

University of Memphis

University of Memphis Digital Commons

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

4-21-2015

## Under Siege: Conspiracy, I-pistemology and Resistance Through Hip Hop in Killarmy's Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars

Marcus Keith Hassell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hassell, Marcus Keith, "Under Siege: Conspiracy, I-pistemology and Resistance Through Hip Hop in Killarmy's Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars" (2015). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1138.  
<https://digitalcommons.memphis.edu/etd/1138>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by University of Memphis Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of Memphis Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [khhgerty@memphis.edu](mailto:khhgerty@memphis.edu).

UNDER SIEGE: CONSPIRACY, I-PISTEMOLOGY AND RESISTANCE  
THROUGH HIP HOP IN KILLARMY'S *SILENT WEAPONS FOR QUIET WARS*

by

Marcus Keith Hassell

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication

The University of Memphis

May 2015

Copyright © Marcus Keith Hassell  
All rights reserved

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for being supportive of my ideas and seeing this project to completion. Also, a special thanks to Dr. Sandra Sarkela for her guidance and support throughout my time as a graduate student at the University of Memphis. You have lent a sympathetic ear and helped me in ways I never expected. Thank you, Dr. Marina Levina for your guidance, assistance, and support. You challenged me to become a better writer and broaden my intellectual horizons. I also want to thank Dr. Sharon Stanley for expanding my academic toolkit from a political science perspective. Special thanks to all in the Communication department for providing a positive environment; I am grateful for you all.

Next, I would like to thank my fellow graduate students for being a part of my learning process. Thank you, Dr. Morgan Ginther, for discussing my ideas with me in detail. Finally I want to give special thanks to my family for being supportive and patient throughout this process.

## ABSTRACT

Hassell, Marcus Keith. Ph.D. The University of Memphis. May 2015. Under Siege: Conspiracy, I-Pistemology and Resistance Through Hip Hop in Killarmy's *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. Major Professor: Sandra J. Sarkela, Ph.D.

This dissertation examines and explicates the convergences of conspiracy theory, Islam, terrorism, and hip hop culture in rap group Killarmy's album *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge production post 9/11 through a process Liesbet Van Zoonen has labeled *I-pistemology*. The influences of Five Percent Nation ideology, popular culture, and conspiracy theory impact Killarmy's tools of rhetorical resistance, or what Tricia Rose calls the "hidden transcript" of rap music. Furthermore, *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was at the center of controversy during the Beltway sniper attacks of 2002 prompting journalists to admonish Five Percent ideology through a process Jack Bratich calls a "conspiracy panic." This dissertation presents a twofold argument: 1) I-pistemology accurately describes the ethos and knowledge base of hip hop culture and 2) Rap music as a mass-marketed commodity of hip hop culture creates a double-bind for subversive politics as the commodity of hip hop is allowed to present images and messages that validate discourses of oppression and marginalization. This dissertation offers a fresh contribution to stagnant sociopolitical discussions of hip hop and provides a new approach for examining the interplay between dominant knowledge institutions, marginalized citizens and discourses on terror.

## PREFACE

As a child of the 1980s, I grew up with the influence of a popular culture that I accessed through the radio and television. From an early age, I saw music as a portal to other experiences and points of view. In my opinion, music is the pulse of humanity and through the feeling conveyed in it, we can learn about the struggles and triumphs of different communities around the world. I became familiar with R&B, soul, and funk from my parents collection. MTV and kids I went to school with gave me access to rock, pop, and alternative genres. As hip hop was rising to mainstream prominence, I was fortunate enough to have an older brother who gave me access to the new, fresh sounds from different areas of the country. Of all the genres of music I was exposed to, hip hop music resonated with me the most. For one, I was already writing poetry so the rhyming and storytelling of rap was a natural fit for me. Secondly, I felt a kinship with rap music because it reflected the experiences of black youth in America.

In those days, hip hop was an education as I learned about different communities in the United States and could cross-reference these depictions with my own environment. On a deeper level, artists like Public Enemy, KRS-ONE, Rakim, and X-Clan inspired me to research and study black history and culture far beyond Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement. Hip hop was more than music to me; it was an educational portal to a consciousness eclipsing the narratives I engaged in school and church. By this point I was challenging the narratives propagated by these institutions and rap music was the primary catalyst. I began writing my own lyrics and figuring out how to create my own sonic backing for vocal expression. This practice of creating stayed

with me from childhood to adulthood, sharing experiences with people from different walks of life along the way.

My study of music, its creation, and cultural impact is formed from a fascination of the *process* of how it all works together. What are the circumstances that inspire artists to present their expression in a specific way? The music that stuck with me the most was the music that offered critiques of society or told authentic stories about experience and struggle. By the time I was introduced to the music of the Wu-Tang Clan, I was already discussing with peers a different view of the world than we were taught in school or saw on the news. Much was wrong with the society we lived in and it was paramount to our survival and prosperity to really know what was happening and not take everything at face value.

This project is a culmination of my education through hip hop culture and academics. The goal is to bridge the gap of understanding in terms of how knowledge is produced, maintained, controlled, and challenged. By not seeing the world in simplistic black and white terms, we can make sense of the myriad of complexities humanity faces in the varied shades of gray. It is important to challenge what we accept as reality for a deeper understanding, especially those realities we see as foundational to our identity.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1	1
Introduction	
Bullets over Beltway	4
I-pistemology	8
Conspiracy Discourse and Scholarship	12
Conspiracy Panics	17
Hip Hop Scholarship and the Hidden Transcript of Black Resistance	20
Islamic Influence in the Voices of Black Resistance	25
Chapter Preview	28
2	
I-SELF-LORD-AND-MASTER: I-pistemology and the Complex Process of Identity Making through Popular Culture	32
The Impact of the Wu-Tang and the Birth of Killarmy	34
Constructing Meaning from Pop Culture Influences to Combat an Oppressive Context	37
Simulacrum, Simulation, Sampling and the Appropriation of Meaning	39
Embodied and Referential Meaning through Sampling in <i>Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars</i>	43
The Use of <i>Silent Weapons in the Quiet War</i>	50
Conclusion: I-pistemological Ethos and Hip Hop Expression	53
3	
It Seems it Never Fails: The Teachings of the Five Percent and I-pistemological Meaning Making in the Battle of Knowledge	56
Whiteness, Blackness and the Resistance Against the Knowledge Institutions	56
The Lessons of the Five Percent	58
“Dropping Knowledge” in <i>Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars</i>	59
Who is the Colored Man?	66
Love, Hell or Right	74
Conclusion: Hidden Transcripts as Social Critique	77
4	
Burning Season: The Impact of the Crack Epidemic and the Struggle Against a “Dark Alliance”	79
<i>Dark Alliance</i> , the Iran Contra Scandal and the Crack Era	82
Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986	85
Impact of Telecommunication Act of 1996 and the Conspiracy of the Music Industry and Privatized Prisons	87
“Thugs are Guilty of High Treason”	92
All is Fair in Love and War	96
Blurred Lines	100

Conclusion: Journalistic Framing of the Conspiracy Panic and I-pistemology	102
5 Terror Is Him—Black Male Image and the War on Terror	104
Gods, Gangsters and Gangster Rappers	105
Wu-Tang’s FBI Investigation	109
Militant Imagery	112
Lyrical Specialists, Underworld Terrorists	114
5 Star General, Giving Killing Orders	118
Hardcore Rap and the Double Bind of Entertainment	123
Conclusion: Disciplining Dangerous Knowledge through Media Discourses	126
6 Conclusion	131
Interpretation of the Findings	135
Limitations of the Study	139
Suggestions for Future Research	140
Works Cited	142
Appendices	
A. Supreme Mathematics	155
B. Supreme Alphabet	156
C. Twelve Jewels	158

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

It is patently impossible to discuss social engineering or the automation of a society, i.e., the engineering of social automation systems (silent weapons) on a national or worldwide scale without implying extensive objectives of social control and destruction of human life, i.e., slavery and genocide.

This manual is in itself an analog declaration of intent. Such writing must be secured from public scrutiny. Otherwise, it might be recognized as a technically formal declaration of domestic war. Furthermore, whenever any person or group of persons in a position of great power and without full knowledge and consent of the public, uses such knowledge and methodologies for economic conquest - it must be understood that a state of domestic warfare exists between said person or group of persons and the public.

The solution of today's problems requires an approach which is ruthlessly candid, with no agonizing over religious, moral or cultural values.

You have qualified for this project because of your ability to look at human society with cold objectivity, and yet analyze and discuss your observations and conclusions with others of similar intellectual capacity without the loss of discretion or humility. Such virtues are exercised in your own best interest. Do not deviate from them.

*-Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars, An Introduction Programming Manual, author unknown*

We are at war with an enemy we can't see. A brutal conspiracy of assassination, kidnappings, bombings, high jacking and mass murder ... There's a battle raging, fueled by desperation, hatred and fear. Now the principle language spoken here is gun fire. It is a World War; lead by holy men, mad men, and millions of disciples willing to die for their cause. Their strategy is worldwide terrorism.

-opening sample from "Dress to Kill" by Killarmy

A battle for information continues to be waged under the dark, ominous cloud of public suspicion. From various regions and corners of the globe, from varying races, classes, nationalities, religious creeds, and political allegiances, people question the validity of their governments and the reliability of the news presented to them through media outlets. The two quotes used to open this chapter describe important elements of this enduring skepticism—the first passage introduces a calculated methodology for

controlling mass society, the second passage describes the paranoid mentality of the individual engrossed in a global political, psychic warfare matrix. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars, An Introduction Programming Manual*, is a mysterious document that was discovered on a discarded IBM typewriter and is the first chapter in the canonical conspiracy text, *Behold a Pale Horse* by former naval officer and CIA agent William Cooper. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* is also the title of the debut album by hip hop group Killarmy (pronounced Killa-army), an affiliate act of the multi-platinum selling hip hop group Wu-Tang Clan. Tension between actors on multiple sides of the sociopolitical milieu is exemplified by competing narratives. The United States of America and its dominant knowledge institutions (education, government institutions, and mass media) propagate a narrative of equality, justice for all, and the freedom to pursue the “American Dream.” The reality for many in America is shaped by undeniable evidence that a global power elite orchestrates events on the world stage in advance and denies meaningful opportunities for those on the margins of society, not by happenstance, but by design.

In 1997 *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* by Killarmy was released on the Wu-Tang label, distributed by Priority Records, appealing primarily to the most ardent fans of the raw sound of the Wu-Tang Clan. On top of chaotic, heavily-sampled tracks Killarmy spit rapid fire lyrics thematically focused around the subjects of terrorism and conspiracy, driven by the ideology of the Nation of Gods and Earths or Five Percent Nation, an offshoot of the Nation of Islam, created by Clarence Smith (also known as Clarence 13X or Father Allah). This dissertation examines and explicates the convergences of conspiracy theory, Islam, terrorism, and hip hop culture in rap group Killarmy’s album *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge production

post 9/11 through a process Liesbet Van Zoonen has labeled *I-pistemology* or the “process where the self is the source and arbiter of all truth” (4). The influences of Five Percent Nation ideology, popular culture, and conspiracy theory impact Killarmy’s tools of rhetorical resistance, or what Tricia Rose calls in *Black Noise* the “hidden transcript” of rap music. Furthermore, *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was at the center of controversy during the Beltway sniper attacks of 2002 prompting journalists to admonish Five Percent ideology through a process Jack Bratich calls a “conspiracy panic.” This study presents a twofold argument: 1) I-pistemology accurately describes the ethos and knowledge base of hip hop culture and 2) Rap music as a mass-marketed commodity of hip hop culture creates a double-bind for subversive politics as the commodity of hip hop is allowed to present images and messages that validate discourses of oppression and marginalization. This dissertation offers a fresh contribution to stagnant sociopolitical discussions of hip hop and provides a new approach for examining the interplay between dominant knowledge institutions, marginalized citizens, and discourses on terror.

This dissertation is the first to consider conspiracy, hip hop, Islam, and terrorism together in one study.<sup>1</sup> These connections have not been examined despite the strong influence of these genres in hip hop culture. What follows is an original and unique contribution to the field of communication studies with implications for both the critical/cultural and rhetorical fields. Ultimately, this study will achieve a deeper more enriched understanding of the marginalized experience of African-Americans expressed through the rhetoric of hip hop, deeper insight into conspiracy theory and its implications

---

<sup>1</sup> For more studies on rap music, rhetoric, and the African-American community see Hatch; Cummings and Roy.

for the war on terror, and an increased understanding of the production of knowledge in the postmodern world.

This chapter follows with the narrative of the Beltway sniper attacks and the alleged influence of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* as an inspiration for these attacks. Second will be a discussion of I-pistemology, which theoretically situates the direction of this study. Third will be a discussion of the discourse of conspiracy theory and the academic contributions that examine it. Fourth will be a general discussion of the trajectory of hip hop scholarship. Fifth will be a discussion of black Islamic movements in the United States and their connection to hip hop culture. Finally, I will conclude with a brief description of the chapters that will comprise this dissertation.

