THE JOURNAL OF HIP HOP STUDIES

"Is There a Heaven for a Gangsta?": Hip Hop, Spirituality, and Heaven

Cassandra D. Chaney

Abstract

A content analysis was conducted on the lyrics of 24 Hip Hop songs to identify how Black male Hip Hop artists discuss heaven. The songs were released between 1993 and 2015 and phenomenology was the theoretical foundation on which the themes were identified. I propose that Black Hip Hop artists create a heaven that reflects their own experiences, values, and traditions, envision a heaven where the weak and oppressed receive vindication from the indignities suffered on earth as well as a way to connect with dead loved ones. Essentially, Black Hip Hop artists' expressions of heaven acknowledge racial experiences, demonstrates their belief in God and/or a Higher Power, as well as their need to communicate with God and/or a Higher Power. Furthermore, Black male Hip Hop artists' expressions of heaven highlight their need to seek the direction of God and/or a Higher Power, motivates them to create positive change in their communities, and perceive heaven and/or the afterlife in ways that are based on their earthly relationships and experiences. This study was led by the following two questions: (1) How is heaven described by Black male artists in Hip Hop? (2) How do Black male Hip Hop artists conceptualizations of heaven shape their perceptions of earthly experiences? An analysis of the 24 Hip Hop lyrics revealed Black male Hip Hop artists described heaven in the following five ways: (a) Heaven as Superior to Earth; (b) Heaven as the Ultimate Reward; (c) Heaven as Reunification with Loved Ones; (d) Heaven as Segregated; (e) Heaven as Synonymous with Sensual Love. Qualitative examples are provided to support each of the aforementioned themes.

Introduction

Many artists have acknowledged Heaven in the Hip Hop community. To illustrate, the above sampling is from "Rapper's Delight," one of the first Hip Hop songs recorded in the United States. Although the release of this song occurs almost forty years ago, since that time, an increasing number of Hip Hop artists have openly discussed their views on heaven, spirituality, and the afterlife during interviews and their music. During an interview, the late Hip Hop artist actor, and activist Tupac Shakur[1] made the following statement regarding heaven: "*I believe that everything that you do bad comes back to you. So everything that I do that's bad, I'm going to suffer from it. But in my mind, I believe what I'm doing is right. So I feel like I'm going to heaven."*[2] Through these words, Shakur demonstrates he believes in heaven and makes a connection between one's actions and if one will actually go to heaven, as well as a solid belief that he, in fact, would go to heaven. However, why does heaven appeal to so many people, particularly those that support some form of Judeo-Christianity? Given the increased amount of scholarly[3] and commercial interest in God, heaven and the afterlife in best-selling novels such as *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*[4] and *The Lovely Bones*,[5] I am aware of no scholars that have specifically examined how Black artists in Hip Hop discuss heaven or how their conceptualizations of the afterlife inform their spirituality.

Significance of the Current Study

There are four reasons why this study is important. First, this study legitimizes the intellectual discussion of heaven within Hip Hop by concentrating on the most difficult experiences of the downtrodden. As stated by Michael Eric Dyson, "The best of Hip Hop culture looks beyond bigotry to embrace the heroic use of words and beats to cast light on the dark places of the black experience and the American soul. At their noblest Hip Hop artists carry the weight of the black and poor in their speech and rhymes and exorcise demons as they encounter them in their minds and in the world

---

[1] Tupac Amaru Shakur (born Lesane Parish Crooks; June 16, 1971 – September 13, 1996), also known by his stage names 2Pac and Makaveli, was an American rapper and actor.

[2] Tupac Shakur Quotes (http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/300044-i-believe-that-everything-that-you-do-bad-comes-back)

[3] Lewis V. Baldwin, "A Home in Dat Rock: Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell," *Journal of Religious Thought,* Washington*, DC 41*, no. 1 (1984): 38-57. Hertel, Bradley R. "Inconsistency of Beliefs in the Existence of Heaven and Afterlife." *Review of Religious Research 21*, no. 3 (March 1, 1980): 171-183. Ralls, Mark. "Reclaiming Heaven: What Can We Say about the Afterlife?" Christian Century 121, no. 25 (December 14, 2004): 34-39. Monica R. Miller, and Anthony B. Pinn, eds. *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*. Routledge, 2015.

[4] Mitch Albom, *The Five People You Meet In Heaven* (New York: Hachette Books, 2003).

[5] Alice Sebold, *The Lovely Bones: A Novel* (Boston: Little Brown, 2002).

around them."[6] Thus, by focusing on a multitude of Black realities, this study will further legitimize why this musical genre is a credible site for scholarly consideration.[7] Second, this work deliberately focuses on Black men whose experiences are categorically different from Black women. Specifically, Black men are substantially more likely (than Black women) to be perceived as a threat,[8] to experience police violence, be incarcerated, and be murdered by police.[9]

Third, this study contributes to and builds on current scholarship that relates to Black spirituality[10] and reveals how descriptions of heaven and spirituality relate to these constructs. In other words, this scholarly work will highlight how Hip Hop artists' perceive and discuss heaven as well as how their relationships with God and significant others inform their spirituality. Finally, this study juxtaposes earthly experiences versus those in heaven and examines how Black male mortals perceive heaven. Simply put, this study examines why the belief in heaven makes grim experiences on earth easier or more difficult to bear. Fundamentally, this study will answer the following two questions: (1) How is heaven described by Black male artists in Hip Hop? (2) How do

---

[6] Monica R. Miller, Anthony B. Pinn, and Bernard 'Bun B' Freeman, eds. *Religion in Hip Hop: Mapping the New Terrain in the US*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015, p. xiv. Michael Eric Dyson, *Holler If You Hear Me (2006)*. Basic books, 2006. Dave Marsh, *Heaven Was Detroit: From Jazz to Hip-Hop and Beyond*. Wayne State University Press, 2017. Michael Sakamoto, "Flash: Butoh, Hip-Hop, and the Urban Body in Crisis." In *Performing Utopias in the Contemporary Americas*, pp. 71-86 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017).

[7] Bakari Kitwana, *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*. (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Lindon Barrett, "Dead Men Printed: Tupac Shakur, Biggie Small, and Hip-Hop Eulogy." *Callaloo* 22, no. 2 (1999): 306-332. Alford A. Young, *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[8] Dawn Marie Dow, "The Deadly Challenges of Raising African American Boys: Navigating the Controlling Image of the 'Thug'," *Gender & Society 30*, no. 2 (2016): 161-188.

[9] Bernadette R. Hadden, Willie Tolliver, Fabienne Snowden, and Robyn Brown Manning, "An Authentic Discourse: Recentering Race and Racism as Factors that Contribute to Police Violence Against Unarmed Black or African American Men," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* (2016): 1-14. Adrienne N. Milner, Brandon J. George, and David B. Allison, "Black and Hispanic Men Perceived to Be Large Are at Increased Risk for Police Frisk, Search, and Force," *PloS One 11*, no. 1 (2016); Aymer, Samuel R. "'I Can't Breathe': A Case Study—Helping Black Men Cope with Race-Related Trauma Stemming from Police Killing and Brutality," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment 26*, no. 3-4 (2016): 367-376. Cassandra Chaney and Ray Robertson, "Armed and Dangerous?: An Examination of Fatal Shootings of Unarmed Black People by Police," *Journal of Pan African Studies 8*, no. 4 (2015): 46.

