I don't really relate to American city poverty, but being in Belize... Jamaica, Belize, is a very different type of poverty: like I understand those types of songs better because I went there, and I like Jamaican or South American songs better because I've seen them, and I talked to random people on the street. So if I lived in the city, I think I'd be able to grasp these things better than I can now, but I've never lived in the city, so I just don't know... For Paris, it would be a very similar audience: frustrated inner-city people. Maybe not as much gang-members though, they were trying to group the entire African-American and minority struggle together to unite for one cause, so more of a message than Wu-Tang, too. For Lupe Fiasco, that one was a pretty broad audience, anyone who listened to that could get something from it. Even Paris, I think anyone could get something out of it, more than the Wu-Tang one. Wu-Tang was just talking about things I could never understand, like motivations for joining gangs. Freedom was more about being oppressed and feeling angry about it, and anger's a pretty universal thing, so I can relate to it more. For Lupe, the American audience would probably be the main audience, though, because it may not hold the same weight in Europe or the Middle East, but it would still have a good message. But he talked more about specific, possibly irrational fears, that are more prevalent for Americans. Like I feel like we focus more on irrational things that we associate with our fears, but aren't really the cause of our fears. The Mos Def song, well, I feel like everyone could listen to it, but I don't think anyone would really listen to that a lot, like it had a message, but it wasn't very powerful, mostly just positive and not very specific. Native Deen, definitely for Islamic people... I don't think Muslims actually from the Middle East who would listen to it, but American Muslims, I guess... maybe black people. I feel like I've said black people so many times tonight. I just don't like saying "black people," it is too much of a broad generalization, I don't like grouping people by color, I feel like there's better ways to group people by race.

After listening to each of these artists, do you think that most people who listen to it are understanding the messages they are

trying to portray, or are most people completely oblivious?

M: I think most people are definitely oblivious to the message, except for the Native Deen one. If you don't notice the message in that one, you're dumb. A lot of people like hip-hop for the fat beats and the flow... so for the rest of them, and Wu-Tang, and stuff, I don't think many people would get anything concrete out of it. A lot of white people I know like hip-hop and don't really care what they're saying. They just like the beat and if they can dance to it, you know? I mean, I like Lupe because I thought Lupe seemed more intelligent to me, actually, than the rest of them. Because the way he presents music... I don't always know exactly what he's trying to say, but its not just like, "Fuck the police, look at these bitches," etc...

A: I don't think people necessarily see the message, but I do think that some parts come out if you listen to a song enough times. I mean, when I listen to rap, I mostly just do it for the flow of it and the way the music is played, and especially after listening to *American Terrorist* I got a lot of new stuff out of the lyrics which I never heard before. But I also definitely got a general, if subconscious or vague, feeling of what he was trying to say, I think. I never really put it into words in my head, though. For Mos Def, I think black people would get what he was saying, I mean he was pretty straightforward, but for especially Paris and Wu-Tang in particular, even reading the lyrics along with it I had a really hard time figuring out what they were trying to say. I mean, I just didn't understand the references.

G: I think that like you couldn't repeatedly listen to any of these songs without eventually saying, "Oh... that's what he's talking about," You know? But with like Wu-Tang I thought it was more of just a normal sort of rap more than the other ones, just going off on tangents. Paris is more like a normal rap... The Wu-Tang has more of a message I guess than that, and if you were to listen to it enough times, you would easily find that message... you know, about violence against the cops and urban black people and stuff.

P: I feel like it would be hard to listen to any of those songs and not hear the message, besides the Wu-Tang song, if they were listening to the lyrics... So if they just liked the flow of it or whatever and didn't care about the message, maybe not, but it

would be hard to listen to it without hearing to what they're saying and acknowledge it. (Do you think a lot of people listen to the lyrics in hip-hop?) I think so... I mean, what else do you have to listen to? I guess I was reading along with the lyrics, which a different experience than listening to it normally. You experience a song differently when you listen to a song like that while you read it. If it had just come on the radio... I'd probably just bob my head, and it wouldn't really register. If it was on my Ipod, I'd probably get it easier, like sometimes when I listen to a song I don't really pay attention, but other times I do and it get the message pretty quickly. It depends on if you actually own the song or not, but I feel like if you listen to a song a few times, you'll pick up a few phrases. Like "this one's talking about bombing," or "this one's talking about killing cops." I think the main themes of the song almost always come through: violence, or whatever. Especially with the help of the title of a song. Although I think the Islamic themes definitely don't come in as much. Especially because a lot are more subtle...

Have hip-hop lyrics related to Islam ever given you a desire to look up information about the subject on your own time?

M: No... I mean, to be honest, I learned a lot about Islam in previous years, like in school, but I don't remember shit about it. Like I mean I remember something about Pillars, and you know, if someone mentions that, I'll be like: oh yeah, Islam.

A: Definitely not, nope.

G: No, not at all.

Do you actively make sure to listen to either secular or Islamic-influenced hip-hop?

M: No.

A: No.

G: No.

Do you think that being white and non-Muslim has any affect on your choice of hip-hop, whether it be Islamic-influenced or not?

M: No, not really... I mean, I don't really pick up on themes like

that when I'm listening to hip hop. When I listen to it... I guess being white would have more of an impact than being non-Muslim, because some of these songs' intended audiences are obviously white people, and I might not listen to a song if it's blatantly like anti-white or something. But mostly, it doesn't make a difference, and I just don't pick up on it. I just listen to the flow of it.

A: No, not really, like I said before, when I listen to hip-hop it's mostly because I'll find it on a station with the most popular music, and I never notice that they have any Islamic background or anything. I just like to dance to hip-hop because it has such a good beat and stuff, usually, you know?

G: Not really, I mean the Native Deen one would make a big difference because of my race and religious background, since that one is so obviously intended for devout orthodox Muslims, but the other ones don't make me want to listen to them any less, necessarily, because I'm white or non-Muslim.