### **Bullets over Beltway**

To all my universal soldiers, stand at attention

While I strategize an invasion- the mission be assassination

Snipers hitting Caucasians

With semi-automatic shots heard around the world

My plot is to control the globe and hold the Earth hostage

In my fingertips with tight grips like Atlas

I got a war plan more deadlier than Hitler

It was written down in ancient scriptures (Shogun Assassin, "Blood for Blood")

At 6:30 pm on October 2, 2002, a single bullet struck 55-year-old James Martin in the parking lot of a Shopper's Food Warehouse Grocery store in Glenmont, Maryland ("The D.C. Sniper Beltway Attacks"). This shooting was the beginning of a 22-day rampage in the Washington, D.C. area that left ten dead and three others wounded. Ex-

Army officer John Allen Muhammad and his teenage accomplice Lee Boyd Malvo perpetrated this killing spree, which would be known as the “Beltway Sniper Attacks.” According to the account Malvo provided in Muhammad’s 2006 trial, Muhammad’s plan had three phases (“The D.C. Sniper Beltway Attacks”). Phase one was to kill six white people a day for thirty days. Phase two included killing a pregnant woman, a police officer, and then kill multiple police officers by setting up explosives at the funeral. Phase three would include extorting millions of dollars from the U.S. government and recruiting orphans to carry out a massive terror plot designed to cripple the United States. Fortunately, the extended plan never came to fruition as the pair was captured sleeping in a blue Chevy Caprice on October 24, 2002. Muhammad was found guilty of murder and was lethally injected in 2009. Malvo still serves time today in a federal prison in Virginia.

Interestingly, a link between this act of domestic terror and hip hop was made on an October 2002 episode of the NBC news show, *Meet the Press*. In this exchange, host Tim Russert and guest Dr. Meloy make the assertion that the attacks may have been influenced in part by Killarmy’s music and then the program cuts to Chief Charles Moose’s on-air communication with the snipers using language similar to the lyrics:

MR. RUSSERT: Now, one of the more interesting things that went on in this case was how the police used the media to try to communicate and develop a dialogue with the alleged snipers. And we've gone back and looked at a variety of things as to what influences there may have been on the snipers. This is a CD from a group called Kill Army. It's named "Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars." There's a song called "Wake Up." "Word is bond this is as real as it's going to get." Then here is the letter which they left behind at the shooting in Ashland,

Virginia. "Word is bond." And on Wednesday night, we heard Chief Charles Moose of Montgomery County saying this:

(Videotape, October 23, 2002):

CHIEF CHARLES MOOSE: If you are reluctant to contact us, be assured that we made ready to talk directly with you. Our word is our bond.

(End videotape) (Muhammad)

Russert continues to discuss the role that popular culture can play in these seemingly random events of violence. Meloy mentions that the influence of pop culture can be significant but does not necessarily cause these events. Further into the exchange, Russert describes more connections between the album's content and the drama of the mass shootings:

MR. RUSSERT: Let me show you some more based on exactly what you're saying and bring everybody else into the conversation. Here are more lyrics from that same album. This is a song called "Five Stars." "Snipers on the rooftop watch out for the pit bulls. Waited 'til sunsets and moving like ninjas. ...Yo, 5 Star General giving orders." Here's the letter, cover sheet, they left behind. The five stars were a symbol or an indication that this was the true sniper sending this letter.

Then we had this left behind. I'll show you here the lyrics from the same album. "My name is Born God Allah, King of North America," and the tarot card left behind, "Dear Policemen, I am God."

Playing out a real fantasy, influenced somewhat by music, and yet in his own mind, woven together and we saw this play out. (Muhammad)

This vignette offers a glimpse into the conjecture of the press when attempting to determine the motive for this brutal act of domestic terrorism. It is indeterminable whether or not Killarmy's music served as a direct inspiration for these mass killings. What this story brings into view is the convergence of entertainment, popular culture, and real world events that goad responses from different ideological perspectives on causation. How does such incendiary anti-American content become marketed by a major record company when it can aid to produce such horrifying events? Others would argue that linking the music to the shootings is part of an agenda to demonize both hip hop and Islam, in a conspiracy of its own. Cedric Muhammad, former manager of Killarmy expressed his concern over agenda setting by the media:

The exchange got my full attention as I was already fully aware of the effort by many in the media and those above them to position the Honorable Minister Louis Farrakhan as the inspiration behind the activities of the alleged sniper. Now, I saw more fully the details of the height and depth to which the sniper controversy - from the horrific killings; to the association with the Nation Of Islam of the lead suspect, John Allen Muhammad; to the alleged influence of Hip-Hop; and the repeated visual of the image and account of a Black male committing violence with a firearm - could and was being used by the worst enemies of Black America to justify certain attitudes and policies. (Muhammad)

Thus, the contested accounts of historical events and media discourses that reflect the ideology of the dominant institutions in turn force a response from the subjugated

population. Often, the response against domination is a call for self-reliance and cultural pride that uses the prejudices of society against oppression, solidifying community through processes of meaning-making and coded communication. As such, marginalized communities create alternative ways of knowledge production in an oppressive context. Next, will be an overview of I-pistemology and its significance as a tool of analysis for social mobilization through music.

### **I-pistemology**

Liesbet Van Zoonen creates the term I-pistemology to address the growing epistemological suspicion in popular and political culture. People from varying perspectives distrust official sources of knowledge for different reasons, but the idea that “truth and knowledge are tied to social and material interests” is at the root of the skepticism (Van Zoonen 56). Van Zoonen argues that this trope has become a “dominant mindset” which was at one time limited to feminist, postmodern, and critical theory but now can also explain right-wing populist politics. Suspicion goes hand-in-hand with the turn to “the self as the source and arbiter of all truth” drawing from personal experiences, feelings, subjective judgment, and individual memory (56-57). Truth is something that is “out there” (to be discovered) and simultaneously “in there” (personal experience). In short, I-pistemology captures the turn into the self as the origin of all truth.

While some critics label this turn to the self as “postmodernism gone wrong,” Van Zoonen makes a compelling case for her idea by providing examples of media scandals, government campaigns, and academic disagreements that have contributed to the climate of skepticism.<sup>2</sup> The mistrust in official sources of knowledge for Van Zoonen is marked

---

<sup>2</sup> Van Zoonen cites a few examples: HPV vaccination opposition in Holland; debate over causes of global warming; BBC “climate gate” scandal; intelligent design vs. evolution theory

by a “general trust in knowledge institutions” with a “specific distrust” in some of the things they say are true (58).<sup>3</sup> Both “general trust” and “specific mistrust” are said to be sociocultural byproducts of modernity, risk society, and fear culture. Two points to this epistemological transformation are the suspicion surrounding official knowledge depends on finding someone to blame<sup>4</sup> that leads to the turn to the self as “alternative source of knowing and understanding” (Van Zoonen 60). This turn is seen in the growth of self-therapy, spiritualism, and personal media.

As politics and popular culture have become more personalized audiences rely more on personal experiences. One of the burning questions is the “question of truth” in mediated and unmediated knowledge and controversy over media coverage has led to more inclusion of first-person accounts of actual events. Conversely, counter-narratives are also dependent on their own first-person accounts. Van Zoonen notes that this “personal knowledge and experience movement” is now “part and parcel” with right-wing populism in Europe and the United States (62).<sup>5</sup> Progressive politics (feminist, civil rights, and LGBT activism) relied on this alternative knowledge from experience and the

---

claims in science discourse; whether or not the Holocaust or Armenian genocide are actually true; objections to historic canons; the growing belief in alternative therapies.

<sup>3</sup> Van Zoonen cites longitudinal data from Eurobarometer: radio news is trusted 60% of the time where television, the press and the internet are trusted 50% and 40% respectively. Trust in the press in the UK is extremely low (18%) compared to other northern European countries.

<sup>4</sup> Van Zoonen cites Stef Aupers analysis of conspiracy theories, how these theories offer “an illusion of knowledge and control, of causal connections in a chaotic world and of clearly identifiable actors (Muslims, ‘the Left’, Jews) or institutions (Big Pharma, ‘the Government’) to blame” (60).

<sup>5</sup> For example, personal accounts from a soldier’s point of view in Iraq have been used to support a pro-war right-wing agenda.

adoption of this strategy by the right-wing poses a challenge to leftist politics.<sup>6</sup> What determines whose claims are valid? The truth claims for I-pistemology reach “much wider and much more intense platforms than ever before” (Van Zoonen 64). Thus, the two challenges Van Zoonen proposes for future study are 1) “How knowledge institutions can realize trustworthiness among all these contending truth claims (truth must be deserved, advanced, and maintained)” and 2) “the plurality of voices that claim access to truth on the basis of personal knowledge, experience and opinion” leads to questions of whether all voices need to be equally valid to be heard or recognized (65). Moreover, Van Zoonen claims the left-wing has failed to meet the challenge from right-wing populist politics “using the same vocabulary of personal experience as progressive forces” (65). Van Zoonen also calls for analyses that explain how the right wing has “managed to impose claims on common sense” (65).

This dissertation will contribute to this discussion by addressing these challenges. In regards to the first challenge, knowledge institutions (government institutions, educational institutions, and the media) realize their trustworthiness in part by delegitimizing the voices of the black Islamic militant (represented by Killarmy) by utilizing a fear-based discourse in the media (terrorism) and by leaning on dominant institutions (Christian church) or dominant tropes (patriotism). In turn the delegitimizing by dominant discourses serves to squelch *certain* truth claims and validate others. Moreover, the right-wing through these discourses manage to “impose claims on common sense” by sensationalizing violence and making connections to hip hop music which is framed as the enemy to American moral values and patriotic ideals. What this

---

<sup>6</sup> The “people” as defined by right-wing populist politics, are united “through their common whiteness, Christian values and enlightenment ethos. They are seriously alienated by multicultural politics, political and media elites, by Europe and by Islam” (Van Zoonen 62).

study will do is explain how these processes operate by providing examples of how the I-pistemology is expressed through the music and the communities that it represents, as well as the tension of the varying truth claims that contextualize the discourse. As mentioned, Van Zoonen discusses a general trust in knowledge institutions and a specific distrust in some of what they claim is true. While I am not disagreeing with this claim I do offer a reversal—for many African Americans, there is a general *distrust* in knowledge institutions and a *specific* trust in some of the claims knowledge institutions make. Through the following chapters, I will make my case for this reversal by explaining how the discourse in Killarmy’s music as well as the I-pistemological claims made by black activists illustrate the general distrust of knowledge institutions in the U.S. while simultaneously using specific claims made by these institutions to advance their agenda.

Differing ideological perspectives, a dissatisfaction with mainstream media coverage, a general distrust in government agencies, and the fear of terrorism are all contributing factors in the climate of skepticism. Conspiracy theory and its framing is a matter of narrative power. How something gets labeled as a conspiracy theory depends on the legitimacy of knowledge at the center. Foucault describes subjugated knowledges as “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (82). Discourse that has been labeled “conspiracy theory” fits Foucault’s definition. Here I must make distinctions with what I am labeling “conspiracy discourse” and what I define as the “conspiracy genre.” The latter describes media texts which focus on specific historical accounts of conspiracies or

the ongoing conspiracies against certain groups in society or society at large and the popular media texts that dramatize these narratives (dramatizations of actual events or fictitious narratives). The former describes scholarly discourse about these media texts. In order to place this study in conversation with scholarly discourse on conspiracy, I will now explain the trajectory and highlight some general themes of conspiracy discourse.

### **Conspiracy Discourse and Scholarship**

Scholarly work related to conspiracy theory or conspiracy discourse exists in both the rhetorical and critical strains. Discussion of conspiracy related discourse begins with Richard Hofstadter's seminal essay, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," first published in 1965. Hofstadter cites historical examples from McCarthyism to the suspicion of the Catholic Church as evidence of a political phenomenon where fantasy takes the place of logic in political reasoning. "I call it the paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind" (Hofstadter 77). Hofstadter's essential claim is that conspiracy theorists generally are dissatisfied paranoid skeptics on the fringes of the political spectrum. Much of the work about conspiracy theory addresses Hofstadter's essay directly by either extending the paranoid style to address specific examples or offering a counter by claiming the paranoid style does not account for conspiracy rhetoric at the center. Other scholars either aim to discredit the validity of conspiracy theory or offer some insight to its political legitimacy. I will discuss a few examples from three strains of conspiracy scholarship: 1) Re-theorizing conspiracy discourse in centrist politics, 2) Conspiracy theory as a subject for popular entertainment, and 3) Conspiracy discourse in journalism and the role of technology on conspiracy discourse production

post 9/11. To conclude this section I will discuss Bratich's formulation of "conspiracy panics" or the larger context from which conspiracy narratives emerge, which is important for this study.

Several scholars have identified limitations to the paranoid style by explaining the role of conspiracy discourse in centrist politics and offering new theories to explain it. Pfau offers a counter to the paranoid style by introducing the idea of a "political style" of conspiracy rhetoric, claiming that Hofstadter's focus on those on the fringes does not account for conspiracy rhetoric at the center of public discourse. Pfau proposes a strategy to evaluate the "unique character of conspiracy arguments" or their "unique burden to prove the existence of machinations that necessarily are difficult or impossible to perceive," by examining Abraham Lincoln's expression of the "slave power" conspiracy in his "House Divided" speech (58). Pfau, in a different study with Zarfesky, addresses the "slave power" conspiracy by examining the Texas Annexation controversy of 1844-1845, specifically focusing on the argumentative frames and testing the validity of the narrative form of the conspiracy argument. One of the challenges to evaluating the claims made in an argument that exposes a conspiracy is the uncertainty of the facts contained in the narrative considering the fact that truth usually exists somewhere in the account. Thus, Pfau and Zarfesky conclude that the best course of action in evaluating these arguments is to examine the frames used in the argument and compare them for the most plausible claims that support the argument.