[10] Cassandra Chaney, "Religiosity and Spirituality among Members of an African American Church community: A Qualitative Analysis," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 27, no. 3 (2008): 201-234. Linda M. Chatters, Robert Joseph Taylor, Kai M. Bullard, and James S. Jackson, "Spirituality and Subjective Religiosity among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks, and Non-Hispanic Whites," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 47*, no. 4 (2008): 725-737. Anthony Reddie, "Not Just Seeing, But Really Seeing: A Practical Black Liberationist Spirituality for Re-interpreting Reality," *Black Theology* 7, no. 3 (2009): 339-365. Michael Battle, *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality*, (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

Black male Hip Hop artists conceptualizations of heaven shape their perceptions of earthly experiences?

Review of Literature

In this section, I provide a brief overview of key scholarship that relates to the experiences of African American slaves and how these experiences shaped their religious practices and conceptualizations of heaven. Included also within this overview is the salience of religion and spirituality for African Americans. Next, I provide the theoretical framework on which this study builds. Then, I describe the methodology utilized in this study. Following this, I present lyrics that support the primary themes revealed in this study.

Religion among Black Slaves

Religion is inherently a part of the African culture and its salience has historical and contemporary relevance.[11] According to John S. Mbiti, "It [religion] is by far the richest part of the African heritage. Religion is present in all areas of human life. It has dominated the thinking of African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities."[12] Of note, even when they migrate to other areas, forms of the African religious consciousness remain. Mbiti further notes: "When Africans migrate in large numbers from one part of the continent to another, or from Africa to other continents, they take religion with them. They can only know how to live within their religious context. Even if they are converted to another religion like Christianity or Islam, they do not completely abandon their traditional religion immediately: it remains with them for several generations and sometimes centuries."[13]

In a society in which they had no social power,[14] the African slave relied on religion as a form of coping. According to Eugene Genovese,[15] religion for the Black slave had the dual purpose of setting a standard for behavior and providing the reason for human suffering: "The religion of Afro-American slaves, like all religion, grew as a way of ordering the world and of providing a vantage point from which to judge it. Like all religion it laid down a basis for moral conduct and an explanation for the existence of evil and injustice."[16] Through religion and a belief a God, the slaves envisioned a heaven where the weak and oppressed would receive vindication or

---

[11] James H. Cone, "God and Black Suffering: Calling the Oppressors to Account," *Anglican Theological Review 90*, no. 4 (2008): 701-712. Stephen C. Finley, "Homoeroticism and the African-American Heterosexual Male: Quest for Meaning in the Black Church," *Black Theology 5*, no. 3 (November 1, 2007): 305-326.

[12] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2015), 10.

[13] Ibid, pp. 14-15.

[14] Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[15] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976).

[16] Berlin, Ibid, 162.

liberation and a hell where their oppressors would be damned.[17] Essentially, in a world where they held no social power, religion made life on earth bearable for the slaves.

Heaven among Black Slaves

Given their marginalized place on earth, the belief in heaven gave African slaves endurance and hope.[18] In particular, heaven's appeal is more vivid as the slaves more forcibly accept their oppressed state. In essence, heaven's most welcoming features corresponded nicely to all of the inhumane treatment endured by the slaves on earth. While earth was smelly, disorganized, chaotic, and dangerous, heaven was fragrant, clean, beautiful, and safe. Furthermore, although the slaves forcibly eat substandard food and wear tattered clothing, heaven was a place of abundant food, splendid clothes, delightful music, and running water; all luxuries denied so many slaves on earth.[19] Therefore, the African American slave relied on a God that would one day eradicate the racism, sexism, and classism that they experienced.[20]

Even though White slave masters promote the idea of racial segregation in heaven, the slaves opposed this idea. For example, Afro-American slaves rejected the slave masters' images of a heaven where Blacks and Whites would be separate and of a hell where disobedient slaves would meet their eternal fate. Instead of living their lives in a state of spiritual, emotional, and psychological despair, the slaves shaped a body of thought concerning the afterlife, which reflected their own experiences, values, and traditions. Quite simply, this collective body of thought regarding the life that began after the physical one ended gave the slaves hope and the strength to endure suffering.

Other slaves were confident that even if they were separate from their families and lost their lives, they would reunite with their loved ones in heaven. In the poem "*I'm On My Way*,"[21] a Georgia slave expressed confidence in the existence of heaven, looked forward to meeting his "brother" in heaven, and being in the presence of Jesus Christ:

If a seeker gets to heaven before I do
Look out for me, I'm on my way too.
Shout, shout, the Heaven-bound King!
Shout, shout, I'm on my way!

As one of the cornerstones of the Judeo-Christian belief system, heaven signifies

---

[17] Lewis V. Baldwin, "A Home in Dat Rock: Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell," *Journal (The) of Religious Thought Washington, DC 41*, no. 1 (1984): 38-57.

[18] Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[19] John Gordon Stackhouse, "Harleys in Heaven: What Christians have Thought of the Afterlife, & What Difference it Makes Now," *Christianity Today 47*, no. 6 (June 1, 2003): 38-41.

[20] Eric. Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2014).

[21] Federal Writers Project, *Georgia Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves* (Native American Book Publishers, 1938).

a state of total bliss, happiness, and peace after death.[22] Therefore, heaven is the reward for those who have lived a good moral life, while the afterlife reserves for those who, more often than not, have failed to foster good relationships between themselves and others and themselves and God. While religious affiliation and church attendance are main predictors of belief in heaven and the afterlife, a prohibitive attitude toward premarital sexuality, abortion, and divorce laws were significant predictors of belief in the afterlife.[23]

Black Religiosity and Spirituality

Although used interchangeably, it is important to make a distinction between "religiosity" and "spirituality." Over a decade ago, Mattis[24] categorized religiosity with organized worship and spirituality as "the internalization of positive values" religion as "a path" and spiritualty as "an outcome" and religion being tied to worship while spirituality being associated with relationships. However, there are racial distinctions regarding the salience of these constructs. Of note, Taylor and Chatters[25] find that when compared with Whites, African American and Caribbean Blacks were substantially more likely than Whites are to report that "both religion and spirituality" are important and less likely to indicate "just spirituality" or "neither" is important. Even given the utilization of self-report measures, African American Blacks are more likely than Caribbean Blacks and non-Hispanic Whites to indicate high levels of being spiritual and spirituality being an important facet of their lives.[26] Furthermore, Chaney's[27] subsequent work reveals religiosity links to external behaviors and internalized beliefs, and spirituality associates with acknowledging a "spiritual reality" and connecting to God. Furthermore, this scholar also found an interconnection between religiosity and spirituality that embodied having quality relationships with others, being mentally and emotionally connected to God, and doing what God requires.

For many African Americans, spirituality is associated with being involved with a religious organization, having a personal and intimate relationship with God, or

---

[22] Abbott L. Ferriss, "Religion and the Quality of Life," *Journal of Happiness Studies 3*, no. 3 (2002): 199-215.

[23] John G. Richardson and Georgie Ann Weatherby, "Belief in an Afterlife as Symbolic Sanction." *Review of Religious Research 25*, no. 2 (1983): 162-169.

[24] Jacqueline S. Mattis, "African American Women's Definitions of Spirituality and Religiosity," *Journal of Black Psychology 26*, no. 1 (2000): 101-122.

[25] Robert Joseph Taylor and Linda M. Chatters, "Importance of Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and Non-Hispanic Whites," *The Journal of Negro Education* (2010): 280-294.

[26] Robert Joseph Taylor, Linda M. Chatters and James S. Jackson, "Correlates of spirituality among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks in the United States: Findings from the National Survey of American Life," *Journal of Black Psychology 35*, no. 3 (2009): 317-342.