P: Um... being white does, but I don't think being non-Muslim does. I mean for the last one, I didn't like but not because I wasn't Muslim... I just don't like being preached to. I guess being non-religious makes a the biggest difference... which is kinda the same as being non-Muslim... so yeah I guess it does influence my perceptions. But it really depends on how they're talking about religion... if they're just mentioning it, or if the whole song is devoted to it. Like if they're telling me what to do, how to act, I won't like it. In general... I think my race and the experiences I've had because of my race have the most impact on whether I'd like a song and how I relate to it, but other songs I just like cuz it's damn good.

Bells of War Lyrics:

"Bells of War"

[Verse One: U-God]

Yeah, yo
Give me the cue
Skip the introduction, prosate the lip function
The junction get rushed by some grimy people bustin weed
Splatter your belly like some Attica fellas
Use a firearm good, bloods go for hard swelling
Insert the spasm, yes the dirty hurt has them
Thoroughbred thugs insert the fantasm
Verbal smarts, spark the word, visit my scripture
Exotic wine, holding nine, Picasso pictures
When the rhyme pivot you now, limit your chance
Bodyguard the lyric with unlimited stance
Words seem to zing on down to Beijing
When we touch down you crown renowned kings

[Verse two: Method Man]

There's no honor amongst thieves, street pharmaceutical
Stack like Genovese, the four devil tempt mad men
But not these, we profound hardcore sound
To MC's thumbs down, prepare
Killa bees it be warfare, this the year
Niggaz gotta take you off of here, hold the square
If we go there we go gritty
And spread fear through this rap city, call the mayor
My razor sharp darts be like cold stairs
The smell of fear makes my nostrils -- flair, truth or dare
Ask yourself can you compare
to these niggaz in the hood, Johnny B. Goode
or he be gone, yeah
The struggle goes on, you've been warned
P.L.O. from here to Lebanon, how many bombs
Must we drop in the Ninety-Now
Walk a mile in my shoes, get the street news, from Meth-Tical

[Verse Three: RZA]

You gots to be kidding, you gots to be kidding
Aiyyo kid, you gots to be kidding, my glocks'll be spitting
You gots to be kidding, yo

It's common sense how I master my circum-fer-ence, you dense

I get locked the fuck up, released on my own recognizance
Can't be judged, young bloods bust back like scuds
Wu-Tang harvest one thousand notches above
MC level, yo, I stay high as like treble
Foes who oppose get plucked like rose pedals
Arresting and holding, penetrate for better regions
Wack MC's only lasted one season
The morale was low at the corral
Adjective pronouns had no style, yo, we propose our
aim the official, initial, is Ruler Zig-Zag-Zig Allah
All that other bullshit ain't permissable
Annual increase of the Wu-Tang Manual
Handles to a keyboard is true hip hop set tangible
illegible, every egg ain't edible
My tracks remain Unforgettable, like Ol' Nat Cole
Got to catch this paper to buy Shaquasia a glacier
Throw chairs to deck a skyscraper
Understand that the continents of Africa and Asia
and free the black man from the enslaved labor, Wu-Tang

[Interlude: Masta Killa, Method Man, Raekwon]

The weight of the fam is on our back and we can't fall
Victim to this long hall of fame, meaning nuttin
We came to punish the glutton with a substance
That can't be contained, Wu-Tang

Motherfuckers
We be seeing y'all asses when we walk up in the club
Y'all all in the back
Scared to speak the speak cause you scared
Punk motherfucker, we know what time it is

[Raekwon conversating with some people]

"All you been seeing is upsets in the box and shit right
It's like come on man
This nigga fucked up motherfuckin Whittaker"
"Dang, he caught Whittaker"
"Mmmhmmm"
"He caught Whittaker a long time ago"
"Mike got touched"
"Then Mike got touched by Holyfield"
"Holyfield"

"Yeah, word up"
"Hey, Mike's -- Mike's gonna forfeit this fight"
"He ain't fighting McDermit"
"He ain't fightin?"
"Nope"
"Whattup?"
"You talkin bout he -- what he, what he, what he did?"
"Told them he cut his eye, in sparring"

[Verse Five: Ghostface Killah]

Style adoral rap pressing, David Berkowitz
Einstein birth to hit, now nurture it
M.G.M. front row seat tonight, no gens
Purified cleanse, ran into some beef up in the men's
Fix your sawed off, Wu-Tang throw me off the cross
All you saw was white meat, skin hangin off
These is words from the Arch Bishop, some call it six up
The Betty Crocker, marvel cake stakes admissor
Wax janitor, black Jack Mulligan from Canada
Slam dance, tarantula style, youse a fan of the
Monopoly king, Slavic poetry
Carnegie Hall's off the hook, let's push through the armory
Mack truck hitting soloist, soul controllers
Behold of the thousand teeth fist, swift and boneless

[Outro: RZA]

You know, cause Wu-Tang is invincible, youknowhatl'mean?
It's Wu-Tang Forever God (invincible)
Knahmsaying? We gonna get down with that W
You gonna get down with that W
That's that Wu, that's that Wisdom
Youknowhatl'msayin? That's the Wisdom of the Universe
That's the truth, of Allah, for the Nation, of the Gods
Youknowhatl'msayin? We breakin egg through these days God
Youknowhatl'msayin? We got the fuckin way
We got the medicine for yo' sickness
Out here, ya knowhatlmean?
I was telling Shorty like --
Yo Shorty, you don't even gotta go to summer school
Pick up the Wu-Tang double CD
And you'll get all the education you need this year

Youknowhatlmean?
(Their poisoned minds can't comprehend this shit)
Word man, it's Wu-Tang Forever God
Niggaz can't fuck with these lyrics God
Youknowhatl'msayin? Knahmean?
(Oh hell no, none of this shit)
C'mon man -- beats, lyrics man, y'all niggaz
(Niggaz can't even understand half this shit)
Nah (man, no)
I think niggaz ain't gonna figure it out til the year Two-G
(Wax niggaz ass for free or fee) Word
Yo, you know what? The next Wu-Tang album ain't even
comin out until Two Thousand
Yaknowhatlmean? That's just gonna come back with a comet
You hear, we gonna bring a comet
(Check for that shit in the millenium)
Youknowhatlmean? So, yo, y'all niggaz man
(Be the ressurection) The Gods is here man
Born Gods is here
(Born God)