Goodnight and Poulakos also claim that the paranoid style does not accurately explain the acceptance of conspiracy theory in centrist discourse, thus they re-theorize conspiracy discourse by dividing it into two categories- pragmatism and fantasy. The

pragmatic frame assumes that true ideas are verifiable, while false ideas are not (Goodnight and Poulakos 300). Conversely, the fantasy frame explains discourse as an appropriation of symbolism that can be indicative of a hidden agenda (Goodnight and Poulakos 301). In a different study, Blanusia cites Nazism and McCarthyism as examples of the center of power producing the Other through conspiratorial narratives. Blanusia also dichotomizes discursive positions of conspiracy: “Cynical conspiracy theories speak in the name of totalitarian and authoritarian power trying to defend an organismic community, and preserve a phantasmatic structure. Kynical conspiracy theories are speaking from the position of particular, fragmentational and singular agents” (94). Both of the previously mentioned studies theorize conspiracy narratives by defining characteristics that are similar but distinctly different. On one end of the spectrum, there are conspiracy narratives that focus on verifiable events or “facts” while other conspiracy narratives attempt to tie these verifiable events together by claiming that the appropriated symbolism of such events exposes a connected web of a hidden agenda.

As the previously mentioned studies indicate conspiracy narratives have a long tradition in political discourse. More interest in these narratives has led to conspiracy related themes becoming more popular in mainstream entertainment. Several scholars have offered analyses of the television series “The X-Files.”<sup>7</sup> Kelley-Romano discusses “The X-Files” as an example of conspiracy discourse in popular entertainment as it “raises significant issues about the nature of truth and the place of the individual” and satisfies the “psychological needs of viewers” (106). Dorsey explains the role of the protagonist “trickster” in the X-Files, as the ambiguity of the characters “blur the typical

---

<sup>7</sup> See Bellon; Clerc; Emery; Graham; Howley; Knight; Lavery, Hague, and Cartwright; Malach; Parks; Pirie; Soukup; Wilcox and Williams; Wildermuth

images of villainy and heroism in the contemporary myth...the distinction between right and wrong, making this character essential to the fidelity of such a multi-layered story” (450). This alteration of the conspiracy narrative challenges viewers’ perceptions of conspiracy in a “morally ambiguous existence” (Dorsey 450). Aside from programs that offer fictional narratives with the theme of conspiracy other media texts focus on alternative accounts of actual events. Benoit and Nill discuss Oliver Stone’s defense of his film JFK, which made claim of a conspiracy in the Kennedy assassination through a dramatic adaptation of historical events.<sup>8</sup> Dramatic adaptation of historical events is not the only focus for conspiracy narratives in Hollywood films, fictitious tales of “realistic” situations are also popular.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, as Nelson explains conspiracy is synonymous with “system” in Hollywood films:

Conspiracy has become a popularly accessible figure for analyzing particular systems. To literalize film conspiracies is to enact the fundamentalism that insidiously authoritarian or totalitarian politics effect through their systems. To debunk conspiracy films as fantasies that obscure the subtleties and structures of systems is to miss the cinematic symbolism. Through narrative tropes, ironically, conspiracy movies analyze the very systems that scholars would target in place of conspiracies. Conspiracies in republics can be devices for resisting tyrannies; conspiracies in movies can be devices for resisting the totalizing politics of systems. Movies use mythic figures of conspiracy to specify systems that

---

<sup>8</sup> See Medhurst

<sup>9</sup> Nelson cites films like *Conspiracy Theory*, *Enemy of the State*, *Road to Perdition*, *The Heist*, *Gladiator*, *The Man in the Iron mask*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Parallax View*, and *From Hell* as examples.

otherwise elude popular attention precisely because their politics are structural and pervasive. Conspiracy is a Hollywood trope for system. (501)

As conspiracy has become a popular theme for Hollywood entertainment, conspiracy discourse has also had an impact on journalistic coverage.<sup>10</sup> Most important for this study is the influence of Gary Webb's *Dark Alliance* series, which detailed the involvement of the CIA in the crack epidemic in Los Angeles. In August 1996, a series of articles was published in the *San Jose Mercury News* that provided evidence of government involvement in a drug ring stretching from Nicaragua to the United States (Hall 205). Initially these articles were praised for the discovery of illegal activities perpetrated by the government, but it was quickly reframed as a "conspiracy theory" primarily because of the overwhelming support of the findings from the African-American community. Hall's study focuses on the framing of Webb's story and the interest of the African-American community by mainstream media outlets. "In response to Webb's report, the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Washington Post* often associated African American interest in Webb with a history of false conspiracy charges by African Americans...African American interest alone became a reason to see Webb as a conspiracy theorist" (Hall 207).<sup>11</sup> Thus, in the case of the *Dark Alliance* series, the validity of the findings is challenged by official authorities of knowledge production as the marginalized African-American community demanded accountability from the government. I will return to the context surrounding the *Dark Alliance* series and the

---

<sup>10</sup> See Berlet; Miller; Bulic; Farhi; Hodai

<sup>11</sup> See Pipes

crack epidemic in the African American community, as it provides a rhetorical exigency for *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*.

Other recent work on conspiracy discourse examines the role of technology in shaping the journalistic coverage and spread of conspiracy theories.<sup>12</sup> Several scholars argue that conspiracy discourse undermines the validity of political arguments.<sup>13</sup> Fenster describes conspiracy theory as a “disfigured expression of critical populism” and Jameson calls it a “poor person’s cognitive mapping” (Bratich 17). More moderate views from Knight and Marcus say conspiracy theories convey new forms of pervasive suspicion. Auspers discusses how conspiracy theories are viewed as “pathological, irrational and anti-modern” but argues that epistemological doubt and turn to conspiracy theory is produced by the processes of modernization (Bratich 27).

### **Conspiracy Panics**

Jack Bratich in his book *Conspiracy Panics* takes the study of conspiracy discourse a step further by focusing not on conspiracy theories but on the panics that surround them. Bratich examines examples of conspiracy panics linking Foucault’s governmentality<sup>14</sup> and a method of discourse analysis he calls “symptomatology” (15-17). Bratich states that other studies focus on conspiracy theory and convey what we already know where his study focuses on the concern over conspiracy theories or what he calls conspiracy panics. He seeks to fill the gap by claiming the focus should be on the institutions obsessed with these narratives. Bratich examines “the broader discursive

---

<sup>12</sup> See Stempel, Hargrove, and Stempel III; Soukup; Van Horn

<sup>13</sup> See Showalter; Melly; Goldberg; Barkum describe conspiracy discourse as a danger to the health of the political and cultural body.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault’s formulation of “governmental rationality” or “the techniques and strategies by which a society is deemed governable.”

cultural contexts that constrain” rather than why people subscribe to conspiracy narratives (18). Furthermore Bratich aims to focus on the rationale behind controlling or managing extremism. Bratich’s central claim is that context matters as much as theories that exist in them. Other studies are root analyses that focus on causes and conditions acknowledge emergence of conspiracy theory but not their disqualification. Bratich looks at context as source of status rather than emergence arguing that context not separate but constitutive and that conspiracy panics are a new form of culture and rationality tied to politics. “The panics surrounding conspiracy theories demonstrate that trust, truth, and rationality are at the heart of the current political context. In their prominence as objects of public concern, conspiracy theories provide insight into the current configuration of political rationality” (Bratich 19).

The labeling of a discourse as “conspiracy theory” is to mark a discourse as politically unsound, delusional, and paranoid. When a so-called conspiracy theory gains traction, mainstream media coverage seeks to discipline it because it is dangerous to the dominant narrative. Thus, a conspiracy panic is born as journalists scramble to refocus the public perception back to the dominant “regime of truth.” Bratich discussed the institutional support of conspiracy panic through journalism, to “link its discursive properties to the broader spheres of a regime of truth and political rationality” (51). Bratich examines Walter Lippman’s writings that theorized how to “professionalize” journalism and move to an objective style of journalistic coverage and how this professionalism is a discourse of political rationality.

The shift to an objective paradigm in journalism was due to the explosion of yellow journalism, a sensationalized, tabloid style of reporting that focuses on salacious

content and an oversimplification of political and social events. Lippman called for the use of the scientific method to bring back the integrity of journalism. “For Lippman, the crowd was an irrational subject most attracted to and pandered to by, yellow journalism” (Bratich 59). Lippman then sought to create a “public” as opposed to the “irrational, impetuous and unpredictable crowd, the public was rational, contemplative and deliberative” (Bratich 60). In order to accomplish creating the public Lippman proposed using social engineers and scientists to engineer public opinion and consent for the good of the public interest as “the people cannot be trusted to transcend their petty self-interest to form a public” (Bratich 60). The public would be formed by using informed specialists to debate on topics to maintain norms of society. Political rationality would be formed in the hands of a trusted minority as the masses were inherently irrational. With the professionalization of journalism, “journalists come to define themselves as gatekeepers for the marketplace of ideas” (Bratich 61).

Bratich notes that in a contemporary context, critics equate the decline of journalism to its proximity to popular culture. “But these lamentations usually equate the popular with sensationalized style, tabloidization, oversimplification and a reliance on melodramatic narrative” (Bratich 53). Bratich uses popular in three senses, “widespread, commercialized culture (Hollywood)”, in reference to populism or “how does popular culture speak to, and in name of ‘the people’ (how populism refers to creating an Us/Them) (Fenster 1999)” and “as the bottom-up and appropriation of technology (grassroots) (Douglas 1987)” (53). Specifically useful is the idea of populism where the us/them dichotomy is used by populist movements as a counterhegemonic project (Bratich 57). Fenster noted that conspiracy theory “is itself necessarily populist in its

evocation of an unwitting and unwilling populace in thrall to the secretive machinations of power” (Bratich 63). Bratich cites a 1992 Rolling Stone article that discusses how young people were turning away from “professional journalism and to popular culture to get their information” (57).

This study will build from Bratich’s focus on “conspiracy panics” by isolating the sociopolitical context from which *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* emerges, thus providing insight as to how the album functions discursively in the center and at the margins of society and popular culture. The context of terrorism precipitates a climate of mistrust where the lines of truth and rationality are blurred which is evident in the multitude of conspiracy theories that attempt to explain events on the global stage. As a result, individuals and groups form their theories and arguments from their own I-pistemological understanding both inside and outside of the mainstream margins of society.

### **Hip Hop Scholarship and the Hidden Transcript of Black Resistance**

Hip hop or rap music is a unique art form widely studied for its lyrical, visual, and symbolic content. The culture and music emerge from a unique sociopolitical context of hegemonic oppression where impoverished youth of urban communities found a distinctive way of expressing themselves in spite of their oppressive living conditions. It is precisely the circumstances of scarcity that helped to shape the music, the lack of resources to purchase traditional instruments led to the ingenuity of manipulating technology in order to provide a sonic backdrop for rhythmic poetry. Originally the rhymes were mostly about having a good time, but eventually rappers used their voices to express their discontent with the conditions in their communities and the oppressive

context of society. Rap exists as a form of expression but also as a means for capital gain, thus emerging from outside of the dominant culture yet repackaged as a commodity that large corporations could sell. With all of these complex social, political, and economic factors in mind the influence of hip hop culture and its most accessible artistic expression (rap) has been substantial on a global scale, entertaining and inspiring youth of various cultures, and now well integrated into the global capitalist structure. This significant influence has led to an explosion of scholarship that studies hip hop and rap music in numerous contexts.

I think it is necessary to identify specific themes in the trajectory of hip hop scholarship. Numerous studies focus on the impact of hip hop in countries outside of the United States, as it has become a form of expression and political resistance across the globe.<sup>15</sup> Rap music traditionally has been dominated by males and is often derided for sexist or misogynistic content, thus several studies focus on the politics of sex and gender as it relates to hip hop.<sup>16</sup> It seems impossible to separate the influence of race in the context of hip hop as race is a primary factor in the development of the culture. Naturally the impact of racial politics related to hip hop is a key point of emphasis for study, ranging from discussions about race and oppression against ethnic minorities to discussions about the role of whiteness and its relation to performance and commodification.<sup>17</sup> Many studies are historical accounts or explanations of social codes

---

<sup>15</sup> See Pennycook; Auzanneau; Levy; Mitchell; Pardue; Pennay; Perullo and Fenn; Wermuth

<sup>16</sup> Campbell

<sup>17</sup> See Grealy; Forman; Hill-Collins; Kitwana; Reeves

in the culture as well as exploratory studies on content and style.<sup>18</sup> Other scholars focus on the influence of religion<sup>19</sup> while others focus on how hip hop serves as a platform for political commentary and resistance.<sup>20</sup> This study engages the context of hip hop on the two aforementioned themes, specifically the influence of Islam in the black community as a form of resistance itself and the tradition of political resistance as expressed through rap music.