[27] Cassandra Chaney, "Religiosity and Spirituality among Members of an African-American Church Community: A qualitative analysis," *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought 11*, (2008): 201-234.

frequently reading the Bible and relying in it as a source of comfort.[28] Even in terms of health management, hope and strength were hallmarks of spirituality.[29] In her examination of the salience of religiosity and spirituality among African American congregants and church staff in a Baptist Church in the Midwest, Chaney's[30] qualitative study indicated fellowship, evangelism and discipleship, "positive internal experiences," and strong family ties were the greatest benefits of church involvement for Blacks. In addition, this scholar found the provisions of "spiritual guidance," advice, hope, and social supports were the most salient features of religious involvement among church staff. Just as "positive internal experiences" allowed members of the church to best cope with problems, so did the provision of hope. According to Chaney, this hope was provided when members were faced with economic and financial difficulties and allowed them to feel as though they could "get through anything" with God's help.

Theoretical Framework

The current study builds on a phenomenological framework, which focuses on the salience of words in a social context.[31] According to Lenore Langsdorf,[32] "Phenomenology is, at the very least, a choice to study the environment from a situated location is actual experience and oriented toward particular aspects of the spectrum of human activity." Since language is one of the most influence factors in social interaction, a phenomenological approach allows scholars to understand the relationship between what one says or communicates; and the lived experiences of African Americans. As communication is central to the lives of Black men,[33] a phenomenological approach allowed me to examine "particular aspects of the spectrum of human activity," or specifically the relationship between what male Hip Hop artists said about heaven as well as their actual experiences on earth.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach that examined contextual themes present in song lyrics. In order to determine the songs chosen, this involves several steps. The first step involves determining all Hip Hop songs with the word "heaven" in the song title. The second step involved expanding the selection criteria, when appropriate. Since several songs specifically discussed heaven yet did not specifically use the word

---

[28] Bush, Ibid.

[29] Dorothy Headley Knox, "Spirituality: A Tool in the Assessment and Treatment of Black Alcoholics and Their Families," *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 2, no. 3-4 (1985): 31-44.

[30] Chaney, Ibid.

[31] Melvin Pollner, *Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[32] Lenore Langsdorf, "Why Phenomenology in Communication Research?," *Human Studies 17*, no. 1 (1994): 1.

[33] Mark P. Orbe, "'Remember, It's Always Whites' Ball': Descriptions of African American Male Communication," *Communication Quarterly 42*, no. 3 (1994): 287-300. Lauren Freeman, "Phenomenology of Racial Oppression," *Knowledge Cultures 3*, no. 1 (2015): 24-24.

"heaven" in the song title, I decide to include Hip Hop songs that did not have the word "heaven" in the title. Sole singers and groups were included in the analysis if the song's title and/or lyrics met the aforementioned criteria. This involves analyzing song titles from the following websites: (1) 20 Hip Hop Songs about Heaven and Hell http://www.sosoactive.com/hip-hop-songs-about-heaven-and-hell/and; and (2) Second, the complete lyrics of all songs were then analyzed, which were obtained from the following websites: http://www.aaalyrics.com/, http://www.lyrics-now.com/, http://www.metrolyrics.com, http://www.sing365.com/index.html and http://www.songs-lyrics.net/ [The song title, singer or singers, year released, the individual or individuals that composed and produced the song and the genre are provided in Table 1].

Table 1

Song Title, Singer, Year Released, Composer, and Genre

Song Title	**Singer/s**	**Year**	**Writer(s)/Producer(s)**	**Genre**
When I Get to Heaven	Ice Cube	1993	Writers: O'Shea Jackson; Brian Gallow (P/K/A BRIAN G.); Marvin Gaye; James Nyx Producer: Brian G	Hip Hop
Suicidal Thoughts	Notorious B.I.G.	1994	Writers: Christopher Wallace and Robert Hall Producer: Lord Finesse	Hip Hop
Heaven Ain't Hard to Find	Tupac Shakur	1996	Writers: Shakur; QD3 Producer(s):	Hip Hop
I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto	Tupac Shakur	1997	Writers: Soulshock; Kenneth Karlin	Hip Hop
I'll Be Missing You	Puff Daddy and Faith (featuring 112)	1997	Writers: Faith Evans; Sauce Money; Sting; Albert E. Brumley (not credited on album)	Hip Hop

			Producers: Puffy Daddy; Stevie J	
Ask Heaven	Heavy-D (featuring Chico DeBarge)	1999	Writers: Heavy D; Tony Dofat; Erick Sermon; The Ummah	Hip Hop
Tha Crossroads	Bone Thugs N Harmony	1999	Writers: Byron McCane II, Anthony Henderson, Steven Howse; Charles Scruggs Producer: D J U-Neek	Hip Hop
I Miss You	DMX (featuring Faith Evans)	2002	Writer: Earl Simmons	Hip Hop
Heaven	Nas (featuring Jully Black)	2002	Writers: Ajene Griffith (aka "Agile"); Karl Amani Wailoo (aka "Saukrates")	Hip Hop
Heaven	Scarface (featuring Kelly Price)	2002	Writers: B. Jordan, K. West, T. Jones, K. Price, R. Moore Jr. Producers: T-Mix; Kanye West	Hip Hop
Gotta Make it to Heaven	50 Cent	2003	Writers: C. Jackson, D. Wesley, Alla Borisovna Pugacheva Producer: Megahertz	Hip Hop
Is There a Heaven 4 a Gangsta	Master P	2005	Writers: Producers: Master P; Beats by the Pound	Hip Hop
Heaven	John Legend (featuring Kanye	2006	Writers: John Legend and Kanye West	Hip Hop

	West)		Producers: John Legend; Kanye West	
Live In The Sky	T. I (featuring Jamie Foxx)	2007	Writers: C. Harris; K. McMasters Producer: Keith Mack	Hip Hop
Heaven	Underground Kingz (UGK)	2007	Writer(s): Chad L. Butler, Joseph Johnson, Bernard James Freeman Producers: Chad Lamont Butler (aka "Pimp C"); N. O. Joe	Hip Hop
Hip-Hop Heaven	One Be Lo	2007	Writers: 14KT (of the Lab Techs) Producers: 14KT (of the Lab Techs)	Hip Hop
Heaven at Night	Kid Cudi	2009	Writer: Scott Ramon Seguro Mescudi (Kid Cudi) Producer: Kareem Johnson	Hip Hop
Heavenly Father	Fat Joe (featuring Lil Wayne)	2010	Producers: Raw Uncut	Hip Hop
Heaven and Hell	Kendrick Lamar (featuring Alori Joh)	2010	Writer: Kendrick Lamar Producer: Tommy Black	Hip Hop
All Dogs go to Heaven (Nate Dogg Tribute)	The Game	2011	Writer: Jayceon Terrell Taylor	Hip Hop

			Producer:	
I'm in Heaven (When You Kiss Me)	Eminem (featuring 'Lil Wayne and Tyga)	2011	Writer: Eninem Producers: Eninem; Dr. Dre	Hip Hop
Heaven	Jay-Z (featuring Justin Timberlake)	2013	Writers: Adrian Younge; Michael Stripe; Peter Buck; Shawn Carter; Justin Timberlake; Michael Mills; Terius Nash; Timothy Mosley; Jermone Harmon; William Thomas Berry Producers: Timbaland; Jerome "J-Roc" Harmon	Hip Hop
Heaven Only Knows	Towkio (featuring Chance the Rapper, Lido, and Eryn Allen Kane)	2015	Writer: Towkio Producer: Lido	Hip Hop
Black Heaven	Boosie Badazz (featuring J. Cole and Keyshia Cole)	2015	Writers: Keyshia Cole; Torence Hatch Producers: Kenoe; Samuel AsH	Hip Hop