Freedom Lyrics:

Lyrics to Freedom :
(feat. Dead Prez)

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom
This is how we ride and roll - soldier fo life fo' sho
Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom
This is how we ride and roll - soldier fo life fo' sho [x2]

[Paris]

We come back to the days of - grenades up
Black fist raised up - we stay rough
Come this way cause - the game fucked
Can't stay away from - the main stuff

still bust when we ride, still game
still bust any time, fuck fame
still rhyme under pressure, still bangin'
still prime, niggas wetcha, still aimin'

Still put a fist in – the system
Still kill a killa cop, we still win
Still be the one to expose the beast (when it's)
Still un-American to be for peace (yeah)

Revenge is a dish best served with steel
If it's on then, lets get it on for real
Can't shut us up – cut us down – never regret
Fuck Bush, I'ma say it loud – raisin' a fist – we holla

[Chorus]

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom
This is how we ride and roll – soldier fo life fo' sho
Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom
This is how we ride and roll – soldier fo life fo' sho

[M1 – Dead Prez]

RBG'd up, yeah, ready to get freed up
Bangin' on the system, ready to turn the heat up
Malcolm X cocktail, ready to burn the streets up
Holla if ya hear me big homie, it's time to eat somthin'

Picture me rollin', me Paris and Chuck D'd up
Dickies and white tee'd up, throwin' them O.G.s love
Listen up, rule number 1 is no snitchin'
Switch up and you gon' have to eat a clip up 'till you hiccup

[Stic – Dead Prez]

My reality is poverty, police brutality
How I came into this revolutionary mentality
Comin' up in my hood, it's an everyday thang
Niggas is hungry and starvin' that's why niggas bang

The O.G.s put me up on the jewels of the game
Ain't no wins in the street if you comin' up lame
That's why I walk how I walk and I claim what I claim
Red, Black to the Green with a gangsta lean

[Chorus]

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom
This is how we ride and roll – soldier fo life fo' sho
Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom

This is how we ride and roll – soldier fo life fo' sho

[Paris]

Rebels at it come again

That's why we conspire so you never win

Keep it calmer when we ride so you never seein'

Niggas aim between the eyes so you never mend

Field niggas in the front be the first to bust

GuerrillaFunk.com who you gon' trust?

With all this talk about the war they forgettin' us

Broke schools and abuse made the noose a must

Holla black – fuck a pig and these killers wars

Around the world every border it's the same story

Anywhere that it's color it ain't never peace

Africa, South America and Middle East

Move in packs bust back at these killa foes

Reach first make the heat spurts so he know

No blood for the rich – they been exposed

Now it's power to the people everywhere I go – and everybody's sayin..

[Chorus]

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom

Yeah, my live niggas standin' in here, Yeah, my live niggas standin' over there

Freedom, Freedom, Freedom, Freedom

Yeah, my live niggas standin' in here, Yeah, my live niggas standin' over there

Love Lyrics:

Lyrics to Love :

[Mos Def]

They say the goodness in life belongs to those who believe

So, I believe...YES!

[Chorus] 2x

I start to think, and then I sink

Into the paper, like I was ink
When I'm writing I'm trapped in between the line
I escape when I finish the rhyme (aiyyo)

My pops said he was in love when he made me
Thought about it for a second, wasn't hard to see
I could hear he was sincere, was a game of promotion
The entire affair's probably charged wit emotion
But love call your heart, I guess you got to persue
12-11-73 my life is testament
Praise the beneficent, element that rest
Devoid in the form that make love manifest
I spent my early years in Roosevelt Project
It was a bright valley wit some dark prospects
In '83, Venny C was the host wit the most
I listened to the Rap Attack and held the radio close
I listened to the Rap Attack and held the radio close
This is far before the days of high glamour and pose
Aiyyo power from the street light made the place dark
I know a few understand what I'm talkin about
It was love for the thing that made me wanna stay out
It was love for the thing that made me stay in the house
Spendin time, writin rhymes
Tryin to find words that describe the vibe
That's inside the space
When you close yo' eyes and screw yo' face
Is this the pain of too much tenderness
To make me nod my head in reverence
Should I visit this place and remember it?
To build landmarks here as evidence
Night time, spirit shook my temperment
To write rhymes that portray this sentiment
We live the now for the promise of the infinite
We live the now for the promise of the infinite
And we believe in the promise (love, love *repeated*)
Yes yes y'all and we don't stop because

Chorus

I got love, L-O-V-E and I be
Love, L-O-V-E to MC
Get love, L-O-V-E and I be
Love, L-O-V-E I MC

Get love, L-O-V-E and I be
Love, L-O-V-E to MC
Get love, L-O-V-E and I be
The M-O-S-D-E-F-initely

Check it out y'all, feel me out y'all
Feel me out y'all, hear my out y'all
Check me, out y'all
Feel me out y'all, check it out y'all
Now hear out (bounce) y'all
Check me out y'all, feel me out y'all
Check me out y'all, feel me out y'all
Feel me out y'all (hear me bounce y'all)
Check me out y'all, check it out y'all