Tricia Rose in her book *Black Noise* explores the social, political, and cultural implications of hip hop culture. Of specific interest for this study is Rose's discussion of the cultural expression of politics in rap music where "oppressed people use language, dance and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion" (99). Rose describes these forms of expression as "oppositional transcripts" that are a "cultural response to oppression" working to "produce communal bases of knowledge about social conditions, communal interpretations of them and quite often serve as the cultural glue that fosters communal resistance" (99-100). Furthermore, Rose uses James Scott's formulation of "public" and "hidden" transcripts that challenge relationships of power and domination:<sup>21</sup>

These dominant public transcripts are maintained through a wide range of social practices and are in a constant state of production. Powerful groups maintain and

---

<sup>18</sup> See Chang; Neal

<sup>19</sup> See Alpin; Johnson; Swedenburg

<sup>20</sup> See Boyd; Reeves

<sup>21</sup> Scott argues that the dominant public transcript supports the established social order and is an "open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate, whereas the hidden transcript takes place 'offstage' or in 'disguised form' and critiques social domination" (Rose 100).

affirm their power by attempting to dictate the staging of public celebrations, by feigning unanimity among groups of powerholders to make such social relations seem inevitable, by strategically concealing subversive or challenging discourse, by preventing access to the public stage, by policing language and using stigma and euphemism to set the terms of public debate or perception. Resistive hidden transcripts that attempt to undermine this power block do so by insinuating a critique of the powerful in stories that revolve around symbolic and legitimated victories over powerholders. (100)

Rose describes rap music as a “hidden transcript” that uses its “cloaked speech and distinguished cultural codes to comment and challenge aspects of current power inequalities” (100). *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* is an example of how these hidden transcripts operate. On multiple levels the language makes very specific indictments of the dominant power structure, solidifies the positions of an oppressed community and expresses aspirations of militant revolution. Without an understanding of the context that produces Killarmy’s inspiration it is difficult to understand the language that they use to inspire pride, solidarity, and revolutionary action. In order to explain this album and the context that surrounds its production, I will engage this discussion of the “hidden transcript” to elucidate the album’s content and how it serves to resist dominance and functions as an I-pistemological manifesto for self-reliance and unified resistance.

In 2008, Rose authored an update to *Black Noise* with *The Hip-Hop Wars*. Her central argument is that discussions about hip hop from both its defenders and critics has been simplistic and stagnant despite hip hop undergoing two significant shifts: 1) commercial expansion, reaching audiences across the globe to create a distinctive culture

and 2) contraction during the same period, due largely to corporate consolidation that minimizes the range of voices heard in the mainstream. Rose argues that commercially rap music has been reduced to a “Gangster-Pimp-Ho Trifecta,” spawning a destructive assembly line of entertainment that amplifies racist stereotypes and exploits the black community:

black ghetto gangsta-based sales are the result of marketing manipulation and the reflection not only of specific realities in our poorest black urban communities but also of the exploitation of already-embedded racist fears about black people. (25)

By focusing on the discourse surrounding hip hop, Rose offers insight to shake-up the stagnant conversation about the culture. Rose argues that

the current state of conversation about hip hop sets destructive and illiterate terms for cross-racial community building. The people most injured by the fraught, hostile, and destructive state of this conversation are those who most need a healthy, honest, vibrant (not sterile and repressed) cultural space: young, poor, and working-class African-American boys and girls, men and women-the generation that comprises the future of the black community. (11)

Hip hop’s detractors use variations of well-worn arguments like "Hip Hop Causes Violence," "Hip Hop Reflects Black Dysfunctional Ghetto Culture," "Hip Hop Hurts Black People," "Hip Hop is Destroying American Values," and "Hip Hop Demeans Women." Conversely, Rose notes that hip hop’s defenders also use variations of the same tired arguments like "Just Keeping it Real," "Hip Hop is Not Responsible for Sexism,"

"There are Bitches and Hoes," "We're Not Role Models," and "Nobody Talks about Positivity in Hip Hop" (25).

These simplified arguments do not explain the complexities of the context that both create the climate that produces these images as well as the responsibility for hip hop to work beyond the social constraints that contribute to the marginalization of the black community. For Rose, hip hop's critics focus too heavily on individual behavior as evidence of a dysfunctional subculture while hip hop's defenders are too willing to blame structural conditions while deemphasizing personal responsibility. This study will contribute to this conversation by explaining how the discourse surrounding *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and Five Percent ideology (which will be discussed in the following section) uses some of the same simplistic logic that Rose criticizes. By offering an in depth analysis of the album, its packaging, and message, a deeper insight to how the process of meaning-making, identification, and the resistance of the hidden transcript function as well as the structural constraints and marketing of fearsome images of the black male are used commercially.

### **Islamic Influence in the Voices of Black Resistance**

On its face the connections between hip hop music and culture and Islam seems tenuous or not deep enough to warrant extensive investigation. Hip hop is often viewed as a violent, misogynistic genre that celebrates hedonistic values or revels in nihilistic gangster fantasies. These values appear out of balance with the religious prudence and discipline of orthodox Islam. It is important to understand Islamic influence on African-Americans not only for the religious, cultural implications, but also for Islam's role in the context of black resistance and revolutionary movements. Upon further examination hip

hop's connections to Islam are a continuance of the tradition of ideological and social resistance in the African-American community that can be traced directly to two movements that began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA) and the Nation Of Islam (NOI).

The MSTA was founded in 1913 by Timothy Drew known as the Prophet Noble Drew Ali for African-Americans to reclaim their heritage as Moors, reject racial labels like "Negro," "Black," and "Colored" and become self-sufficient respectable members of the community. Ali urged his followers to follow Islam and based his teachings on the text known as *The Circle Seven Koran* that is said to be derived from the works *Unto Thee I Grant* and *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Nance 125). The MSTA was headquartered in Chicago, and at its height in the 1920s, it is reported that the organization had around 35,000 members in 17 cities. After Ali's death in 1929, the MSTA split into several competing factions. Wallace Fard Muhammad founded the Nation of Islam (NOI), and it has been alleged that Fard was a member of the MSTA, although the NOI denies Fard's connection to the MSTA.

The NOI was founded by Fard in 1930 in Detroit, Michigan to improve the social conditions of blacks in America and to turn to its true religion which is Islam. Fard claimed to be "Allah in person." After his disappearance in 1934, Elijah Muhammad succeeded him. The NOI has been the most prominent counter-religious movement among blacks in the U.S., rising to prominence with charismatic figures like Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali. Both the NOI and to a lesser extent in terms of influence the MSTA emerged in the U.S. as organizations for political resistance, racial pride, and community building for African-Americans in the face of systematic oppression. The NOI has

influenced the music of several hip hop artists. Arguably the most notable influence of Islam on hip hop is Nation of Gods and Earths (NGE) commonly known as the Five Percent Nation, which should be explained for its specific relevance in this study.

Founded in Harlem by Clarence 13X who was a member of the NOI, the Five Percent Nation taught the 120 lessons from the NOI, but deviated from that organization by teaching followers that the black man was God himself, creator of life while women are known as Earths. The Five Percent have knowledge of self and are poor righteous teachers who strive to free the deaf, dumb, and blind (85%) from the perils of ignorance. The Ten Percent are the bloodsuckers and leeches of the masses who advocate the belief in a mystery god in the sky, yet preserve the knowledge of true history and the black man's divinity in secret societies. The teachings of the Five Percent are based on the 120 lessons of the NOI, but Father Allah also added Supreme Mathematics and the Supreme Alphabet.<sup>22</sup> For the purpose of examining *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, I will return to explanations of the tenets of the NGE, 120 lessons, Supreme Mathematics, and Supreme Alphabet as these examples will clarify the language or "hidden transcript" that functions as a discourse of resistance.

The aforementioned movements are an extension for black political resistance in the U.S. Islam, which has been identified as the "true religion" for blacks who have been oppressed by the dominant white Judeo-Christian society. Scholars have studied both the rhetoric of these movements as well as the response and framing by apparatuses of the dominant culture.<sup>23</sup> In terms of the intersection between Islam, hip hop and black

---

<sup>22</sup> Supreme Mathematics and the Supreme Alphabet are sets of principles with numerological meaning and are essential to understanding how Five Percenters communicate.

<sup>23</sup> See McPhail; Varda; Terrill

resistance there are two studies of particular relevance. McCann examines the connections between Gary Webb's *Dark Alliance* series, conspiracy and the Nation of Islam, specifically the NOI's assertion that Webb's death which was reported as a suicide was part of a conspiracy. McCann examines the "resonance" of Webb's narrative in the black community as well as "the ways the NOI exploited this resonance" (398). Using Burke's notion of the "representative anecdote," McCann locates the *Dark Alliance* series "within the representative anecdote of genocide" (398). As McCann explains, "Webb's 'Dark Alliance' provided many members of the black community—and certainly the more radical rhetors of the NOI—a resource for organizing the horrors of the drug economy and mass incarceration around a familiar and persuasive anecdote" (398). Swedenburg conducted an anthropological study of Five Percent ideology and rap music, citing several examples of lyrical references as well as explanations of the basic tenets. Swedenburg argues, "Islamic rap is no marginal cultural phenomenon, it has firmly implanted itself at the center of U.S. mass culture" (2). This study will engage these studies and provide deeper understanding of the music and the message, as well as the context and social conditions from which it emerges.

### **Chapter Preview**

*Chapter 2: I-Self-Lord-And-Master: I-pistemology and the Complex Process of Identity Making through Popular Culture*

Chapter 2 explores the influence of the media discourses in popular culture, the relationship between knowledge institutions, subjugated bodies of knowledge, and the expression of resistance through the commoditized industry of rap music. The relationship between media texts that are produced by artists who represent marginalized

communities and the capitalist apparatuses of media is complicated by the general distrust of the dominant culture's institutions. In this chapter, I describe the context from which Killarmy and their parent group Wu-Tang Clan emerged to challenge dominant culture while simultaneously operating within it by using specific texts as support for their sonic revolution. In particular, I examine the document that bears the same title of the album and its validity within the hip hop community as an example of the specific trust of certain productions of knowledge from the dominant culture. The relationship of popular culture with the attitude of epistemological suspicion provides a unique context that must be understood first before exploring the specific exigencies *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* addresses. Furthermore, the culture of hip hop is produced from an I-pistemological knowledge base where a do-it-yourself ethos emerges from creating meaning from a multitude of possible sources.

*Chapter 3: It Seems it Never Fails: The Teachings of the Five Percent and I-pistemological Meaning Making in the Battle of Knowledge*

Chapter 3 explores in detail the teachings of the Five Percent that influenced Killarmy and the revolutionary aspirations espoused in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. The lyrical content reflects the tradition of black resistance and the importance of knowledge of self to combat the “tricknowledge” of the dominant culture. The teachings of the Five Percent particularly the emphasis on self-reliance and internal judgment is an example of an I-pistemological mindset that arises from the general distrust of African-Americans with the knowledge institutions of the United States. Killarmy's lyrics exemplify Rose's idea of the “hidden transcript” that criticizes the dominant power structure through a codified slang style of rap. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* displays

the lyrical style of Miyakawa's "God Hop," which functions both to resist oppression and to show and positive knowledge of self and an understanding of the universe.

*Chapter 4: Burning Season: The Impact of the Crack Epidemic and the Struggle Against a "Dark Alliance"*

Chapter 4 examines the conspiracy of the crack epidemic in the black community and the relationship between government apparatuses like the CIA and the criminal justice system that incarcerates young black males at high rates. Placed in conversation with the facts reported in the *Dark Alliance* series, *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* speaks specifically to this exigency and the music reflects the struggle of young black men in poverty who fight to escape seemingly inevitable incarceration or premature death. The *Dark Alliance* series and the African-American community's support of the findings sparked what Bratich calls a "conspiracy panic" where mainstream media focused on marginalizing the conspiracy theory that was gaining strength in the early days of online journalism. Killarmy not only describe the perils of the conspiracy to destroy black men, they also admonish crack dealers as traitors and the inauthentic, materialistic rappers who lack their revolutionary spirit and lyrical ability. The message in the music is contextualized by the significance of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, the shift in the direction of rap music and the alleged conspiracy of the music industry and the prison industrial complex.

*Chapter 5: Terror is Him: The Black Male Image and the War on Terror*

Chapter 5 examines the relationship between terrorism, conspiracy, war, and the events that unfold on the world stage that breed a climate of suspicion. I situate this discussion by describing the framing of Five Percenters as a criminal organization and

the historical circumstances that brought forth this characterization. The Wu-Tang Clan was the focus of an FBI investigation in the late 1990s and connections to Five Percenters and criminal activity has been a long-standing focus for law enforcement. War and terrorism is a central theme in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and Killarmy adopt the image of militant terrorists that threaten the dominant establishment by subverting the power structures that employ their own terrorist tactics to victimize the black community. In this chapter, I return to the example of the Beltway Attacks to explore the media framing of domestic insurgents, specifically black militants and the complex relationship of this image with the mainstream media that circulates it. A conspiracy panic ensued in the wake of the Beltway Attacks to further marginalize Five Percent ideology as a dysfunctional mentality for the black community and at worse a terrorist ideology bent on destroying America. The image Killarmy presents contributes to the double bind that rappers face as authentic voices from the ghetto who are simultaneously fighting the criminal image. This becomes a more complicated process because of commercialization.