Second, after all songs were identified, the next part of the study involves: (1) identifying whether the song was provided by a solo artist or group; (2) determining the year that the song was released; (3) providing the individual or individuals that wrote and composed the song; (4) providing direct quotes from the songs that directly supported heaven; (5) providing a rationale for why the selected quotes directly support heaven; and (6) running statistical analyses on the aforementioned. The data were entered into a Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and frequencies revealed 12 songs (50% of the total number of songs) were provided by the artist and a featured singer or singers,[34] 10 songs (42% of the total number of songs) were provided by a sole-artist, and two songs (8%) were provided by a group (e.g., Bone Thugs N Harmony; Underground Kings). In addition, the artist wrote three songs (12%), the artist and another individual or individuals wrote 10 songs (38%) and 13 songs (50%) were written by an individual or individuals other than the artist. This systematic approach allowed me to respond to the questions of interest and established the validity and reliability of the research.[35]

Third, all songs were content analyzed using an open-coding process.[36] In order to determine the themes that would serve as the focus of the current study, words and phrases were the units of analysis. This involves a *word-by-word* and *line by line* examination of the complete lyrics of all songs, keeping track of any emerging themes that were present, and using those themes to answer the question of scholarly interest. Essentially, this method allows me to determine the patterns within and between songs as well as identify the themes regarding heaven described in the songs.

To further increase the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of these categories, I create a Word file that includes the song title, author, and complete lyrics of all songs that were included in the study. An outside coder trained in qualitative methods receives instruction to become familiar with the typologies identified by the author, to thoroughly read the lyrics of all songs, and indicate in a separate column the typology identified in all songs. After a 97% coding reliability rate was established between me and the outside coder, it was determined that a working coding system had been established, and thus minimized the likelihood that personal biases from the author informed the outcomes presented herein.[37]

Presentation of the Findings

There were 24 songs related to heaven. Specifically, an individual or individuals other than the artist wrote ten songs (42%), the artist and another individual or individuals wrote eight songs (33%), and the artist wrote six songs (25%). In addition, seven songs (30%) were produced in the 1990s; 11 songs (46%) were produced between 2000 and 2010; and seven songs (24%) were produced between 2011 and 2015.

Five artists provide a song with the title *Heaven*: (1) *Heaven* by Nas (featuring Jully Black) (2002); (2) *Heaven* by Scarface (featuring Kelly Price) (2002); (3) *Heaven* by

---

[34] A White male Hip-Hop artist provided one song. Eminem offered the song *I'm in Heaven When You Kiss Me* (2011) (featuring 'Lil Wayne and Tyga). However, he was included in the analysis because both of his featured artists were Black.

[35] Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[36] Anselm Leonard Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Vol. 15 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

[37] As the analysis of song lyrics did not include interview statements from any of the artists, one must note that the conclusions may not necessarily reflect the actual meaning that was the conceptualization of the writer and/or artist.

John Legend (featuring Kanye West) (2006); (4) *Heaven* by Underground Kingz (UGK) (2007); and (5) *Heaven* by Jay-Z (Featuring Justin Timberlake) (2013). Furthermore, although the majority of artists provide one song (24 artists or 96% of the total number of songs analyzed), Tupac Shakur (4%) produced two songs related to heaven, namely (1) Heaven Ain't Hard to find (1996); and (2) I wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto (1997).[38]

A qualitative content analysis of the 24 Hip Hop lyrics revealed Hip Hop artists described heaven in the following five ways: (a) Heaven as the Ultimate Reward; (b) Heaven as Segregated; (c) Heaven as Reunification with Loved Ones; (d) Heaven as Superior to Earth; (e) Heaven as Synonymous with Physical Activities. *Heaven as the Ultimate Reward* exemplified a description of heaven as the reward for having experienced and lived through difficulties on earth. *Heaven as Segregated* exemplified a description of heaven where the marginalized experiences of Blacks on earth is distinctly separate from others in heaven. *Heaven as Reunification with Loved Ones* exemplified a depiction of heaven as the site where those on earth who lost friends and loved ones in death reunite with them in heaven. *Heaven as Superior to Earth* exemplified a description of heaven in which the treatment of Blacks is superior to what is the experience on earth. *Heaven as Synonymous with Physical Activities* exemplified a description of physical (erotic) contact as being tantamount to heaven.

Of the five typologies, *Heaven as the Ultimate Reward* was demonstrated in 5 songs (20%), *Heaven as Segregated* was demonstrated in 5 songs (20%); *Heaven as Reunification with Loved Ones* was demonstrated in 4 songs (16%); *Heaven as Superior to Earth* was demonstrated in 4 songs (16%); and *Heaven as Synonymous with Physical Activities* was demonstrated by 2 songs (8%). [Theme of Heaven, Description of Heaven, Lyrical Examples, and Songs and Singer/s that demonstrate the Theme of Heaven are present in Table 2].

Table 2

Theme of Heaven, Description of Heaven, Lyrical Example, Songs and Singers that Demonstrate the Theme of Heaven

Theme of Heaven	Description of Heaven	Lyrical Example	Songs and Singer/s that Demonstrate the Theme of Heaven
Heaven as Superior to Earth	A description of heaven in which the treatment of Blacks is superior to what is the experience on earth.	"And they won't call me a nigga, When I Get To Heaven" "Hell it hurts just to	• *When I Get to Heaven* by Ice Cube (1993) • *Heaven* by Nas

[38] Derek Iwamoto, "Tupac Shakur: Understanding the Identity Formation of Hyper-Masculinity of a Popular Hip-Hop Artist." *The Black Scholar* 33, no. 2 (2003): 44-49.

		fathom the thought wishing that I fled the Earth"	(featuring Jully Black) (2002)
Heaven as the Ultimate Reward	A description of heaven as the reward for having experienced and lived through difficulties on earth.	"I gotta make it to heaven, for going through hell I gotta make it to heaven I hope I make it to heaven" "So when I die I hope I live in the sky"	• *Gotta Make It To Heaven* by 50 Cent (2003) • *Live in the Sky* by T. I. (featuring Jamie Foxx) (2007)
Heaven as Reunification With Loved Ones	A description of heaven as the site where those on earth who lost friends and loved ones in death and/or are reunited with them in heaven.	"See you at the crossroads, crossroads, crossroads So you won't be lonely" "I know you smilin' down up there in black heaven I know you're really proud of me up there in black heaven I know you smilin' down on me in black heaven Thinkin' of you til the day we meet again"	• *Tha Crossroads* by Bone Thugs N Harmony (1999) • Black Heaven by Boosie Badazz (featuring J. Cole and Keyshia Cole) (2015)
Heaven as Segregated	A description of heaven where the marginalized experiences of Blacks on earth is distinctly separate from others in heaven.	"I wonder if it's a heaven up there for real G's For all the niggas in the game, in the game - uhh~!" "And if I die, I wonda if heaven's	• *Heaven* by Underground Kingz (UGK)

		got a ghetto. I wonder if heaven's got a ghetto" "Black heaven is a place where people like me go Up there in black heaven, black heaven"	• *I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto* by Tupac • Boosie Badazz (featuring J. Cole and Keyshia Cole) (2015)
Heaven as Synonymous with Physical Activities	A description of heaven as being synonymous with physical activities (e.g., sensuality, drug inducement, meditation).	"I'm making love to your mind baby Heaven ain't hard to find" "I'm in heaven when you kiss me Heaven when you kiss me You were sent to me from Wonderland!"	• *Heaven Ain't Hard to Find* by Tupac Shakur (1993) • *I'm in Heaven (When You Kiss Me)* by Eminem (featuring 'Lil Wayne and Tyga) (2011)

Discussion

Consistent with Baldwin's[39] earlier work, Black men in Hip Hop envision a heaven that reflects their experiences, values, and traditions. In particular, they believe in God and/or a Higher Power and look forward to seeing a heaven where the weak and oppressed would enjoy vindication or liberation and a hell where oppressors would be damned. This perspective on the afterlife represents one important example of how slaves fashioned a neo-Christianity.