My folks said they was in love when they had me
I take they love they made me wit to make rhymes and beats
(Can you feel?) The raw deal, it's all wheel-driven
Contemplate the essence of beats, rhymes and living
Speech in line wit the rhythm, designed wit the rhythm
Ears and eyes keepin good time wit the rhythm
I shine wit the rhythm, the Black Star Gallactica
Big number fleetin, we ancient like the Abbacca's
After us, I see most proceed to be trees
Sproutin leaves, given breeze to the we who believe
I MC, which means I Must Cultivate the earth
Back straight backs, hard beats and hard work
I be the funky drummer to soften the hard earth
(Amin) Pray Allah keep my soul and heart clean
(Amin) Pray the same thing again for all my team
This go out to Fort Greene and on out to Queens
Uptown to Boogie Down, yo just look around
AND SHOOK UP THE WORLD!, like Ali in 6-3 (right)
I'm reachin the height that you said cannot be
I'm bringin the light but you said we can't see
Saw the new day commin, and it look just like me
Some burst through the clouds, my photo ID
I bring light to your day and raise yo' degree
The Universal Magnetic, you must respect it
From end to beginning, ? true and livin
EVERY CHANGING, it was a state of magnificent
Building it now for the promise of the infinite
Building it now for the promise of the infinite because

Chorus

I got love, L-O-V-E and I be
Love, L-O-V-E to MC
Get love, L-O-V-E and I be
Love, L-O-V-E to MC
Get love, L-O-V-E and I be
Love, L-O-V-E to MC
Get love, L-O-V-E and I be
The M-O-S-D-E-F-initely

REST OF LYRICS UPLOADED AS FILES AT BOTTOM

Discuss *Methodology*

(Final

Paper): In my interviews of four different University of Illinois students, one woman and three men, I discovered many trends as well as some interesting differences in responses. These interviews took place in the dorm rooms of my interviewees, and were one-on-one intensive, one to two hour, sessions. My interviews consisted of questions which I had prewritten and selected, although there was the occasional minor variation in questions for each interviewee. Also, after asking the questions, and during my subject's response, I would sometimes add questions to help evoke more detailed or interesting responses and to investigate what my subject was really trying to express.

My interviews started with introductory and background questions which didn't involve much critical thinking on the part of my subjects, the purpose being to familiarize my subjects with the interview process, make them feel comfortable, and also to find out their ethnic, cultural, socio-economic, religious, and childhood backgrounds in order to add this information to my analysis. I then probed with general knowledge questions about my subjects' understanding and opinion on Islam, including the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Gods and Earths (Five-Percent Nation), their perceptions of Islam and its relationship with America, as well as hip-hop, their experience with it, and their knowledge of Islamic-affiliated hip-hop. After this point, I gave my interviewees a general background on the Nation of Islam and its influence on the African-American community from the early

20th century, mostly to help evoke more interesting responses later in my interviews. I then moved on to the backbone of my interview process, which consisted of listening to pre-selected songs, with their lyrics available to read along to, and coming from artists who claim membership or heavy influence from either orthodox Islam, Nation of Islam, or the Five-Percent Nation, and asking for my subjects' perceptions on the message of the song. With each new song that I would have them listen to, I would also ask my subjects their perceptions on the differences between the songs and the ones they'd already listened to. After the intensive analysis of all the songs was over, I finished the interviews by evoking some general reactions and conclusions from my subjects.

Background Information

I would like to begin this analysis with some general background information on the influence of the Islam, including the Nation of Islam and the Nation of Gods and Earths, on hip-hop since the early 1990s and continuing to today. Many African-American rappers, in the early '90s, found the Nation of Islam to be a tangible and unifying community which would help them express their disillusionment with the still-dominant white majority in America, and its oppressive nature in regard to the class status and infrastructure of African-Americans and their highly homogenous neighborhoods in the urban areas. The crack epidemic which developed in the black ghettos of America at this time was also an essential catalyst which made urban youth take action and become involved in spreading a message of community, as well as resistance to the white dominance of wealth and industry, which was often manifest in hatred of the police force, who were known to race-profile and treat blacks with indignity and unfair treatment. The Nation of Gods and Earths, or Five-Percent Nation, was established in 1964 by Clarence 13X, a member of the Nation of Islam, in Harlem. Its race theology is much more radical than the Nation of Islam, and it is often considered an off-shoot of the NOI, but in truth it has very little in common with either NOI or orthodox Islam. Unlike either NOI or orthodoxy, the Five-Percenters do not recognize the Five Pillars of Islam, including the Oneness of God or the Prophet Muhammad, and do not follow *halla*, being known to indulge in drugs and alcohol. The Five-Percenters believe that the original Blackman is God, the original Blackwoman is Earth, and their

theology involves concepts such as the Supreme Mathematics, the Supreme Alphabet, the Twelve Jewels of Islam, and that only 5% of people of earth are the poor righteous teachers who understand the one truth. Both the NOI and the Five-Percent Nation have had a great influence on the black-dominated hip-hop scene, especially in the '90s, and many top-selling artists claim membership to one of these groups and have a lot of references to their theologies in their lyrics and musical stylings, which was the primary inspiration for this ethnography. More recently, there has been a more overt influence of orthodox Islam on popular hip-hop as well, which I included in these interviews so see how it was perceived by my subjects.

Unfamiliarity with, and Indifference to, Islam

In my interviews, the first curious and fairly shocking findings came from the general knowledge questions I began with in regards to the religion of Islam, as well as the Nation of Islam and the Five-Percent Nation, and also to perceptions and knowledge of world affairs referring to America and its relationship to Muslim nations.

My interviewees were all from either middle or upper class backgrounds, having grown up in affluent, homogenously white Chicago suburbs. They all ethnically and culturally identified themselves as white and American, and they all described themselves as having been brought up in some type of Christian denomination, but all professed to be non-religious now. Also, all of my interviewees either claimed to listen to some hip-hop or had some basic knowledge of hip-hop, but none were huge hip-hop fans.