#### *Chapter 6: Conclusion*

Chapter 6 will conclude this study by resituating the context of the discourse with the theoretical concepts discussed in the dissertation. Here I will tie together the examples discussed from the album and explore its relevance to related studies and offer suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2

### **I-SELF-LORD-AND-MASTER: I-pistemology and the Complex Process of Identity Making through Popular Culture**

The spirit and rhetoric of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* operates under the general assumption that nothing in the political and socioeconomic arena happens by accident and the black community has been engineered to be the low-class element of society. Hip hop as a culture and musical form of expression emerged from the negative influence of poverty and marginalization as an outlet for expression, community, and prosperity. Hip hop has grown in large part from an I-pistemological ethos of creating one's own epistemological template of living in the face of a society that has denied access. This chapter explains this process in the sonic creation of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, specifically how Killarmy reconfigures elements of the dominant popular culture to create their own distinct signature on an alternative body of knowledge.

One of the common ties that connects society today is the influence of popular culture depicted in mainstream media productions. Despite differences in socioeconomic status or cultural background people share connections to musical icons, television shows, motion pictures, and sports teams. The relationships of entertainment, political engagement, social justice, and economic status are complicated by three factors. First, popular culture tends to replicate and in many cases create specific expectations for groups of people in regards to race, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. Secondly, these expectations or stereotypical depictions have a tangible social impact as they reinforce power relationships that benefit some and are detrimental to others. Lastly, I see popular culture as an industry that is capitalistic in nature that

potentially creates serious issues for oppressed groups when the pursuit of profit overrides basic principles of justice and equality.

In this chapter, I examine the influence of media discourses in popular culture, the relationship between knowledge institutions with subjugated bodies of knowledge, and the expression of resistance through the commoditized industry of rap music. The creation of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* draws on a myriad of sources including influences of dominant institutions of mainstream media as well as the marginal discourses and forms of expression created in response to the oppressiveness of these institutions. Secondly, I believe the black community maintains a general distrust of dominant knowledge institutions but simultaneously maintains on a specific trust of some of the texts these institutions produce. This relationship of the black community with the dominant knowledge institutions of the United States is evident in hip hop, as I-pistemological meaning making is culled from various source materials that are deemed necessary for survival and advancement. I-pistemological meaning making and the expression of resistance is vividly expressed in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* as Killarmy paints graphic musical portraits through the sonic chaos of the Wu-Tang sound and offers the listener an opportunity to experience the frustrations of black urban youth engaged in an ongoing war.

I will begin with the influence of media discourses on Wu-Tang and Killarmy and explain how the sound, imagery, slang, and musical approach is molded by numerous pop culture influences and how meaning is created by drawing inspiration from elements of popular culture. Secondly, I will discuss the art of sampling in hip hop and how *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* exemplifies this art form by engaging Jean Baudrillard's

discussion of simulacrum and simulation in the postmodern context. Finally, I will discuss the original document from which the album's title is taken and introduce the exigency Killarmy addresses, an oppressive context for the black community and how new, I-pistimeological meaning is constructed to combat these forces. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* aims to combat the forces of oppressions by following the tradition of the expression of resistance in rap music and the socioeconomic complications that the capitalist machine poses for a movement of social justice.

### **The Impact of the Wu-Tang and the Birth of Killarmy**

In order to understand the style of musical protest, references used and exigencies that Killarmy addresses in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, the album must first be placed into context by discussing the emergence and influence of Killarmy's<sup>1</sup> parent group the Wu-Tang Clan.<sup>2</sup> The phenomenon of the Wu-Tang Clan gained notoriety in 1993 with their groundbreaking debut, *Enter the Wu-Tang: 36 Chambers*. This unique contribution changed the hip hop landscape that had become commercially dominated by slicker-sounding funk and R&B laden sounds from hip hop luminaries like Dr. Dre of Death Row Records and the Notorious B.I.G. of Bad Boy Records. Wu-Tang's sound employed a rawer, more stripped down approach to rap music, characterized by hard hitting drums and sparse arrangements created by producer/rapper RZA. One consistent element of Wu-Tang's music was the use of samples from classic kung-fu films, both in the actual songs and interludes, providing a cinematic feel to their songs. Wu-Tang spoke with a unique slang, which caught on in the rap world with hits like C.R.E.A.M. (Cash Rules

---

<sup>1</sup> Killarmy's members include: producer 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple and rappers 9<sup>th</sup> Prince, Dom Pachino, Killa Sin, Beretta 9, Shogun Assassin, and Islord.

<sup>2</sup> Wu-Tang Clan's members include: RZA, GZA, Ol' Dirty Bastard, Method Man, Raekwon the Chef, Ghostface Killah, Inspectah Deck, U-God, and Masta Killa.

Everything Around Me), for example, and subsequently “cream” became a widely used slang term for money. Wu-Tang altered the landscape in terms of the sound of hip hop in the mid-1990s by influencing other artists to use a more stripped down approach. RZA also brokered unprecedented deals for the nine-man rap crew: as a group they were signed to one label (Loud Records), but each individual member was able to sign deals with other labels.<sup>3</sup> This breakthrough enabled other large crews in hip hop to follow suit, at a time when the industry was dominated by solo-acts. Wu-Tang’s popularity enabled them to broker deals for numerous side groups and artists, one of the most successful affiliates being Killarmy, whose music is the primary focus of this study.

To further elucidate the connection between popular culture, the image, and sound of Wu-Tang/Killarmy, a discussion of the trajectory of the influences on hip hop culture, specifically the art of sampling, or borrowing pieces of previously recorded material and creating new songs from this material is necessary. Hip hop music is uniquely tied to popular culture in a way other genres are not due to the tradition of sampling. Rap music emerged from the block parties in the South Bronx in the early 1970s, where popular samples or “breaks” were looped from records for party-goers to dance to and the emcees or rappers would engage the crowd through call and response chants. From this beginning, hip hop music evolved into its most recognized expression of rap, where emcees would perform rhythmic poetry over these breaks or reworked arrangements of breaks known as “beats.” There are numerous ways to create an instrumental track for a rap song that would stay true to hip hop’s aesthetics. Live instruments can be used and traditional musical arrangements can be appropriated to create rap songs. At its essence

---

<sup>3</sup> Other rap conglomerates like No Limit Records and Cash Money Records for example, garnered deals for their artists both as group and solo acts after Wu-Tang set the initial precedent.

however, it is the manipulation of technology and the art of sampling that is more consistent to the roots of hip hop culture. Sampling takes pieces of previously recorded material and reconfigures it into a format conducive to the rapper's message. In its most rudimentary form, sampling simply takes part of a song and loops it where it is easily recognizable to the listener. A more advanced form of sampling is the sound collage where snippets of recorded material are combined and arranged with other pieces to create a sonic backdrop that sounds completely new. In the late-1980s when rap was becoming more commercially viable, several artists faced litigation for sampling. As sampling became more expensive, more producers focused on creating original music (usually synthesized music) that did not rely on samples.

The use of sampling and the tradition of sampling in hip hop is a postmodern phenomenon that resurrects forgone moments in pop culture history. In many instances, these sounds are used to pay homage or provide the feel of older genres of music, in other instances they are used to provide a sense of irony and in some cases a conglomeration of influences creates a motif that constructs its own meaning that resonates with fans. Wu-Tang not only sampled old R&B and soul classics but also infused their music with samples from classic kung-fu movies, which coincided with the philosophy and mystique of the group. This philosophy and mystique was created as a means to combat the negative influences of poverty, crime, and the subjugation of the black community. Wu-Tang was formed in Staten Island, New York, which became known as "Shaolin" and the style of rapping was referred to as a "sword style." The ideas that were inspired by RZA and the crew's infatuation with kung-fu cinema became an integral part of Wu-Tang's sound, philosophy, and ultimately its influence on an entire industry. The influence

drawn from kung-fu movies along with the influence of the Five Percent Nation created a unique philosophy and manner of communicating that made the Wu-Tang sound stand out to listeners. Adding dialogue and sounds from movies is a technique Killarmy's producer 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple follows. In the commercial marketplace, hip hop has helped to resurface somewhat forgotten elements of popular culture. In the case of Wu-Tang, kung-fu movies were brought back into public consciousness and introduced to a new generation of fans.

### **Constructing Meaning from Pop Culture Influences to Combat an Oppressive**

#### **Context**

I was thirteen years old when I saw the kung-fu film *The Thirty-sixth Chamber of Shaolin*, the story of a man who trains to be a Shaolin monk then leaves the temple to teach the world their style of kung-fu. Nine years later, I formed the Wu-Tang Clan- and we left Staten Island to teach the world our style of hip-hop. (RZA 4)

It is important to understand how elements of popular culture can resonate with individuals and are relatable to their circumstances, specifically the bleak circumstances of living in the inescapable maze of public housing. As RZA says in his memoir *Tao of Wu*, "Shaolin is about as far from Staten Island as you can get" (4). Yet through media, unlikely connections can be made across the globe, even an understanding of the ancient wisdom of kung-fu through the dramatizations of martial arts cinema. RZA and the rest of the nine-member crew connected with the messages of discipline, transformation, and brotherhood in the kung-fu films and in combination with their study of 120 lessons of the Five Percent Nation built the foundation for the Wu-Tang.

As we say, Wisdom is a reflection of Knowledge. And when I was a kid, the only knowledge the media showed about black history was either slaves or pimps- *Roots*, *The Mack*, and that was basically it. So in a way, films like *The Thirty-Sixth Chamber* reflected our experience and solidified it, drew people like me into the truth of our own history. And after that martial arts films became serious to me. I studied them like lessons...I look for signals in my own life, to see how they activate those responses. (RZA 53)

RZA tells the story of how the Wu-Tang Clan was named, from the inspiration of *Shaolin vs Wu-Tang*, a movie he and Ol' Dirty Bastard saw one night in a musty theater after a night of drunken debauchery. As RZA recalls, Wu-Tang were the bad guys in the movie, who were highly skilled but were expelled from the Shaolin temple. "Wu-Tang and Shaolin became popular slang around Staten Island and specifically among the members of the future Wu-Tang Clan" (RZA 56). Ironically the brotherhood among the group was solidified from a night when they watched a film called *Eight-Diagram Pole Fighter*. "So one day a bunch of dudes came over...I pulled out a tape of *Eight-Diagram*. Before we were an hour into it something strange happened...people got real quiet, some niggas even started crying. Because that movie is real- it's a reflection of the reality we were all living" (RZA 57-58).

The story in *Eight Diagram* is one of hardship and betrayal, and RZA explains that the bonds one makes become "stronger than blood" in a context where drug wars and murder are the norm. From the different lessons culled from the films, the naming and philosophy that accompanied Wu-Tang was inevitable. "The name says we're Wu-Tang warriors, we're from Shaolin and we're a Clan, which means family. That last part's just

as crucial because it's about a connection to something bigger than yourself, which is where the greatest strength comes from" (RZA 58). Through this unlikely mix of Five Percent teachings and meaning derived from kung-fu films, Wu-Tang created their own culture that was expressed through rap music that had a major impact on the rap industry and pop culture at large. Killarmy as members of the Wu-Tang family tree put their spin on this philosophy and style of music by delving into the themes of war, terrorism, and conspiracy with their album *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. This intriguing phenomenon in which esoteric religious teachings and pop culture media were appropriated to construct new meaning and even engage sociopolitical issues is postmodern in the sense that it follows no linear pattern but only makes sense in a context where the multitude of media influences create a climate where individuals *must* find a way to make sense of it, particularly the socially oppressed. Thus, through appropriated symbolism, the phenomenon of the Wu-Tang Clan and subsequently Killarmy develop their own style of protest music consistent with postmodern society where symbols are adjusted to create new maps to navigate uncertain, dangerous territory.

### **Simulacrum, Simulation, Sampling and the Appropriation of Meaning**

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the

map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself. (Baudrillard 1)

Hip hop music at its essence is the abstraction of reality through its descriptions of events and situations that create it. The art of sampling takes the pieces of previously performed music and other sonic material, rearranges these pieces to assemble a soundtrack that provides the backdrop for these interpretations of reality. Baudrillard discusses “copies of copies” or “simulacra” and “hyper-reality” existing through the appropriation of symbolism that represents previous representations of extracted existence. In other words, “the map” becoming the territory that one exists in is a framework created through the historic process of symbol appropriation. What is imagined can no longer be determined as the representation is reduced to the procession of symbols. “This imaginary of representation, which simultaneously culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographers mad project of the ideal coextensivity of map and territory, disappears in the simulation whose operation is nuclear and genetic, no longer at all specular or discursive. It is all of metaphysics that is lost” (Baudrillard 2). To simplify, “cartographers” can be understood as those who validate meaning through discourses that are purely symbolic, thus defining the territory and creating the parameters for people to navigate in it. The procession of discourse and symbolism through history defines how people can operate through their subjectivity, a subjectivity with no real metaphysical presence other than what is defined by this cartography. In a postmodern context, with the increased proliferation of mass media through digitization, hyper-reality is intensified exponentially as representations of reality are even further removed from their essential metaphysics and are re-appropriated symbols, or as Baudrillard says, “copies of copies.”