[39] Lewis V, Baldwin, "A Home in Dat Rock: Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell," *Journal (The) of Religious Thought Washington, DC 41*, no. 1 (1984): 38-57.

Heaven as the Ultimate Reward

Inherent to the Judeo-Christian belief system is the desire to be in the presence of God and heaven as the ultimate reward. In *Gotta Make it to Heaven,* 50 Cent shared how his near-death experience ("Been to ICU once, I ain't going again") and the sudden deaths of many of his friends ("First Zee got murked [murdered], then Raw got murked [murdered]. An homies still in the hood, why he ain't getting hurt") motivated him to pray to God ("God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference") and desire to go to heaven as a reward for a challenged life on earth ("I gotta make it to heaven, for going through hell, I gotta make it to heaven I hope I make it to heaven"). One might ask, "What is hell?" Well, for 50 Cent, hell is being in an intensive care unit (ICU) and losing "homies" or good friends "in the hood" to street violence. Even still, Black-on-Black crime was a reality that he was not sure whether he should accept, change, or deal with to the best of his ability ("God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference"). Thus, in a chaotic world, keeping heaven foremost in his thoughts helped him achieve and maintain serenity on earth.

Heaven is also the reward for caring for one's family and seeing these ones again. In *Ask Heaven*, Heavy D acknowledges the sacrifices that his parents made for him ("Mom and dad, bustin they ass, 14 years, In the night they would pass, each other, Tryin to raise six of us - one sister, four brothers, Two deceased, laid to rest, And I miss you cats, what I wouldn't give to bring you back, To fill the void that you left in my heart, Your last breath really tore me apart, And I'm sorry if I never said I loved you enough, I truly did") yet believed they will be waiting for him in heaven ("Ask, heaven, heaven - is there room for me? Cause I believe, that's where you'll be, Waiting for me, at the end of a stairway to heaven").

In addition, Black males that long for better conditions on earth will be satisfied when they reunite with loved ones in heaven. In *I'll Be Missing You,* Puff Daddy and Faith (featuring 112), reminisced about the sudden passing of their good friend and husband, Biggie Smalls.[40] Even though his death was untimely ("I'll be missing you, Thinkin' of the days, when you went away; What a life to take, what a bond to break, I'll be missing you") these artists were confident that Big is watching over them from heaven ("It's kinda hard with you not around (yeah); Know you in heaven smilin' down (eheh); Watchin' us while we pray for you; Every day we pray for you") and when they die, they will be reunited with Big again in heaven ("Somebody tell me why, One Black Morning; When this life is over; I know I'll see your face"). Of note, those on earth "pray for" Biggie, which may suggest that they hope that even though he engaged in inappropriate behaviors on earth, he will finally find God's favor in heaven.

[40] Christopher George Latore Wallace (May 21, 1972 – March 9, 1997), better known by his stage names The Notorious B.I.G, Biggie, or Biggie Smalls, was an American rapper.

Religiosity and Heaven

Some Black males touted religion as the basis for hope and compared religious experiences to being in heaven. In *Heaven*, Scarface (featuring Kelly Price) proudly declares that he is serious about religion (”Listening to different scriptures, they teach on God, and if you ain't never met him, don't speak on God, I'm serious about religion, this just ain't no song”), his firm belief in the Holy Spirit that positively changed his outlook on life (“And the voice is much louder than the voice you thought, was the voice of the holy spirit, you'll change your life when you hear it, and the next morning you wake up and the world will look lighter, the grass greener and the sun brighter”), and how his life changed when he allowed God in his life (“I know the feeling firsthand, I've witnessed the sight, when I allowed the lord to come in my life, and it was like heaven”). In the wake of asking forgiveness for his sins (“I ask him forgiveness for every sin I commit, hoping he gone let me stay on his list, I'm trying to get to Heaven”) this Black male is aware that God communicates directly to him through His holy spirit.

In the tune *I Miss You b*y DMX (Featuring Faith Evans), this Black male Hip Hop artist dedicated this song to his deceased grandmother. This woman used to encourage him (“You used to say "Don't worry, it's gone be ok"), give him needed discipline (“I remember the time when I was like, ten; crept up in the neighbor's yard, yeah, being hardheaded; you told me that I would get it; you said it and boy, did I get it) did so with love (“But after you spanked me, you hugged me, kissed me on my forehead, and told me that you loved me, and I saw that it hurt you more than it hurt me”) but prayed to see his grandmother again (“I and like when everything comes to an end, I pray that I go to heaven to see you again, amen**”).** In *Da Crossroads,* the group Bone Thugs-N-Harmony openly wondered why death occurs (“Can somebody anybody tell me why? Hey, can somebody anybody tell me why we die, we die?**”**), lamented the murder of a family member that was murdered in front of his home (“I miss my uncle Charles y'all, And he shouldn’t be gone, in front of his home”) as well as confirmed that they would see him and others in heaven (“See you as the crossroads, so you won’t be lonely”).

Condemnation of Religion in Hip Hop

Not every musical offering heralds religion. Case in point: In *When I Get to Heaven,* Ice Cube criticizes Christianity and Catholicism (“Four hundred years of getting’ our ass kicked, by so-called Christians and Catholics”), the reason why many attend church (“The church ain't nothin' but a fashion show”), and the end of racism (“And they won't call me a nigga, When I Get to Heaven”). In these lyrics, Ice Cube placed religion in a social and historical context. Even though Black people in America are more religious than other racial groups,[41] historically, Whites that oppressed the

[41] Cassandra Chaney, "Religiosity and Spirituality among Members of an African American Church Community: A Qualitative Analysis," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 27, no. 3 (2008): 201-234.

slaves proudly touted themselves as Christians.

In support of the lyrics offered by Ice Cube, Nas also condemns the behavior of many professed-Christians. He began *Heaven* (featuring Jully Black) by questioning the motives of those who are religious and wondered whether they would change their thoughts and behaviors if they had a glimpse of heaven ("If Heaven was a mile away), would I pack up my bags and leave this world behind? (If Heaven was a mile away), or save it all for you? (If Heaven was a mile away), Would I, fill the tank up with gas and be out the front door in a FLASH"). In particular, Nas's condemnation of religious leaders that "do the devil's work" by sexually molesting children ("I know you heard the noise, Preachers touching on altar boys, Sodomizing not realizing God is watching before the Lord, How can they do the devil's work?), and engaging in promiscuous acts ("A man giving another man head in church") causes him to regret his existence on earth ("Hell it hurts just to fathom the thought wishing that I fled the Earth."). Thus, it seemed that a critical incongruence between what is said and what is actually done in the name of religion caused Nas to wonder whether those that promote heaven would actually see it themselves. Other Hip Hop artists believed religion in itself, is not a conduit to heaven.

In *Heaven* (featuring Justin Timberlake), the Hip Hop mogul Jay-Z question whether individuals have seen heaven ("Have you ever been to heaven? Have you ever seen the gates? Have you bow down to your highness? And do you know how heaven taste?"), and admitted to losing his faith in religion ("That's me in the corner; that's me in the spotlight; Losing my religion"). It was interesting that Jay-Z reiterated the same negative assessment of religion that was initially offered 25 years earlier by the alternative rock band, R. E. M. in the song, "Losing my Religion."[42] Similarly, in *Heaven Only Knows*, Towkio (featuring Lido, Eryn Allen Kane & Chance The Rapper), took seriously his role ("It's my job to make them think, and make music that they feel") and only heaven is aware of what the course of his life will be ("Where the end will go? Will I ever know? Heaven only knows"). Instead of promoting religious beliefs that support the Judeo-Christian belief in heaven, these artists believe it is their "job" to provoke critical thought and create their own spirituality,[43] separate from religion.