When asked the broad question, "What do you know about the religion of Islam?" my interviewees expressed, in general, a surprising lack of knowledge of even the fundamentals of the religion. One of my interviewees, Garrett, did show a good deal of knowledge on the Five Pillars of Islam, naming each of them correctly, and even explained a connection between Islam and the Levantine conflicts between Christians, Jews, and Muslims over the holy sites in that area. However, the other three interviewees' knowledge could probably be summed up in Marvin's response to the question, "Is that the 'Allah' religion?" While they each did come up with something, like Anna's

acknowledgement of two major sects of the religion, responding with uncertainty, “one is related to like Muhammad’s brother, and the other is his husband?” all in all, there was significantly less knowledge of the fundamentals of the religion than I had expected before the interview. Parker referred to a Muslim friend he had when trying to come up with information on the religion, recognizing some customary cultural aspects of the religion emanating from Middle Eastern countries, such as “some Islamic cultures cover up their women,” and, “there are certain things about men and facial hair.” In my analysis, this seems to be a perpetuation of many stereotypes Americans have of Islam as being oppressive, especially with the phrase “cover up,” indicating a lack of freedom of, or subjugation of, Muslim women.

When asked what knowledge my interviewees had of the Nation of Islam, there was even less knowledge. The responses ranged from complete lack of knowledge, to some associations they had with the NOI, like Garrett’s response of, “The Black Panthers, maybe? I feel like Malcolm X is related to it…” and a reference to who he thought was the “Pope” of Islam, “Louis Farrakhan.” All the responses expressed no knowledge of the actual theology of the NOI, but the associations with the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, and Louis Farrakhan that Garrett made at least expressed the knowledge that NOI was related to African-Americans and their struggle against white dominance, albeit with the wrong language, like “Pope.” This was also moderately unexpected, in my perspective, because the Nation of Islam has been around for over a century, it is uniquely American, and it’s had a huge impact on African-American history in this country. As expected, there was absolutely no knowledge of the Nation of Gods and Earths.

I found it very interesting how my interviewees often used language incorrectly in reference to Muslims, often referring them as people “who are Islam,” or “Islam-people,” as well as getting the question from Parker, “Muslims are people who practice Islam, right?” This question expressed his initial uncertainty about the language used to refer to Muslims or Islam, but he was correct, so he at least thought he knew the correct language. Often times, the interviewees would switch between referring to people who practice Islam as “Muslim,” or “Islam-people.” This indicates a general lack of communication between my participants and Muslims in their everyday lives, as well as a lack

of discussion about Islam and Muslims, and a lack of understanding of Islamic affairs and discourse.

Finally, I was surprised at the indifference towards the religion of Islam, expecting some heated reactions towards Islam and its relationship with America and the West. The interviewees all responded that they were “indifferent” to Islam as a religion, and expressed quite fair and non-stereotyped reactions to Islam and its ability to live parallel to Western culture. I would have expected, from the previous indications that there was hardly any knowledge of the Islam and its cultural influences on the Middle East, that my subjects would have had a skewed or stereotyped perspective of Islam and may have expressed contempt for Muslims or Middle Eastern affairs, but there was not much of that. From Anna, there was an expression that that Islam did not come in conflict with the values of America or the West, saying, “I know there’s a lot of Islam-people here in America that are fine,” and even empathy for the way that America wrongly treated Muslims, like through the Patriot Act. When asked to expand on that idea, she said, “I think that basically anyone who is Islam, and anyone who might one day sort of might kind of be a threat might get locked up with no warnings . . . Took away a lot of liberties. But I don’t think they’re opposed to each other, and I know Islam is supposed to be peacy.” This expressed a lack of stereotyped attitudes and an acknowledgement that Islam is fundamentally a peaceful religion, and an opposition to the Patriot Act’s unfair treatment of Muslims, with the colloquial statement “anyone who might one day sort of might kind of be a threat,” meaning that the government was too general in their guidelines about detaining Muslims in America after 9/11. From Marvin and Garrett, there was an expression of knowledge that most Muslims are not terrorists, and that the ones that were had a radical interpretation of the Koran that most wouldn’t agree with. However, Marvin’s definition of *jihad* as “holy war,” indicated a popular American perception that of the word, and not its true and primarily non-violent meaning of “struggle” in a religious context.

Wu-Tang Clan and the Five-Percent Nation

The first song that I had all my participants listen to was *Bells of War* by the artist Wu-Tang Clan. The Wu-Tang Clan is an extremely vocal proponent of the Five-Percent Nation and it is manifest in their lyrics in nearly every one of their raps. I chose

this song because I thought it expressed, in the lyrics, a salient embodiment of the views of many members of the Five-Percent Nation, and also included a great deal of discourse on the African-American struggle in America, with some pan-African and internationalist themes as well, which the title of the song also reflects. The responses to the song were very interesting and expansive, and the perceived messages that the artists were trying to send were very close to what I thought they would be coming from white, non-Muslim students who grew up in affluent Chicago suburbs. Basically, the subjects noticed some vague allusions to religion, and also a lot of violent overtones and use of race-specific language, like the word “nigga.” There was a lot of confusion as to what the artist was trying to say through the lyrics, with an expression of exasperation. Garrett responded, “the total meaning? I don’t know, they were going in a 1000 different directions,” Marvin said, “I couldn’t really follow what they were trying to say,” and Parker’s first reaction was, “I don’t really understand a lot of this. But there are tones, a lot of violence throughout it.” Anna was the only one who really expressed that she saw a vague connection between the title and some of the internationalist lyrics and references to war, saying, “With the title, I see a relation to some of the lyrics, like ‘How many bombs are we gonna drop in the 90 now,’” but she ended with saying, “I’m not really sure… I caught vague religious mentionings, but didn’t really understand it.”

In this song, Wu-Tang Clan refers to themselves as “born Gods” and also express that “That's the Wisdom of the Universe, that's the truth, of Allah, for the Nation, of the Gods,” with many very explicit references to Five-Percenter theology. My interviewees noticed the references to Allah, and some vague religious allusions, but they, of course, did not catch on that these rappers were referring to themselves as Gods, and instead it confused them and they could make no connection between the references to the black man’s struggle and religion. This was what I expected, because I had assumed there would need to be a lot more background knowledge on specific Five-Percenter theology and its influence on many black rappers, knowledge that white suburbanites would not have. Garrett did express that there might have been a Nation of Islam connection, saying, “I think perhaps the Nation of Islam was being alluded to,” but that was the closest any of them got to unveiling the hidden messages in this

song.