Peter Manuel engages Baudrillard's theorization of simulacrum by relating it to borrowing or sampling in modern music, eventually turning his attention to the process used in hip hop music. Manuel begins his argument by noting that the African Diaspora culture emerged as a "Western, hybrid, creolized" culture where music specifically flipped Enlightenment modernity by "using pre-modern as well as original and borrowed elements of western elements to create a new and dynamic expressive culture" (228).<sup>4</sup> For Manuel, post-modernist influenced music is characterized by the "proliferation of mass media into private and public life, commodification and penetration of capital" and a "mixing of high and low culture" resulting in a type of "pastiche" (228). No music represents this mixing like hip hop where at its root sampling, borrowing and appropriation of various cultural influences are essential to its aesthetics. Hip hop began as a form of expression from a marginalized segment of society, one that as Manuel describes, necessitates an ability to create meaning from mediated madness:

The alienation of the poor and marginal from mainstream society and its discourse naturally enhances the tendency for such individuals to regard such media content...as duplicitous and meaningless junk. Such media discourse can acquire subcultural significance if only scrambled and recycled in creative bricolage, as subcultures construct their own gerrymandered sense of identity out of imagerial objects or *trouvees*, be they dress codes or musical styles. (230)

To further illustrate his point and highlight the differences in the musical borrowing in hip hop and other forms of music, Manuel engages Leonard Meyer's definition of "embodied" and "referential" meaning. In short, embodied meaning is

---

<sup>4</sup> Manuel builds his argument from Paul Gilroy who discussion of *dislocation* in Diaspora communities.

characterized by “the tensions in the music, rhythm, melody, harmony and timbre” (Manuel 231). Referential meaning is characterized by “extra-musical associations” like “religion, ritual, nationalism” or “personal memory”. For example, a musical group could play a song in a blues standard or style, which would be an example of embodied meaning as the rhythm, melody, etc. is used to reproduce the emotional tensions synonymous with blues. If the same interpretation of blues would reference an experience of listening to the blues in Memphis, Tennessee, for example, this would be an example of referential meaning as it would allude to personal memory as well as pay homage to the tradition of the blues music of Memphis. So with this in mind, are music styles borrowed or cultivated for embodied, referential meaning or both?

Manuel argues that hip hop and other postmodern forms are not using musical borrowing to be emotionally expressive but are “pastiche” or “quirky simulacrum clearly put in for its difference” (232). Furthermore, Manuel states that “digital iterations are merely simulacrum and post modern devoid of referential or embodied meaning”(232). Despite this critique Manuel does acknowledge how hip hop videos are less of a simulacrum because they engage the bleak context of the ghetto and the lyrics have more immediacy as they also focus on this context. Manuel also acknowledges Rose’s explanation of “modern and postmodern elements” centrality to “rap’s aesthetics” because of the “difficult process of constructing history and identity” so rap artists sample or borrow to “pay homage” by “dancing through adversity” (234). Still this explanation leaves many nuances of sampling and meaning making unexplained. On one hand, hip hop music can be and is in many cases, pastiche or creative bricolage. On the other hand, I argue that sampling in hip hop can and does in many cases have both

embodied and referential meaning and in the following section, I will explain how this process is engaged with the sampling used in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*.

### **Embodied and Referential Meaning through Sampling in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars***

The deft aesthetics of sampling in rap music can take on numerous forms. There are clear and obvious examples of borrowing in hip hop sampling that are immediately recognizable to the listener who is familiar with the original song. These samples usually involve the lifting of a loop or break without any alteration or a replaying of a specific refrain or slight modification of a chorus. This more obvious form of sampling is common in rap songs that have more pop or crossover appeal as the reworking of a familiar tune that has been accepted by listeners in a popular format is likely to be successful again given a fresh update or twist. Other forms of sampling are less obvious when producers take a small snippet of a piece of music and layer multiple pieces of compositions to create a completely different sounding production. Hip hop producers can speed up or slow down recognizable samples that alter the sonic content where the listener does not recognize it right away. Many would argue within hip hop circles that truly skilled producers who are more attuned to the essence of hip hop music (making something out of nothing) craft their beats in a way where an original sound can be created to form an unlikely mash of obscure samples or perhaps less obscure samples altered in a way that is unique. In fact one of the unwritten rules of sampling is to not reveal the origin of your sample. This rule cannot apply to a sample everyone knows well. Aesthetically speaking, creativity and originality earns high respect and to modify sound in such a way that is unorthodox makes a producers' sound more authentic. It is

one thing to take popular R&B, funk, or even rock songs and use a simple loop from them to make a hit, but quite another to take some obscure classical or jazz recording or even a sample from a cartoon or television show, or some wild combination of many elements and create a fresh composition.

In hip hop or rap music there is complex tension between artists who make songs that are more commercialized or pop oriented, geared toward crossover audiences and female listeners, and artists that make hardcore music that is geared more toward the streets and male listeners. Admittedly, this dichotomy is a simplification inasmuch that some make the distinction between “real hip hop” and “rap” even within hip hop circles. For the sake of this explanation, I think this dichotomy is apt. In the mid-to-late 1990s, rap artists with hardcore street content that enjoyed the greatest commercial success did so largely because the funk and R&B sampling used was danceable and recognizable to listeners.<sup>5</sup> Wu-Tang’s popularity was uncanny as it was in many ways the antithesis of smoothed out sounds and in some regard this difference catered to an audience who wanted an alternative to the popular rap sound at the time. By the time Killarmy’s *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was released, Wu-Tang had a large following that was diverse enough to include listeners from different ends of hip hop’s fan base, largely because of the diversity of the rappers in the group. Killarmy was accessible to the hardcore Wu-Tang fans who were diehard followers as it strayed even further away from a mainstream sound and also delved into more esoteric content. Wu-Tang Clan even with its unorthodox sound was presented in a way that was accessible to a wide range of listeners

---

<sup>5</sup> Hardcore rappers like Notorious B.I.G. and Dr. Dre achieved commercial success by using samples from classic R&B and funk songs despite their street content.

while Killarmy was even more unorthodox and catered to fans interested in hardcore music, particularly music with more overt Black Nationalist content.

The sound of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* while certainly adhering to the staples of the Wu-Tang sound (hard drums, movie samples, sparse arrangements) was different in terms of the rappers using more unorthodox, offbeat syncopations and in terms of the militant content and imagery. Obviously, the sound would be similar considering the fact that RZA was executive producer of the album and produced two songs (“Wake Up” and “War Face”). The rest of the production was handled by RZA protégé, 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple whose beats were like RZA’s but differed in regards to the sonic dissonance that was consistent on the album. Much in the vein of Public Enemy, 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple created layered compositions with obscure samples and high-pitched tones that contrasted starkly with the deep boom-bap sound of the drums. In many ways *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* follows Public Enemy’s tradition of rap protest by creating a sound that is startling and arresting in its approach. The key distinction between Public Enemy’s lyrics and Killarmy’s is while Chuck D’s messages were more direct in the vein of an orator from the civil rights era, the emcees in Killarmy used a style that is more postmodern as the references and descriptions were at times nihilistic, cryptic, and not as obvious. Likely this is the byproduct of different generations of rappers engaging the social context in similar but very different ways. In a sense, *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* is the postmodern update of *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*.<sup>6</sup>

In this section, I will narrow the focus to the sampling and sonic content as the lyrics will be important to draw out other themes. As Manuel mentions, musical

---

<sup>6</sup> Public Enemy’s seminal album balanced social commentary with frenetic multi-layered production.

borrowing has “embodied” or “referential” meaning. Manuel argues that postmodern sampling in hip hop is simply “quirky simulacrum” and is void of embodied or referential meaning. While this argument is valid in some regard with the examples he uses, I take issue with this assumption and will explain my position using the sampling on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* as my example. I recognize that intent is difficult to determine with how sampling decisions are made by hip hop producers, particularly a producer like 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple where his sound uses so many seemingly unrelated elements. However, there are some connections the samples used that in my view relate to embodied or referential meaning. First, if embodied meaning is characterized by the tensions between harmony, melody, rhythm, and timbre, then *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* is rife with embodied meaning as the sonic dissonance reflects the chaos of the urban ghetto in the postmodern world. Secondly, there are many samples used on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* that have referential meaning as they amplify the content and message of Killarmy. In fact the manner in which 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple and RZA sample, I argue follows the vein of borrowing to elicit emotion in music, as well as the simulacra of bricolage.

The opening to the album with the snippet of a news broadcast sets the tone by describing a world of treachery, conspiracy, kidnappings and violence. The first track “Dress to Kill” uses a non-obvious sample of Lee Dorsey’s cover of Iron Butterfly’s “Get Out of My Life Woman” with its horns augmented by the sounds of sirens and chopping helicopter blades (Killarmy, “Dress to Kill”). The track sounds like soldiers descending on a battlefield with the thunderous kicks and snares providing the pulse. “Dress to Kill” is a call to the listener to prepare for war by suiting up in the proper attire—“grab your army suits and your fat black boots, military gear and go out like troops!” (Killarmy).

“Dress to Kill” sets the tone for the album with the atmosphere reminiscent of the beginning of an epic war film, “Clash of the Titans” sonically resembles an epic battle in full swing, with multiple layers of sonic chaos carefully woven over the driving drumbeat. In this song the embodied meaning of disparate sampling is used to create the chaotic atmosphere of guerilla warfare as Shogun Assassin, 9<sup>th</sup> Prince, Dom Pachino, Beretta 9, and guest Street Life trade verses. The technique of balancing a low-end driving drumbeat with high-pitched keyboard squeals (ala Public Enemy) is balanced in the mid-range by a sample of strings from a classical tune “101 Strings” by Celsete Aida (Killarmy Feat. Streetlife, “Clash of the Titans”). “Clash of the Titans” is an example of many different sounds that seemingly do not make sense together, except in the context of this particular style of rap music. What gives these sounds continuity is the repetition of the drums and the keys that 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple plays in rhythm with them and the content of the emcees over the beat.

Arrangements from classical music are also used on “Wu-Renegades” with samples from Christian Sinding’s “Rustle of Spring” and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov’s “The Sea and Sinbad’s Ship”(Killarmy, “Wu-Renegades”). These two samples, one the continuous loop of a rolling piano riff and the other snippet of a string arrangement sped up to make the sound even more high pitched give it a calm yet eerie feel while 9<sup>th</sup> Prince, Killa Sin, Dom Pachino, and Beretta 9 spit apocalyptic lyrics. The sample of the female vocal also provides a sense of the pain that the song describes. A sense of referential meaning can be inferred from the opening of “Wu-Renegades” with the sample of what sounds like a news broadcast: “For security reasons we are broadcasting from an undisclosed location because tonight’s subject is terrorism” (Killarmy). Indeed,

the song itself gives an atmosphere of darkness as Killarmy describes their mission against the nefarious forces that conspire to destroy black people. Again, samples are used that on their face seem out of context yet work harmoniously together in this postmodern pastiche of protest music.

While the tradition of using soul and funk samples in rap music had been long standing to the point *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was released, aside from the song “Burning Season” which uses a loop from Al Green’s version of “Light my Fire” in a manner that can be recognized for anyone familiar with the sound of Al Green’s music, 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple’s use of soul and funk samples are not as obvious (Killarmy, “Burning Season”). For example, “Camouflage Ninjas” uses a sound consistent with other songs in the album (hard kicks and snares with string arrangements, high-pitched squeals, and female vocal samples added for emotional effect), yet it uses a sample from Earth, Wind and Fire’s “Mom” that is not as recognizable (Killarmy, “Camouflage Ninjas”). “Full Moon” uses a sample from Headhunters “God Made Me Funky” that in combination with the sample from Requiem’s “Brooklyn Bridge” makes the song sound nothing like a funk track (Killarmy, “Full Moon”). The refrain on “Full Moon” combined with the dark, introspective feel of the other sounds on the track provide the perfect backdrop for 9<sup>th</sup> Prince and Killa Sin’s personal, introspective lyrics. “Universal Soldiers” includes a sample of the Isley Brothers “Ohio/Machine Gun” that is more consistent with the definition of referential meaning of musical borrowing than the funky sound the Isley’s are known for. “Universal Soldiers” again embodies the sound of the album with hard drums, multi-layered tones, and high-pitched tones, but the use of the Isley sample fits in two ways (Killarmy, “Universal Soldiers”). The refrain of “ten soldiers I hear them

comin...four dead in Ohio” which sped up in “chipmunk soul” like fashion fits the military motif of the album but also has significance since part of the crew is from Stuebenville, Ohio (Killarmy). This is not done by accident and adds more context to the song despite the fact that the sample is so detached from its original use.

Sampling by 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple is varied and quite creative on the album from the use of Billie Holiday’s “Swing! Brother, Swing!”<sup>7</sup> on “Swinging Swords” to an eerie vocal snippet of the folk song “The Wind That Shakes the Barley” by Dead Can Dance on “Blood for Blood” proving that sounds can be taken from all ends of the pop culture spectrum to give texture and meaning to this form of postmodern music (Killarmy, “Swinging Swords;” Killarmy, “Blood for Blood”). In terms of borrowing from pop culture outside of the realm of traditional music recordings, *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* includes samples from television and film that provide interesting texture to the album. The RZA produced “Wake Up” uses Joe Harrell’s “The Lonely Man Theme” from the soundtrack of *The Incredible Hulk* which is an ironic choice considering the songs’ content (Killarmy, “Wake Up”). Killarmy implores the listener to “wake the fuck up or get broke the fuck up” which is telling the black man to awaken the sleeping giant within and *The Incredible Hulk* story is about a mild mannered scientist who turns into a powerful monster when angered. In *The Incredible Hulk*, the Hulk is always justified in his destruction as he is righting some injustice. The choice by RZA to use this sample is ironic indeed but embedded with referential meaning as well.