Intense Longing for Heaven

Like the previous artists, T. I. is saddened by earthly realities and deeply longs to see heaven. In *Live in the Sky* (featuring Jamie Foxx), he discusses how the feelings

---

[42] "Losing My Religion" is a song by the American alternative rock band R.E.M. The song was released as the first single from the group's 1991 album Out of Time.

[43] Robert Joseph Taylor and Linda M. Chatters, "Importance of Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and Non-Hispanic Whites," *The Journal of Negro Education* (2010): 280-294. Robert Joseph Taylor, Linda M. Chatters, and James S. Jackson, "Correlates of Spirituality among African Americans and Caribbean blacks in the United States: Findings from the National Survey of American Life," *Journal of Black Psychology 35*, no. 3 (2009): 317-342.

associated with losing loved ones ("I like to dedicate this song to anybody who every lost somebody, to the grave, to the streets, to the jail cell, I done been in situations where I done had to cope with all three you know what I'm saying, I feel like the only thing I ain't done yet is die you know...") motivates him to remember the afterlife ("Just remember where you live while you're here ain't half as important as where you're gonna live when you leave"). Also, this Hip Hop artist is hopeful that despite "life's ups and downs" that he will live in heaven ("So when I die I hope I live in the sky.. All my folk who ain't survive, may they live in the sky... Tell God I wanna fly and let me live in the sky..."). In addition, T. I. mentions many of the unique social ills that affect Black people in America, namely being murdered in front of family members ("My cousin Toot ain't have to die right in front of his son and his wife, He lost his life struggling over a gun"), death due to a drug overdose ("Over-dosed on heroin died at 22"), and inequities in the legal system that render harsh penalties to Black men ("That's the way the game structured for real niggas to suffer"). Since he has no control over these realities, he looks forward to being in heaven, a place where these earthly experiences would no longer exist.

Spirituality and Heaven

Other Black males in Hip Hop recounted physical and/or spiritual experiences that make heaven real. In *All Dogs go to Heaven (Nate Dogg Tribute)* the Game payed tribute to this influential Hip Hop pioneer. Until they enter heaven, Nate Dogg[44] and those that emulate him, smoke marijuana ("All dogs go to heaven, Til then (smoke weed everyday"), reminisce on those they lost (Easy-Z and Tupac), accept the inevitability of death ("No-one escapes death or drives to heaven in a Benz, But one things for sure, everybody gotta go"), and contemplate why God would allow someone so young to die ("Damn, he was only 41 so I'mma get high and just drink til this 40 done, But I really wanna cry, shit I really wonder why good n-ggas gotta die"). The desire to mentally, psychologically, and emotionally temporarily numb themselves from current pain may be the impetus for their meditation, alcohol consumption, and getting high. Although its message is hidden, in *Heaven at Night*, Kid Cudi detailed the experience of meditation, drinking alcohol ("Like how you feel if you drink some bud light, followed by Jag") and getting high from drugs during the night hours ("You feel so free like you're high as a kite"). For Cudi, the surreal experience of getting high ("Focus on floating, your focus is tight") was tantamount to being in heaven ("Heaven at nite…have you ever been to heaven at night?").

In contrast to Kid Cudi's use of meditation and drugs to get to "heaven at nite," other males want physical and emotional connection with a member of the opposite sex. In *Heaven Ain't Hard to Find,* Shakur earnestly spoke to a prospective lover. While he is aware of his reputation as a ladies man ("Although I know you've heard about my reputation") he is interested in making love to her body ("Touch me and let me activate

[44] Nathaniel Dwayne Hale (August 19, 1969 – March 15, 2011), better known by his stage name Nate Dogg, was an American rapper, singer, and actor.

your blood pressure, This thug pleasure helps the average man love better"), but most importantly, her mind ("I'm making love to your mind baby, Heaven aint hard to find"). Like Shakur, Eminem (featuring 'Lil Wayne and Tyga) in the song *I'm in Heaven*, spoke of sensual love ("I'm in heaven when you kiss me, show me how you miss me, Take me with you back to Wonderland") as well as how attached he feels to his lover ("You capture me with a stare, I'll follow you anywhere"). Thus, for these men, the physical love of a female can help mitigate many of their everyday stress.

While other artists spoke about their impending death, in the song "Hip-Hop Heaven" ONE.B.LO chronicled how quickly his life could end. In this musical rendering, this artist wakes up with his family ("I feel asleep early, woke up this mornin right side of the bed; The rest of the fam was sleep, I didn't want to wake 'em") and creates music ("I'm in the mood for makin some music and so I hit the basement; When it comes to writin this song, I'm not as patient") and engages in a hard day of work; only to eventually learn he is a ghost ("On my way to the room, I hear my lady on the phone; She moan, cryin and dyin inside, feelin alone; Almost finished packin, said she gotta get goin; Need a change and she can no longer live in this home; I stand lookin confused, with boxes before me; I called her name three times, she only ignored me"), is deceased and now resides in Hip Hop heaven ("She held a newspaper in her hands, it read: "Local rapper, One Be Lo, age 30, found dead"; I'm in hip-hop heaven"). Thus, it seemed that a fleeting existence on earth makes the appeal of a Hip Hop heaven all the more necessary.

Essentially, Black males in Hip Hop create a spiritual connection to heaven and present heaven as an alternative to earth that is welcoming, loving, and eternal. As previously mentioned, one of the ways they do this is by recasting heaven as a place where they will one day see their loved ones and everyday racism on earth do not exist. For example, Ice-Cube was confident that he would not called a "Nigga" in heaven and Bone Thugs N Harmony looked forward to seeing their loved ones "at the crossroads," or the junction between heaven and hell. However, embedded in every dream of life beyond death for these Black men also lied the threat of discontinuity. Thus, the living wondered whether they would retain their earthly identities in heaven, whether they will possess the memories, desires and affections that made their earthly lives unique, or the kind of heaven they would actually see.

A Racially Segregated Heaven

Other males in Hip Hop envisioned a racially segregated heaven. In *I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto,* Tupac described how an absent father ("Was it my fault poppa didn't plan it out? Broke out left me to be the man of the house") led to his decision to sell drugs to support his family ("I couldn't take it, had to make a profit; Found a block, got a glock, and I clocked grip, Makin G's was my mission, Movin enough of this shit to get my momma out the kitchen"). In addition, Shakur mentions conditions that are "here on earth" such as racism ("I see no changes, all I see is racist faces, misplaced hate makes disgraced races") and the mass incarceration of Black men ("And ain't a secret don't conceal the fact The penitentiary's packed, and it's filled with blacks"). Shakur also discusses police violence on Black bodies in which members of law enforcement are heralded for murdering a Black person ("Cops give a damn about a negro, Pull a trigga, kill a nigga , he's a hero") which causes him to wonder "if heaven's got a ghetto" in which the aforementioned earthly experiences also exist in heaven.