Paris and the Nation of Islam

After listening to the song *Freedom* by Paris, off of his album “Sonic Jihad,” there was actually far more comprehension of the perceived messages and allusions in the song than I had expected from my interviewees. They all expressed that this song was far clearer than the Wu–Tang song, in terms of message and overtones, and they noticed the Nation of Islam allusions and pointed them out fairly well. They still had a good deal of confusion about how Nation of Islam related to the themes of African–American struggle against oppression and a need for unity and freedom, but this is understandable because my interviewees had not had much knowledge of the NOI in the first place until I gave some general background on it.

Two of my interviewees noticed the explicit reference to Malcolm X, pointing that out as a connection to the Nation of Islam, with the general feeling expressed when Garrett said, “A mention of Malcolm X right here… but no specific stuff about Islam… If I had to guess, I’d say the artist is a member of Nation of Islam, though. The general message is that black people have it bad.” So my interviewees generally figured out that the Nation of Islam was being represented by this artist through his song, which was fairly surprising because I had thought that from their lack of knowledge they would have a hard time, but since I did give some background information, they must have caught on and connected it to things they’d learned, like about Malcolm X. Secondly, the interviewees were able to distinguish violent overtones, expressions of contempt of police and white oppression against the black man, and a call for freedom and unity. In reference to the message, Marvin mentioned, “fuck the pigs and rich white people,” as general expressions in the song; Garrett saying, “The generic ‘the cops are out to get you’ kinda vibe, a couple times ‘kill a cop, we still win,’” and Parker said expanded a lot more, saying, “I think they’re legitimating the violence. ‘Hungry and starving, that’s why niggas bang,’ so they’re saying that there’s problems here and they need to fight back to get basic freedoms here.” Anna and Parker noticed a few internationalist themes, with Anna mentioning the lyric, “Anywhere that it’s color, there ain’t never peace. Africa, South America, and the Middle East,” and expanding on it, explaining, “Places that

don't have enough money... I think that red black and green reference is an African-American thing too..." This is very perceptive, as the three colors red, black, and green are a reference to the Pan-African movement. Parker also sees a lot of internationalist themes, explaining, "I think they're saying with all this talk about war, they're forgetting us? Like with all this talk about overseas, they aren't paying any attention to the black people and the problems they have? Probably saying that even their own kind, like the black people, are forgetting about their own troubles here, and that they need to unite and keep fighting for their freedom." However, he, I believe, misinterprets the "red, black, and green" lyric to be a reference to gang colors in the inner city, saying, "so there I think he's definitely explaining why he joined a gang, like his gang colors: red black and green..."

So, in analysis, it seems like my subjects did understand the message of black oppression and a need to rise up against their white oppressors and corrupt police, and also noticed allusions to the Nation of Islam, but didn't really connect the two. The connection, of course, would be that the NOI empowers black people in a way that helps work against white dominance and unifies them in a way that excludes the corruption of the white infrastructure. But this would be hard for them to know when they didn't have a background on the group, and this stems from their socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Lupe Fiasco, Mos Def, and Orthodox Islam

Lupe Fiasco and Mos Def are two rappers who identify themselves as orthodox Muslims; Lupe Fiasco's birthname is Wasalu Muhammad Jaco, and Mos Def converted to Islam at the age of nineteen. These two artists, in my research and analysis of the lyrical content of their songs, do express religious themes in at least some of their songs, although Lupe Fiasco is rarely very overt about his membership to Islam, while Mos Def is sometimes explicit. Fiasco's raps are often politically themed, and I chose his song *American Terrorist* for analysis by my interviewees. Mos Def's songs are harder to define, but usually contain general positive messages with a subtle Islamic twist, and I chose his song *Umi Says* for three of my interviewees and *Love* for Parker, because I wanted to get more diverse responses after my first three interviews, but the responses were still fairly similar.

My interviewee Anna was already a fan of the song American Terrorist and of Lupe Fiasco, so before we listened to it, I asked her what she thought the song was about and its message beforehand and afterwards, with the lyrics. Before we listened, she said, in essence, that she liked how it referenced the strife of a lot of different races, and that's about all she could remember from it, but afterwards, she said, "I've never really read the lyrics while listening to it, so I actually got a lot more out of it now that I did that. I never noticed before, '747 on the Pentagon lawn' I liked how he really emphasized how there is terrorism in America, but it's not just Muslims, like, everyone does it." This reaction is what I expected, in that I didn't think my subjects would comprehend much out of the rap they listen to, and that only after being able to read the lyrics would they get closer to the actual message of the song. However, this also demonstrates a flaw in my research; I should have had my subjects listen to a song, get their reactions, and then listen again with the lyrics available to get more comprehensive data on this presumption.

In general, my interviewees expressed similar reactions and perceptions of the message of the song to Anna; that the song was about how terrorism, radicalism, and totalitarianism exists in every religion, not just Islam. Marvin remarked, "I liked how the song talks about how anyone can be a terrorist, you know? 'the books that take you to heaven and let you meet the Lord there have become misinterpreted, reasons for warfare,' shows that..." which was very similar to Garrett and Parker's reactions. This is what I had expected of my interviewees before the interviews, assuming that this song's more universal nature and lack of specific references to life in black, urban areas would allow my white, non-Muslim subjects to be able to connect to the song better. I also noticed a lot of positive reactions to the song as well, with Parker and Marvin both explicitly stating they liked the song, and Anna having liked the song prior to the interview. One very interesting response, however, was Garrett's, when he said, "what I don't like about this song is saying 'this system is putting us down' you know? 'break em off a little democracy turn their whole culture to a mockery, give em coca-cola for their property, give em gum, give em guns, get em young, give em fun,' (What do you think that's saying about America?) Like its saying that they don't have a choice, but the American culture is giving it to them and that's the only reason that they're being ruined by it." I could sense he was offended by these lyrics and the message he

was perceiving in them, and that's why I asked him what it was saying about America. Garrett comes from the highest socio-economic class, upper class, and he was from a very affluent and homogenously white suburb, which I think may have translated into his identifying with the people "putting down" these minorities throughout history, and I felt that he was trying to defend himself and his white, affluent background through his offense at these lyrics.