“5 Stars” samples “Suicide is Painless” which is the theme from *M.A.S.H.*, a television show about military doctors and war and the sounds of helicopters fit the motif

---

<sup>7</sup> “Swinging your sword” is Wu-Tang slang for rapping as “the tongue is symbolic to the sword.” Thus, the use of his sample has referential meaning relative to the Wu-Tang sound.

that Killarmy uses on the album (Killarmy Feat. Masta Killa, “5 Stars”). This sample is a good match considering this motif as well as calling from memory a moment from popular culture that fits the atmosphere of the song. If suicide is indeed painless then a soldier must recognize that the cause he is fighting for is in many ways a death sentence yet he must accept this to have the courage to endure a mission that is important despite the inevitable consequences. Much in this vein of conditioning the soldier’s mind to face death, 4<sup>th</sup> Disciple and RZA’s use of dialogue from Stanley Kubrick’s film *Full Metal Jacket* provides context into the psychology of breaking down a soldiers’ humanity to make them a killer for a cause. The songs “Under Siege” and “War Face” use segments of the film where Sergeant Hartman verbally berates and conditions his marines to be deadly fighters. The refrain in “Under Siege” is where the Sergeant Hartman character gets his soldiers to repeat: “this is my rifle, there are many like it but this one is mine” (Killarmy). This sample is used to a chilling effect and presented as a reality of warfare where the combatant must cultivate a level of heartlessness to accomplish his deadly mission. In a similar vein “War Face” begins with the segment where the sergeant asks the soldier to “see his war face” and demonstrates what a war face looks like with a guttural scream (Killarmy). These samples draw from popular culture’s dramatizations of war culture to authenticate Killarmy’s message—war is never pretty and the ugliness and violence that must be cultivated is necessary to achieve the victory.

### **The Use of *Silent Weapons in the Quiet War***

*Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars, An Introduction Programming Manual* was uncovered quite by accident on July 7, 1986 when an employee of Boeing Aircraft Co. purchased a surplus IBM copier for scrap parts at a sale, and

discovered inside details of a plan, hatched in the embryonic days of the "Cold War" which called for control of the masses through manipulation of industry, peoples' pastimes, education and political leanings. It called for a quiet revolution, putting brother against brother, and diverting the public's attention from what is really going on. (Introduction to *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, a programming manual)

The choice to give this album the title, *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* helps provide context for the themes of war, terrorism, and conspiracy consistent in the album. The original document is a callous and chilling read given that it describes the systematic control of society through manipulation methods of media, the banking system, and the accumulation of data operationalized by computers. The document describes how the Rockefeller Foundation along with the Air Force and The Harvard Economic Research Project began working on the project in the late 1940s. The theories are based on scientific engineering and the discoveries of atomic power and the manipulation of social energy. In short, new weapons, "silent weapons" were invented to control the undisciplined masses and elements from the banking and commodities industries came together to create a system that makes the economy "totally manipulatable and predictable" ("Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars"). The document goes on to describe in great detail how to manipulate markets using shock tests to determine public reaction, how to keep the public preoccupied with matters of little importance through media and how to balance the inflationary system of credit by decimating segments of the population through war. One section describes the assault on the lower-class:

In order to achieve a totally predictable economy, the low-class elements of society must be brought under total control, i.e., must be housebroken, trained, and assigned a yoke and long-term social duties from a very early age, before they have an opportunity to question the propriety of the matter. In order to achieve such conformity, the lower-class family unit must be disintegrated by a process of increasing preoccupation of the parents and the establishment of government-operated day-care centers for the occupationally orphaned children. The quality of education given to the lower class must be of the poorest sort, so that the moat of ignorance isolating the inferior class from the superior class is and remains incomprehensible to the inferior class. With such an initial handicap, even bright lower class individuals have little if any hope of extricating themselves from their assigned lot in life. This form of slavery is essential to maintain some measure of social order, peace, and tranquility for the ruling upper class. (“Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars” 4)

This document, while in some ways describes something out of a sci-fi horror film has very real implications given the scope of world events that have occurred through the Cold War and post-Cold War era. Specifically for urban communities in the United States that have been decimated by drug epidemics, poverty, poor education, and a general lack of resources, the operation of this kind of weapon system is difficult to dispute. In addition, this document that was originally dated in 1979 describes many future events like economic collapses, wars, how to manipulate price controls, and the engineering of public consent through the media to perpetuate war. With a general knowledge of history and with the personal witnessing of the impact of poverty and a

poor education system, subsequently resulting in high mortality rates and high incarceration rates for black and Latino men, it is difficult to believe these incidents all happen by accident. This document which was distributed in its widest form through the book *Behold a Pale Horse*, written by former CIA agent William Cooper validates what many in the black community have felt all along, that the government cannot be trusted as it has never existed to benefit the black community (general distrust) and documents like this (and others available through the Freedom of Information Act) tell you exactly what the government and power elite has done and plans to do (specific trust). The evidence is difficult to dispute, thus for many requires a counter-strategy to understand how to survive and maintain a sense of dignity and prosperity in a context that clearly undermines one's prosperity.

### **Conclusion: I-pistemological Ethos and Hip Hop Expression**

Hip hop emerged as a cultural form and expression of resistance due to the oppressive circumstances of an impoverished black community. A culture of self-reliance dependent on creating new bodies of I-pistemological knowledge was formed by reconstructing meaning by assembling pieces of popular culture disseminated through mainstream media. Hip hop's do-it-yourself ethos from its inception was born of necessity, as New York City youth were searching for positive ways to express themselves in a context of violence and poverty. The Wu-Tang Clan and Killarmy created their own sonic version of empowerment and resistance true to the tradition of sampling and creative bricolage in a re-appropriation of cultural symbols. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* exemplifies this postmodern form of musical protest with its creative assemblage of various pieces of popular culture. The inspiration for this album is not only

influenced by the lineage of hip hop and the experience of impoverished youth growing up in a mass-mediated context, but it is also propelled by evidence of a major conspiracy being waged against society in general, with the black community reaping the worst of its aims. In order to combat oppression hip hoppers use the tools that they are given, whether it is pop culture media or secret government texts published through underground presses. The combination of these influences into a useable discourse is the catalyst for sonic protest and a central component of hip hop activism.

Wu-Tang and Killarmy exemplify the I-pistemological ethos of the hip hop generation by assembling a new base of knowledge by drawing inspiration from multiple sources of popular culture. Pop culture through commercial mass media is a reflection of the interests of the people. At the same time, it is important to recognize the influence of capital in the production of media texts. The hip hop generation created their own form of expression and culture based on taking what was useful from mass media and drawing inspiration and meaning not only to party but also to make political statements about the social conditions of oppression. The general distrust of the dominant institutions of education for example inspired someone like RZA to use all that was meaningful in his life (including kung-fu films) to create a style of hip hop that was unique and functioned as a philosophy of its own where Killarmy follows the template. In the mid-1990s much of the hip hop generation was reading *Behold a Pale Horse*. This text which confirmed the conspiracy to control society was legitimized because the author was an ex-CIA operative. Hip hoppers already believed in the existence of government conspiracies and the admission from someone in the dominant intelligence community was the official seal of approval for legitimacy.

The following chapter will explain one way to resist this oppressive context by gaining knowledge of self through the teachings of the Five Percent Nation. Killarmy consistently makes references to lessons like Supreme Mathematics and incorporates these lessons in the lyrics to provide the listener with a mental strategy to deal with this psychic warfare and the warfare against the black community. In terms of I-pistemology, Five Percenters advocate knowledge of self in order to understand the world and navigate through a social context that provides “trickknowledge” to divert the black man from his true culture. In this sense, relying on the self as the arbiter of all knowledge is the only way to discern the valid from the invalid, and enhances the ability to decode hidden messages that are disseminated through mass media. Knowledge institutions like the school system, the Christian church, government sources, and mainstream media are not to be trusted, yet with the foundation of knowledge that starts from within one can discern the truth that is hidden (sometimes in plain sight) and develop the ability see things clearly for what they are and not what they appear to be.

### Chapter 3

#### **It Seems it Never Fails: The Teachings of the Five Percent and I-pistemological Meaning Making in the Battle of Knowledge**

This chapter will focus on the lyrical content of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* as it pertains to the 120 lessons of the Nation of Gods and Earths, the Five Percenters. The communicative style of the Gods in rap lyrics is peppered with references to Supreme Mathematics and the Supreme Alphabet that Father Allah (Clarence 13X) added to the lessons of the Nation of Islam. Felicia Miyakawa labeled this phenomenon “God Hop” which she defines as “rap produced and performed by Gods and Earths” (37). The lyrical content of “God Hop” is generally cryptic while those who have been exposed to these lessons understand how abbreviations, acronyms, and allusions to specific lessons are used not only to tell a particular narrative but also to resist oppression, show and prove an understanding of the science of life, and display solidarity within the community. The language of the Five Percent through “God Hop” is the expression of a youth culture that has been socialized through a history of hostility, oppression and subjugation, ultimately influencing a course of action and way of thinking contrary to the dominant structure of white supremacy. Through the language of “God Hop,” Killarmy’s hidden transcript of social critique demonstrates an I-pistemological foundation where the self is the arbiter of all knowledge. This I-pistemological foundation is the basis of a culture that is mentally aware and able to act against oppression.

#### **Whiteness, Blackness and the Resistance Against the Knowledge Institutions**

The oppression of black people in America has generally produced an overwhelming distrust in the “official” sources of knowledge provided by the educational

system, government, and mainstream media. For many blacks, a mindset that normalizes and accepts oppression without resistance is an enslaved mindset that is easily manipulated for the ends of a white supremacist power structure. The ideology of the dominant culture is designed to affix to corporeal markers of subjugation, with skin color being one of the most effective markers to indicate inferiority justified by the historical discourses of science and racialized rhetoric. As these markers are bound to the natural man, the narratives are also bound by the constructs of language that accompany them. In a white supremacist context blackness represents darkness, ignorance, evil, the absence of light and justice. Conversely, whiteness represents everything pure and just, bright and brilliant. With these contrasts in mind, the psyche of the oppressed is reformed according to an image that benefits the oppressor, who is ruler, Lord and Savior in the physical embodiment of the Caucasian image of Christ.

In the song “B.I.B.L.E. (Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth)” by Wu artist Killah Priest, he raps “The white image of Christ is really Cesar Borgia / and the second son of Pope Alexander, the Sixth of Rome / once the picture was shown / that’s how the devils tricked my dome” (Killah Priest). If Jesus looks like Cesar Borgia, then this justifies every action Western society has done against people of color in the name of progress or “manifest destiny.” If the deity, himself in the flesh, is represented by a blond-haired blue-eyed European, then the representative markers of intelligence, civilization, and evolution are not only correct, but ordained by God. If the official institutions of knowledge admit that humanity started from dark skinned peoples in Africa and there is a hominid skeleton named Lucy to prove it, it was in this monkey-like state of a beginning mankind emerged into the civilized sophisticated rational body of

whiteness. With these mechanisms of mental incarceration firmly in place and with a language that Africans had little access to and mastery over, a new type of human being is developed that resembles a man but is functioning as a mule.

Given this context forging an I-pisatomolical perspective was a natural consequence for a people frustrated with oppression and marginalized citizenship. What Marcus Garvey and Noble Drew Ali began at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was continued by W.D. Fard and Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and then Clarence 13X. This lineage of Black Nationalism in the United States is not necessarily a uniform mode of thought as divergent paths and political situations bring up questionable events and motivation for specific actions in history. Sub factions, divisiveness, and co-opting of movements by the dominant structure are common byproducts once movements have been defined. Regardless these deviations, the vein of consciousness of the movements resemble each other with the common goal of improving the condition of black people in America. Father Allah's presence and mission of this reclamation of consciousness would spread far beyond Harlem where he taught to become an integral component of the language of hip hop. The Gods were an important element in the development of the culture in its early stages and their message reached its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s through rap music. Next, I will give an overview of the 120 lessons that serve as the foundation of Five Percent ideology.

### **The Lessons of the Five Percent**

The lessons of the Gods and Earths consist of ten categories: Supreme Mathematics, Supreme Alphabet, Twelve Jewels, Student Enrollment (1-10), English Lesson C-1 (1-36), Lost and Found Lesson No. 1 (1-14), Lost and Found Lesson No. 2

(1-40), Actual Facts, Solar Facts and Plus Lessons. Student Enrollment, English Lesson C-1 and the Lost and Found Lessons are a series of questions and answers (see Appendix A). When Father Allah started the Nation of Gods and Earths, he added the Supreme Mathematics and Supreme Alphabet to the NOI lessons. I will proceed by discussing the lyrical content that is influenced by the lessons in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and how Killarmy uses the language of “God Hop” as an I-pistemological basis to combat white supremacy, but first I will list the headings of the Supreme Mathematics, Supreme Alphabet, and the Twelve Jewels as these precepts are foundational to understanding the vernacular of the Gods.