In *I Wonder if Heaven Got a Ghetto*, Shakur used the indefinite article "a" to describe a heaven that is uniquely dissimilar from the heaven that most envision and hope to one day see. In Is There a Heaven 4 a Gangsta? Master P gave homage to Tupac Shakur ("Rest in peace Tupac") and acknowledged Shakur's belief in heaven ("Tupac said there's a heaven foe [for] a G"). Moreover, after admitting his regret for past behaviors ("Damn, I done did some messed up stuff") and wondering whether there is a resting place for murders like him ("But I wonder if there's a restin place for killers and gangsta niggaz like me"), he chronicles the rationale of those who began to sell drugs and who later lost their lives to those they trusted ("Look into the eyes of a killa, neighborhood drug dealer, From ghetto, hero swore he wouldn't be the next nigga, to lose his life in this dope game cocaine, He told me don't trust nobody; his best friend was the trigga man"). Ironically, like Ice-Cube and Nas (featuring Jully Black), Master P admitted that religious organizations are "full of killers and drug dealers." Therefore, it seems that "killers and drug dealers" have the capacity to embrace their religious and spiritual selves. Lastly, Master P acknowledged the Black men on Death Row in various prisons ("All y'all niggaz on Death Row, Lake Charles, Shreveport, New Mexico; R.I.P. nigga; Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, Atlanta") and wished that, in spite of their misdeeds, these men would see heaven.

Other Hip Hop artists envisioned an alternate heaven. In *Heaven* by Underground Kingz (UGK), these artists wondered whether a heaven exists for "real G's." Throughout this song "real G's" were identified as relegated members of society, namely drug dealers, murderers, and strippers ("I wonder if it's a heaven for all the drug dealers; for all the hot boys, strippers, and the thug niggas"). Of note, this group acknowledged the existence of Tupac Shakur ("I wonder if they got a spot for all the Tupacs"), and gave a nod to Black men who are incarcerated ("Dawgs in the pens and the boys with the weed spots"). Similar to the assessment of religion that was offered by Ice-Cube, this group also condemned the hypocrisy of many church leaders ("The preacher talkin' 'bout us in the pulpit; Behind closed doors he be on some gay shit"). Perhaps most noteworthy was the desire of this group to create an alternative heaven for themselves and others ("But on the cool you know what else I hope is true; they got a heaven for me and got a heaven for you, too").

Kendrick Lamar recounted a multitude of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that made the Black experience fundamentally difficult. In particular, in *Heaven and Hell*, Lamar discussed the distrust between Black men and women ("Niggas hatin', bitches hatin'"), gun violence as the cause of the untimely deaths of Black youth ("Babies dyin', bullets flyin'"). He also discussed police scrutiny ("Helicopters, police sirens") and untruthful religious leaders ("preachers lying") as well as a large number of external stressors ("Genocism, criticism, unemployment, racism; Burning buildings, AIDS victims, cancer killin' no cure; Oil spillin', turmoil, poverty stricken) and police violence against Black bodies ("police brutality kickin'"). Like Boosie Badazz, Kendrick also gave tribute to influential African Americans like Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ("Malcolm laughing, Martin laughing,") as well as earthly adversaries Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls ("Biggie spittin'; Pac is rapping). In this alternative heaven, the late Gregory Hines entertains ("Gregory tappin'"), children and angels rejoice ("Children playing, angels praying") on golden streets ("14 karat golden streets") and soul food is consumed ("Collard greens, red wine, potato yams, turkey legs").

Other Black male Hip Hop artists mentioned an alternate heaven. For example, *Black Heaven* clearly indicated the existence of a heaven that highlighted the pride, talent, and accomplishments of notable African Americans. In that track, Boosie Badazz (feat. Keyshia Cole & J. Cole) is confident that he will be a member of this alternate heaven ("Black heaven is a place where people like me go") and enjoy being in the company of famous African Americans in music and politics such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Whitney Houston, Rosa Parks, Bernie Mack, Richard Pryor, Trayvon Martin, Tupac Shakur (2Pac), Biggie Smalls, Easy-Z, Nate Dogg, Marvin Gaye, Michael Jackson, Johnny Taylor, Rodney King, James Brown, Jackie Neal, Tooki Williams, Mac Dre, and Bob Marley. Essentially, Boosie Badazz is confident these influential African Americans are pleased with his accomplishments ("I know you smilin' down up there in black heaven, I know you're really proud of me up there in black heaven, I know you smilin' down on me in black heaven, Thinkin' of you til the day we meet again"). Consequently, he knows that at the time of his death, he will immediately transport to Black heaven to greet them ("See I know one day when they bury me, I'll go straight to black heaven, black heaven"). Perhaps after contemplating the inhumane treatment that Blacks in America have endured for centuries, some Black male artists envisioned a racially segregated heaven that confirmed their historical and contemporary realities. Clearly, in a racially segregated heaven, Blacks who reside there make up a congregated throng of artists that create beautiful and harmonious music, eat soul food, and entertain one another for all eternity.

Limitations of the Current Study

This study had three limitations. For one, my focus on Black male artists in Hip Hop limits the generalizability of the findings in this study to Black female Hip Hop artists. Furthermore, that the overwhelming majority of the songs were representative of the Hip Hop genre further limits the generalizability of our findings. Secondly, as the majority of the songs were created in collaboration with or by someone other than the Black male Hip Hop artist, this makes it difficult to determine how much of the artist's "voice" is present in these songs and how much of that "voice" has been shaped by individuals other than the artist. Lastly, the songs that were analyzed in this study essentially provided a snapshot of how Black males in Hip Hop discussed spirituality and heaven. In other words, as the majority of Black male Hip Hop artists only provided one song related to spirituality and heaven, it is difficult to determine how their views may have changed or remained stable over time. In spite of these limitations, this study builds on the work of previous scholars that have studied spirituality and heaven by providing a qualitative analysis of Hip Hop songs, and placing them within a broad, social context.

Directions for Future Research

There are four ways that scholars can expand the current work. First, future research can examine how Black female Hip Hop artists discuss spirituality and heaven. Future work in this area may determine that the individual and collective perspectives of Black women in Hip Hop is distinctly different from Black men. Thus, a comparative content analysis could be the methodological base to examine these divergent perspectives. Second, future research can *qualitatively* examine how African American male artists in Hip Hop have discussed spirituality and heaven in public television and radio interviews. Since music provides a brief window into how Black males feel about spirituality and heaven, interviews may be an especially valid way to tap into the racial/social consciousness of Black males in Hip Hop regarding spirituality and heaven. Third, future scholars can examine how Black males in Hip Hop discuss spirituality and heaven and how these perspectives are similar and/or different from other music genres, such as Alternative, Blues, Christian, Country, Gangster Rap, Gospel, Neo-Soul, Pop, Rock, and R&B. Finally, scholars can examine the opposite positon of heaven, namely hell. Future work in this area may reveal how Black Hip Hop artists' attitudes, beliefs, and emotions regarding hell determine the perception of current realities, as well as projections regarding their future lives.[45]

Conclusion

The findings of this study clearly suggests that, like their slave forefathers, Black males in Hip Hop perceived heaven to be a welcomed alternative to the many negative experiences they endure on earth. While some males in Hip Hop viewed religion as the conduit to one day seeing heaven, others believed that Blacks should critically examine behaviors done in the name of religion and create a spirituality that links to God and/or a Higher Power. For some, this heaven was the place where they would reunite with their loved ones, yet, for others, this heaven was racially separate from others who oppressed them. As I conclude, I turn attention to the comments provided by the late Tupac Shakur at the beginning of this manuscript. Perhaps Shakur and other Black men reconcile their actions on earth, whether good or bad, with the knowledge that heaven exists and they will one day see heaven. Furthermore, this reality is apparent regardless of whether they use religion, spirituality, or a combination of both these constructs to

---

[45] David C. Reisman, "The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture," *Journal of Islamic Studies 21*, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 116-119. Tymn, Michael E. "Making Sense of a Horrific Hell and a Humdrum Heaven." *Journal of Religion and Psychical Research 24*, no. 2 (April 1, 2001): 102-110.

receive endurance, focus, and hope. Like the Georgia slave that looked forward to meeting his "brother" in heaven, Black males in Hip Hop look embrace their reward of better conditions, seeing loved ones, and being in the company of one another in heaven.