My subjects pointed out, when asked of the difference between Lupe Fiasco's song and the previous two songs, that *American Terrorist's* lyrics were far more universal and less focused on race. Anna commented, "he doesn't flaunt his own race to make his point in any real way. It wasn't like every other line, and it wasn't 'look at me, look at me, I'm black,' and I think that's a better way to present things," which illustrates her increased ability to like this song because of its lack of condemnation against white people and, as Marvin said, "this one was more 'we all have a lot of the same problems,' and didn't emphasize that the black man was the only one with problems." I found these reactions to match up with my presuppositions, especially in that this song is a top-seller in America, which illustrates its ability to escape the niche market that a lot of 90s rap like Wu-Tang and Paris were catering to, like impoverished urban areas

The songs *Umi Says* and *Love* by Mos Def evoked fairly similar responses from all my participants, primarily that Mos Def had much more positive, inspirational overtones, and there were subtle references to Islam being his force of inspiration, but there was also a lot of confusion and dismay over the ambiguous nature of *Umi Says* and Mos Def's message about wanting black people to be free. This was also pretty much what I had expected from my subjects in their perceptions of his messages, as Mos Def does make some pretty specific references to Islam which may exclude non-Muslims with little background knowledge of the religion, but he is also quite positive and non-threatening towards white people in his lyrics, which allowed my subjects to feel less threatened. My subjects also pointed out that Mos Def probably had a more traditional Islamic background because of his lack of violent lyrics and positive overtones, which indicates my subjects' knowledge and preconception that orthodox Islam is not based on violence, but peace and love.

Starting with Parker's response to *Love*, he said, "I think that the main thing the song's about is how love is his main influence for writing music." He goes on to say he didn't notice much in relation to Islam, but after seeing Allah mentioned twice, he started looking for more Islamic tones, and noticed many subtle references. He went on to say, "He probably follows a more peaceful, orthodox Islam as opposed to like the Wu-Tang and all that. I guess I don't really have much to go off of besides the tone and the couple times he mentions Allah having good, positive, messages and characteristics." This was what I had expected Parker to get from the song, and I was impressed that he pinpointed Mos Def's Islamic affiliation just through his positive lyrical tones and subtle Islamic references, knowing that Parker didn't have that much background knowledge on the religion.

In reaction to *Umi Says*, I received very similar responses from Anna, Marvin, and Garrett. It could be easily summed up in Garrett's comment, "He wants black people to be free... free from what? That's vague... He wants them to come together, and unite, but besides that I'm not sure." I went on to ask the difference between this song and the rest that we'd listened to, and the general response was also manifest in Garrett's comment, "This one was a lot more positive, not angry at all. There is no object of the evil, like the other ones pretty much named 'whitey' as the enemy, or at least Paris and Wu-Tang did." They all said they hardly noticed Islamic references, if at all, with Anna saying, "he mentions 'One God,' so that's sort of religious, but there's one God in a lot of different religions." This was definitely expected, as Mos Def hardly makes any specific references to religion or Islam in this song besides his "One God" and "one Light," lyrics, but the title and references to "abi" and "umi" are Arabic for mother and father, if my research is correct, which could be an implicit connection to Islam. Of course, I did not expect my subjects to pick up on this.

Native Deen and Extreme Orthodoxy

Paradise by Native Deen is not a top-selling song and it's also not by African-American rappers, which all the other songs discussed are. This band is popular with Muslim youth who are very observant of traditional Islamic values and rituals, and the artist raps about how to be a good Muslim, the hardships

accompanied by being a strict Muslim in America because of America's materialist and highly sexualized culture. As American culture is so often to counter to the values of those who observe conservative Islam, *Native Deen* has never become mainstream and likely never will, but I thought it would be very interesting to hear my participants' reactions to the song. *Paradise* is focused on how a good Muslim should act in order to get into heaven.

The general reaction was extremely interesting and also fairly expected, which was extreme distaste for the song's lyrical content and "preaching" style, as well as laughter and amusement, and even contempt. Three of my participants laughed immediately after listening to song or throughout it, and Parker, who didn't, was probably the most tolerant of it, but expressed his distaste for the preaching style of it. As I mentioned before, all of my participants are non-religious, so this certainly went into their distaste for such a religiously charged song. One comment which I felt summed up much of the general reaction to the song was Garrett's, "it just reminded me of, you know, those Christian rock bands, which usually just preach about love and stuff I guess, but the thing that gets me the most is that those bands are like, 'Jesus loves you, and love one another, and in general things will be ok,' but this song was like, 'Do what I say, or you're going to Hell!' and that really turned me off of it. Like he seems to be angry at me. Like I'm his enemy." This was not surprising for me as the interviewer, because I knew they would not be able to relate to highly conservative Islamic values, which this song never strays from. Something I found interesting and also characteristic of pretty much every subjects' response was Marvin's comment, "Where did you find this? Did you look up 'crazy shit,' on Google or something?" This illustrates, very poignantly, how I believe many unknowledgeable, liberal, non-Muslim students on the U of I campus would react to extremely orthodox Muslims' beliefs and values. The fact is, many white, non-Muslims from the same socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural background as my subjects have no knowledge of traditional Muslim beliefs, and that proceeds to having little respect for those beliefs and values when they are presented, like through this song. For instance, Anna pointed out the lyrics, "'Sisters acting like they're hot, Muslims smoking pot, It happens a lot' (laughter) like that is really pretty radical to me," but what she doesn't realize or have respect for is that using drugs is *haram* in Islam, and women showing off their bodies is also very unIslamic in

many cultural traditions. This is very opposite to American cultural tradition, where using marijuana is often socially acceptable and sexualizing women is extremely prevalent and accepted. All of my subjects pointed out that this was probably the most orthodox of all of the artists I presented to them, which I also expected them to recognize.

