

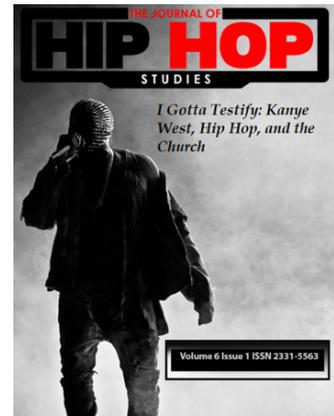
---

## Poem - Untitled

Jasmine Mans

Journal of Hip Hop Studies, Special Issue *I Gotta Testify:  
Kanye West, Hip Hop, and the Church*  
Volume 6, Issue 1, Summer 2019, pp. 99–102  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34718/1v4z-6z60>

---





---

## Poem - Untitled

---

*Jasmine Mans*

The audience asks  
Kanye If he  
remembers The  
song about God...

To speak about the spirituality of Kanye West, we first have to discuss the spirituality of the Black Man, because that is the identity he holds. It'll also be valuable to explore, what the Negro spiritual is and the relationship between music that Black slaves used and how we see remnants of those origins in contemporary Hip Hop. Negro people held on to song as a means of communication, education, and religion. Though, I never considered the actual term "Negro Spiritual." These songs held together the spirit of the Negro. These Negro Spirits outlined literal maps to freedom. The Black song is still very much so rooted in ideas of "freedom" and "God". The slaves relied on song for the truth. The Negro slaves relied on the metaphor in those songs for strategy. We still see it.

Many Black men often see themselves in the symbolism of God. God as a Father, God as a protector, God as someone to be worshipped. Each person learns and participates in spirituality differently;

*Black Boy be given song  
Song be sway and hymn  
Black boy be given song  
Even before God Black boy  
be given tick, and bang.  
Silence and bang*

What a imperialistic white slavemaster thought was a simple sing-along, was a road map that led the Negro to freedom. It was a song of hope and liberation. Lives depended on the lyrics. The Harlem Renaissance, an era that birthed a new age of poetry and jazz, too, was created in search of a "freer" America. Maybe, ideas of "freedom" and "God" exist interchangeably within the work and vocabulary of black folks. Maybe this is true because black folk have an intrinsic relationship with this

search for a freer world. Today, songs that many non-Black people use as pure entertainment often mean much more for us.

So, what does this have to do with Hip Hop, and, specifically, Rapper Kanye West?

We know that rappers have materialized symbols of religion for example, the cross and the Jesus piece pendants. There's this constant use in language, which seeks to compare man to God, or language that explicitly calls the rapper, God. Jay-Z is Jehovah and Kanye West is Yeezus, (a mash up of Yeezy and Jesus) there is also a handful of rappers that call themselves "The God," or "Gaud" as an extension of their name. Rapper Tupac Shakur, in his video, was even nailed to a cross.

*"I'm just tryna say the way school need teachers  
the way Kathie Lee needed Regis  
that's the way I need Jesus"* (West, 2004)

Kanye West covered Rolling Stone Magazine with a controversial photo (LaChapelle, 2006) wearing a crown of thorns and blood dripping down his face. J. Cole referred to Kanye West as a "False Prophet," in his 2017 single, "False Prophet." Mainstream Rap music has contextualized an idea of Christ, the same Christ that died for the sins of the people. That, too, connects us to this constant theme of freedom. Or maybe rap music presents the same American "Christian" narrative of "man-as-savior" and man recreating God in his own likeness. Is that what Kanye and many rappers like him are doing, when they compare themselves to the Christian Savior?

In rap music, there does ring this constant narrative of "desiring God's forgiveness," and knowing sin, death, and martyrdom. Throughout his most outwardly religious songs, Kanye mentions his belief directly, mentioning praying, attending church, and needing saving.

With these ideas, come a few additional questions, such as can an artist access a language of spirituality without believing in the context of the Bible? Does the Bible add a tone of femininity that renders itself unacceptable in the mainstream Hip-Hop sphere? Does the Bible not fit within the controlled narrative of hip-hop?

Kanye exists in this dichotomy. First, mainstream rap doesn't contextualize the "worship" of God in the music. On the other hand, Kanye West has a strong musical palette, that extends across time and genre. Kanye has the creative capacity to celebrate aspect of religion in his work, that other artists don't. He has the freedom to investigate how he feels about his own Christianity, and the way it has transformed through the years.

The audience asks  
Kanye If he  
remembers The  
song about God  
How the choir  
exclaimed that  
prophet be alive  
That he be alive  
amongst the poor &  
brown

## Bibliography

LaChapelle, David. "The Passion of Kanye West." *Rolling Stone*. Cover, February 9, 2006.

Terrell, Pastor. "African American Spirituality in a Hip Hop Culture [Article]." *The Opened Box*. April 28, 2012. Accessed July 3, 2017.  
<http://theopenedbox.com/articles/african-american-spirituality-in-a-hip-hop-culture-article/>.

West, Kanye. "Jesus Walks." *The College Dropout*. Roc-A-Fella Records, 2004, CD.