Bibliography

Akbar, Na'im. *Chains and Images of Psychological Slavery*. Jersey City, NJ: New Mind Productions, 1984.

Albom, Mitch. *The Five People You Meet In Heaven*. New York: Hachette Books, 2003.

Aymer, Samuel R. "'I Can't Breathe': A Case Study—Helping Black Men Cope with Race-Related Trauma Stemming from Police Killing and Brutality." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment 26*, no. 3-4 (2016): 367-376.

Baldwin, Lewis V. "A Home in Dat Rock: Afro-American Folk Sources and Slave Visions of Heaven and Hell." *Journal (The) of Religious Thought Washington, DC 41*, no. 1 (1984): 38-57.

Battle, Michael. *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.

Barrett, Lindon. "Dead Men Printed: Tupac Shakur, Biggie Small, and Hip-Hop Eulogy." *Callaloo 22*, no. 2 (1999): 306-332.

Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

Chaney, Cassandra. "Religiosity and Spirituality among Members of an African American Church Community: A Qualitative Analysis." *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought 27*, no. 3 (2008): 201-234.

Chaney, Cassandra and Ray Robertson. "Armed and Dangerous? An Examination of Fatal Shootings of Unarmed Black People by Police." *Journal of Pan African Studies 8*, no. 4 (2015): 45-78.

Chatters, Linda M., Robert Joseph Taylor, Kai M. Bullard, and James S. Jackson. "Spirituality and Subjective Religiosity among African Americans, Caribbean Blacks, and Non-Hispanic Whites." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 47*, no. 4 (2008): 725-737.

Cone, James H. "God and Black Suffering: Calling the Oppressors to Account." *Anglican Theological Review 90*, no. 4 (2008): 701-712.

Drumgoole, Kelland. "20 Hip Hop Songs about Heaven and Hell." SoSoActive.com. August 07, 2012. Accessed July 15, 2018. http://www.sosoactive.com/hip-hop-songs-about-heaven-and-hell/.

Dow, Dawn Marie. "The Deadly Challenges of Raising African American Boys: Navigating the Controlling Image of the 'Thug'." *Gender & Society 30*, no. 2 (2016): 161-188.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *Holler If You Hear Me*. New York: Basic books, 2006.

Federal Writers Project. *Georgia Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves*. Native American Book Publishers, January 1, 1938.

Ferriss, Abbott L. "Religion and the Quality of Life." *Journal of Happiness Studies 3*, no. 3 (2002): 199-215.

Finley, Stephen C. "Homoeroticism and the African-American Heterosexual Male: Quest for Meaning in The Black Church." *Black Theology 5*, no. 3 (November 1, 2007): 305-326.

Forman, Murray, and Mark Anthony Neal. *That's The Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader.* New York: Routledge Press, 2004.

Freeman, Lauren. "Phenomenology of Racial Oppression." *Knowledge Cultures 3*, no. 1 (2015): 24-24.

Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage, 1976.

Hadden, Bernadette R., Willie Tolliver, Fabienne Snowden, and Robyn Brown Manning. "An Authentic Discourse: Recentering Race And Racism As Factors That Contribute To Police Violence Against Unarmed Black Or African American Men." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* (2016): 1-14.

Hertel, Bradley R. "Inconsistency of Beliefs in The Existence of Heaven and Afterlife." *Review of Religious Research 21*, no. 3 (March 1, 1980): 171-183.

Iwamoto, Derek. "Tupac Shakur: Understanding The Identity Formation Of Hyper-Masculinity Of A Popular Hip-Hop Artist." *The Black Scholar 33*, no. 2 (2003): 44-49.

Jagessar, Michael N. "Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God-Talk." *Black Theology 5*, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 256-258.

King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Kitwana, Bakari. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 2002.

Knox, Dorothy Headley. "Spirituality: A Tool In The Assessment And Treatment Of Black Alcoholics And Their Families." *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly 2*, no. 3-4 (1985): 31-44.

Langsdorf, Lenore. "Why Phenomenology in Communication Research?" *Human Studies 17*, no. 1 (1994): 1-8.

Levine, Lawrence W. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Marsh, Dave. *Heaven Was Detroit: From Jazz to Hip-Hop and Beyond*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017.

Mattis, Jacqueline S. "African American Womens' Definitions of Spirituality and Religiosity." *Journal of Black Psychology 26*, no. 1 (2000): 101-122.

Mbiti, John S. *Introduction to African Religion*. Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland Press, 2015.

Miller, Monica R., Anthony B. Pinn, and B'Freeman Bernard'Bun, eds. *Religion in Hip-Hop: Mapping the New Terrain in the US*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.

Miller, Monica R., and Anthony B. Pinn, eds. *The Hip-Hop and Religion Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Milner, Adrienne N., Brandon J. George, and David B. Allison. "Black and Hispanic Men Perceived To Be Large Are At Increased Risk For Police Frisk, Search, And Force." *PloS One 11*, no. 1 (2016): e0147158.

Orbe, Mark P. "“Remember, It’s Always Whites’ Ball”: Descriptions of African American Male Communication." *Communication Quarterly 42*, no. 3 (1994): 287-300.

Pollner, Melvin. *Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Ralls, Mark. "Reclaiming Heaven: What Can We Say About The Afterlife?" *Christian Century 121*, no. 25 (December 14, 2004): 34-39.

Reddie, Anthony. "Not Just Seeing, But Really Seeing: A Practical Black Liberationist Spirituality for Re-interpreting Reality." *Black Theology* 7, no. 3 (2009): 339-365.

Reisman, David C. "The Garden and The Fire: Heaven And Hell In Islamic Culture.” *Journal of Islamic Studies 21*, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 116-119.

Richardson, John G., and Georgie Ann Weatherby. "Belief in an Afterlife as Symbolic Sanction." *Review of Religious Research 25*, no. 2 (December 1, 1983): 162-169.

Sakamoto, Michael. "Flash: Butoh, Hip-Hop, and the Urban Body in Crisis." In *Performing Utopias in the Contemporary Americas*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Sebold, Alice. *The Lovely Bones: A Novel*. Little Brown: Boston, 2002.

Shakur, Tupac. “Tupac Shakur Quotes.” Goodreads. Accessed February 15, 2018. https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/300044-i-believe-that-everything-that-you-do-bad-comes-back.

Stackhouse, John Gordon. "Harleys in Heaven: What Christians Have Thought of the Afterlife, & What Difference It Makes Now." *Christianity Today 47*, no. 6 (June 1, 2003): 38-41.

Strauss, Anselm Leonard, and Juliet M. Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Vol. 15. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990.

Taylor, Robert Joseph, and Linda M. Chatters. "Importance of Religion and Spirituality in the Lives of African Americans, Caribbean Blacks and Non-Hispanic Whites." *The Journal of Negro Education* (2010): 280-294.

Taylor, Robert Joseph, Linda M. Chatters, and James S. Jackson. "Correlates of Spirituality among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks in the United States:

Findings from the National Survey of American Life." *Journal of Black Psychology 35*, no. 3 (2009): 317-342.

Tymn, Michael E. "Making Sense of a Horrific Hell and a Humdrum Heaven." *Journal of Religion and Psychical Research 24*, no. 2 (April 1, 2001): 102-110.

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Books, 2014.

Young, Alford A. *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004.