Final Thoughts and Conclusions

I asked my interviewees a few final questions to end the interview, including if they would listen to any of the songs or artists again after the interview, who they thought the artists' intended audiences were, if they thought most people who listened to these songs were oblivious of their messages or not, and if being white and non-Muslim has affected their choices in listening to hip-hop, Islamic-influenced or not.

The responses to if they would listen to any of these songs or artists again was varied, with a general trend towards the fact that they would likely listen to Lupe Fiasco and Mos Def again, but were not really attracted to any of the other songs, besides Anna who mentioned possibly listening to Wu-Tang Clan again because, "I liked the flow of it. Like I don't really know if I like the actual lyrics and stuff, but he the beat and the flow was really smooth and enjoyable." This was expected and makes sense in connection to their white, non-Muslim backgrounds because Lupe Fiasco and Mos Def were the most commercially popular contemporary artists, likely because of their non-violent and non-threatening tones towards white people and also their either subtle, or complete lack of, Islamic messages. The others were more directed towards either oppressed blacks in urban areas or highly traditional Muslims, which all presented threatening ideologies towards my white, non-Muslim participants. These conclusions were further backed up by my participants responses to who the artists' intended audiences were, which was, in general, what I just mentioned.

My participants pretty much all said that they believed most people who listened to these songs were quite oblivious to actual messages of the songs, and only after a frequent listening to these songs or reading with the lyrics, like they did, would most people get the full message and tones, especially the Islamic ones. Parker expressed an opposite reaction at first, but he

conceded that he probably was only able to get most of the message because he was reading the lyrics along with the song, which he almost never does in his everyday life. He also mentioned how, “If it had just come on the radio... I’d probably just bob my head, and it wouldn’t really register. If it was on my Ipod, I’d probably get it easier, like sometimes when I listen to a song I don’t really pay attention, but other times I do and it get the message pretty quickly. It depends on if you actually own the song or not, but I feel like if you listen to a song a few times, you’ll pick up a few phrases. Like ‘this one’s talking about bombing,’ or ‘this one’s talking about killing cops.’ This is a fair analysis, in my opinion, and I think this was a good way to illustrate the average person’s ability to pick up the message of a song in hip-hop, including Islamic hip-hop. When asked if my participants actively listen to either secular or Islamic-influenced hip-hop, or have they ever looked up information on Islam on their own time after listening to Islamic-influenced hip-hop, there was a unanimous response of “no.” This was also definitely expected, especially after having pretty much finished the interviews and learning how little my participants knew about the general background of Islam, the NOI, and the Five-Percent Nation.

Finally, when asked the question, “Do you think that being white and non-Muslim has any affect on your choice of hip-hop, whether it be Islamic-influenced or not?” my participants generally had the same responses, as well. They basically said that, besides the Native Deen song, their race or religious background didn’t have much of an effect on their choices, and that, as Marvin expressed, “mostly, it doesn’t make a difference, and I just don’t pick up on it. I just listen to the flow of it.” Anna made the comment, “when I listen to hip-hop it’s mostly because I’ll find it on a station with the most popular music, and I never notice that they have any Islamic background or anything. I just like to dance to hip-hop because it has such a good beat and stuff,” and this really sums up and illustrates what I thought would be the case for my participants. For Native Deen, there was the general reaction that, as Garrett said, “that one is so obviously intended for devout orthodox Muslims, but the other ones don’t make me want to listen to them any less, necessarily, because I’m white or non-Muslim,” and Parker made the comment, “I think my race and the experiences I’ve had because of my race have the most impact on whether I’d like a song and how I relate to it,

but other songs I just like cuz it's damn good . . . [except for] the last one, I didn't like but not because I wasn't Muslim... I just don't like being preached to." This was definitely expected, as I had figured that most white, non-Muslims who listened to hip-hop didn't notice the Islamic themes or even care about them, but instead were mostly listening because it was easy to dance to or had a "good flow."

For my final conclusions, I would say that I got many things out of this ethnography. For one, white, non-Muslims on the University of Illinois campus have shockingly little knowledge of the background of the religion of Islam, as well as the background on the Nation of Islam, which are both huge factors and have long histories in America. Also, prior to my interviews, my subjects had absolutely no knowledge that there were Islamic overtones in many of the songs of top-selling hip-hop artists in America, and only after being able to read along with the lyrics to these songs were they able to recognize some of these overtones, and even then they had a hard time making connections between the content and messages of the songs and the Islamic-affiliations of the artists, especially Wu-Tang Clan and Paris. There were mixed reactions to whether they would listen to any of the songs I played after the interview, with most of them saying they'd listen to the more universal, non-race related orthodox Islamic artists (besides the radically conservative Native Deen), and a general reaction that they believed that most white, non-Muslims who listen to these artists were not catching any of the references to the songs, and only with the lyrics printed out were they able to catch them. My interviewees identified with traditional white, American culture and had a very hard time understanding Islamic values and beliefs, and even expressed distaste and mild to severe contempt for them, as illustrated in the reactions to Native Deen's song. My subjects also occasionally felt alienated by Wu-Tang Clan and Paris's lyrics because of their condemnation of the white, dominant majority in America, and at least one of my interviewees seemed to identify with American dominance and felt offense in response to Lupe Fiasco's allegations in *American Terrorist* of America's oppression of minorities. However, my subjects were not as intolerant or against Islamic values as I had thought they might be, at least in their general reactions stating that they realized Islamic totalitarianism was different than traditional Islam. They expressed the attitude that orthodox Islam was about peace and understanding, and that this was often

skewed by people misinterpreting the holy book, which happens in all religions, not just Islam, after listening to *American Terrorist*. There was the general reaction that they often listen to hip-hop not for the lyrical content or the message, but for the flow and their ability to dance to the songs.