### **“Dropping Knowledge” in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars***

Hip hop culture has for many years had a symbiotic relationship with the Five Percent. There is a tradition of “dropping knowledge” on records and *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* follows this tradition with an offering that describes the trauma of the ghetto and the systematic war against the mentality and stability of the black community. Killarmy engages this struggle with violent imagery and militant metaphors to illustrate the seriousness of this ongoing battle. Mental slavery and trickknowledge (the devil’s false teachings) is combated in order to “civilize the uncivilized,” the eighty-five percent who are the “blind, deaf and dumb” black people who lack knowledge of self. Killarmy reminds the listener that the black man is God and the “maker and owner of the planet earth, father of civilization and God of the universe” (York). Supreme Mathematics functions as a set of numerological principles and is not viewed as a religion but as part of a culture. Knowledge is (the first tenet in Supreme Mathematics and Twelve Jewels, the number one) the foundation and symbolic to the man who leads his family through

wisdom (the number 2), which is the manifestation of knowledge or the words one speaks, also analogous to the woman who is secondary yet necessary, bringing forth understanding (the number 3) which is the best part (the child). This relationship symbolizes the black family, man, woman, and child (1+2=3) or sun, moon, and star, respectively (York). The language Killarmy uses in their lyrics is a direct reflection of these teachings, and while it can seem cryptic to the uninitiated, for those who have “done the knowledge,” it makes perfect sense. Let’s take as an example, the song “Wake Up.”

“Wake Up” is essentially a battle cry to the black man to acknowledge the forthcoming Armageddon that is undeniable. Through prophecies of the ending of a war that ultimately takes the devil off the planet, emcees 9<sup>th</sup> Prince, Killa Sin, and guests Hell Razah and Prodigal Sun from Wu-Tang affiliate Sunz of Man do not mince words about the mission and purpose:

Wake the fuck up or get broke the fuck up!

The wisdom we apply son, soak the shit up!

If it was cess y’all smoke the shit up!

So wake the fuck up or get broke the fuck up! (Killarmy, “Wake Up”)

This refrain is a direct appeal for the black man to gain knowledge of self and recognize the war being waged or continue to suffer at his own peril. As God, a poor righteous teacher who knows himself and his rightful role as the sole controller of his universe, he has done the knowledge thus has the ability to speak wisely (wisdom). On this track, Killarmy explains the desperation and inevitable triumph of those who take heed by showing and proving knowledge through the lyrics, which is the spoken word set

to the beat. Thus, when it is said “to soak this shit up” that is a direct allusion to wisdom or wise words being like water. In a rap sense, this analogy is apt as emcees “flow” to the beat. Wisdom, however, is not something to be taken at face value, as one must do the knowledge for oneself to gain proper understanding. Beretta 9 expresses this idea in “Clash of the Titans” when he raps, “knowledge before you wisdom.” This line has two meanings. First, do not take someone else’s words at face value because one does not truly understand what one does not know. Said another way, do not simply believe what you are being taught, rather apply a critical mind and think logically or mathematically for oneself. Show and prove, not show and tell. Secondly, man is the foundation of the family and culture and it is a mistake to allow the woman to lead, as wisdom is necessary but secondary to knowledge (York). The culture is directed by the actions of its men, so as the men go the women follow, so when women are leading the household, men do not learn how to be men and are led astray. As stated in the lessons, man is symbolic to the sun and woman is symbolized by the moon so when the sun is ignorant and does not provide the proper light, the woman as a reflection of that knowledge, will be ignorant also and consequently the child who learns from the mother is also lost.

The Supreme Mathematics and Supreme Alphabet function as a set of numerological principles to guide one through life and this language is heavily integrated in the speech of Five Percenters and expressed by using acronyms, numerological references to objects and events. Killarmy is no exception to this rule and throughout *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* references like these are made consistently. For example, Killarmy with their militarized image and tales of street warfare make several references to firearms. So when 9<sup>th</sup> Prince says “My culture nickel put holes in your face like

dimples” on “Wake Up” he is making reference to a .45 caliber pistol, culture representing the 4 and nickel being the 5. Another way the Gods use the Supreme Alphabet to reference a gun is by calling guns “God U’s” or “God-u-nation,” which translates to a basic acronym for a gun (g-u-n). In the Supreme Alphabet, G stands for God, U for universe and N for Now, Nation or end (York).

The use of acronyms as messages with deeper meaning is common amongst Five Percenter, and in the styling of “God Hop” where simple lines have multilayered meanings when broken down. On “5 Stars,” Dom Pachino raps, “Dom Pachino the sun saving my universe now,” which alludes to both to Supreme Alphabet as S, is Self or Savior, U is You or Universe and N is Now, Nation or End. As mentioned before, sun (s-u-n) is also symbolic to the black man being knowledge, the head of his family and the source of light for his universe. 9th Prince begins “5 Stars” by saying “Master Allah Self, He,” which spells out M.A.S.H. (the prominent sample of the theme song from M.A.S.H. in “5 Stars”) then “Shaolin CIPHER He”, which is where the crew hails from (Staten Island and Ohio). These simple acronyms have layered meanings when broken down this way and serve as signals to those who know that the Gods are on the microphone and a certain standard of knowledge is expected by the listeners in the lyrics.

Another example of a creative acronym is the word peace (P-E-A-C-E), which is used as a greeting in hip hop culture but for the Gods has deeper meaning depending on its application. In the Twelve Jewels, peace is the highest elevation that leads to happiness (York). A Five Percenter may break this down in several ways to show and prove an understanding of the culture or how to live and conduct oneself. When broken down in the Supreme Alphabet, peace is Power Equality Allah C (see) Equality, which is

basically a way of saying through truth, is my power and the equality of God sees the equality in others. One God may greet another with Power Equality, to which the person being greeted would finish with Allah C- Equality, adding up to P-E-A-C-E. Peace can also be broken down as an acronym meaning Positive-Energy-Always-Corrects-Errors or numerous other acronyms that display one's knowledge and creativity like "Protons-Electrons-Always-Cause-Explosions."<sup>1</sup> Islam is used as an acronym for "I-Self-Lord and Master," "I-Stimulate-Life and Matter," "I-Sincerely-Love Allah's Mathematics," and any other creative assemblage that a God can explain mathematically.<sup>2</sup> Breakdowns of words like these are common ways to display knowledge among Five Percenters. Rap lyrics groups like Killarmy use these breakdowns to show and prove their application of the Supreme Mathematics and Supreme Alphabet to their listeners.<sup>3</sup>

*Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* depicts scenes that dramatize everyday street life as well as offer visions of prophecy. Similar to other religious sects that speak of prophetic visions Five Percenters draw from their own study of religious texts. While Christians use the Bible, Five Percenters use the 120 Lessons. Interestingly, many of the 120 Lessons are cross-referenced with the Bible and Koran, offering different interpretations of scriptures. On "Wake Up" guest emcee Hell Razah raps, "Soon as we unite the sky cracks / a group of UFOs from the seven in the heavens / God celebrated

---

<sup>1</sup> On the Wu-Tang song "4<sup>th</sup> Chamber," RZA ends his verse with, "Protons Electrons Always Cause Explosions."

<sup>2</sup> Guru of Gang Starr begins his verse on "Above the Clouds" with "I-Self-Lord-And-Master." Beretta 9 said "I-Sincerely-Love-Allah's-Mathematics" on the song "Pain" from Killarmy's second LP, *Dirty Weaponry*.

<sup>3</sup> Rappers like Brand Nubian, Rakim, Poor Righteous Teachers, and Lakim Shabazz use acronyms and breakdowns from the Supreme Alphabet and Supreme Mathematics in their rhymes.

devils death day signal / Jail let loose the criminals / Bystanders die” he is likely referencing Plus Lesson 72, which describes Allah’s Mother Plane:

...half mile by half mile square, oval shape, speed up to 9,000 miles per hour...contains 1,500 circular planes, devil calls them “flying saucers”...each plane carries 3 bombs and shoots flames of fire...mother plane’s purpose is to destroy Babylon (America) ...prophecy of plane in Ezekiel 10 ...he saw a vision rose up from earth so high it looked dreadful. (York)

Lessons like Plus Lesson 72 when taken on their face can be viewed as fanatical delusions of a brainwashed sect. The interpretation of biblical scripture is often paralleled with lessons in 120 to help the reader make the connection to more common religious texts to validate prophetic and historical claims. These passages can be taken or interpreted literally or they can be interpreted as allegorical pathways to elevate consciousness and understand one’s power and connection to the universe, rather than accept the docile unenlightened thought pattern of the slave. Whether one wishes to accept or claim a temporal connection to extraterrestrial beings is less important than creation of a new imaginary that extends one’s power and agency to a place that frightens the oppressor. It demonstrates a boundlessness of spirit that cannot be phased by mortal concerns such as socioeconomic disenfranchisement or the criminal justice system. So whether Hell Razah is literal with his words or is merely using metaphor is less relevant than the fact he is demonstrating his alignment with a different level of consciousness and urging the listener to do the same.

The lessons not only include passages that predict future events but also include parables that recall historical events. One such reference is made by Shogun Assassin on “5 Stars:”

Like General Monk and his horsemen

The reason is burning season

My brothers is guilty of high treason

So I decapitate them

As they lay motionless bleeding on the canvas

I put away my weapon which is stainless (Killarmy)

“Chopping heads” conjures uncomfortable images for Americans when brought into the context of anything Islamic, especially in the current climate of jihadism displayed prominently on news broadcasts. One of the Plus Lessons tells the story of General Monk Monk who was responsible for taking care of Yacub’s devils and tried to escape from the Caucasus Mountains in Europe after being exiled from paradise (York). General Monk Monk’s mission was to cut the heads off the devils that were fleeing Europe. For the Gods, taking or chopping heads is not necessarily meant to be taken literal, but symbolically. It represents eliminating evil from one’s life. In Shogun’s verse the devil is not the Caucasian or colored man specifically, but the lost black man doing evil against his people, thus making him a devil who needs to be destroyed. On “Universal Soldiers” 9<sup>th</sup> Prince raps: “I mediate seven miles away from Kuwait / Where water runs dry through rivers and fountains / On weekends catch me collecting heads at the Caucus Mountains.” For the Gods, “chopping heads” is a way of life, a civilized man’s duty to rid the world of evil. This allegory can be viewed as a metaphor for

spiritually cleansing oneself and community of devilish activity. Now this certainly can be taken to literal ends, which is the fear of those outside of this ideology who cringe at the idea of a violent mythology that describes the killing of Caucasians. Killarmy amps the intensity of their message by using these references in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. For those who are studying the lessons, the connection makes perfect sense and can be built upon mathematically. References to the “colored man” indicate a different way of thinking about race, contrary to the society that once labeled blacks as “colored.” In order to elucidate this point I will turn to one of the fundamental ideas of Five Percent and NOI theology that describes who the colored man is and how he was created.

### **Who is the Colored Man?**

With the killa and the clan, I came with a scam a foolproof plan to dead the colored man (Beretta 9 in Killarmy, “Clash of the Titans”)

If there is one section of the 120 lessons that garners the most negative feedback it is likely the section that describes the history of the white man who was created by the wicked black scientist Yacub (York). According to this story Yacub as a child was playing with magnets and recognized the principle of opposites attracting. From there he had a mission to create a devil, which would be accomplished genetically by breeding lighter skinned blacks with other light skinned blacks, eventually producing a recessive being that significantly lacked melanin. This is described in the lesson as a process of “grafting” (York). Once Yacub’s creation came to fruition, it caused many problems. Yacub’s creation brought forth a wickedness that created trouble among the original people, lying and stirring conflict by using the strategy of divide and conquer, telling lies and pitting different people against each other. It was because of this troublemaking and

the inability to survive in the intensity of the sun due to the lack of melanin that he was driven away into the caves of Europe over the Caucasus Mountains. So when the Gods speak of the colored man, colored means grafted out from a shade that changes him from his original state into an artificial, weak and wicked being, only capable of operating through lies, trickery, and deceit. The fact that black people were labeled colored is an example of what the Gods label as “tricknowledge” and in this example, the “devil” calls you what he is, to obscure his true nature and the nature of the black man. Tricknowledge is the tool the devil uses to make the black man a slave by stripping away his name, history, language, culture and identity.

My name is Born God Allah, came to North America

On a ship and was stripped of my knowledge and wits...

Ain't nuttin but the army shit, with military war hits

I ambush your barracks with heat-seeking lyrics

I'm out for revenge like a tribe of Indians

I break down your physical change it to a chemical

You grafted man of wickedness, the black man be original (Beretta 9 in Killarmy, “Wu-Renegades”)

The previous passage encapsulates the frustration of the youth that Killarmy represents by summing up what has caused the black man to be oppressed, as well as identify the nature of the oppressor. Beretta 9 reclaims his identity by stating his attribute (Born God Allah) and recounts the slave trade as well as how his ancestors were broken (“stripped of my knowledge and wits”). Furthermore he describes his mission (“ambush your barracks with heat-seeking lyrics”) and inspiration (“out for revenge like a tribe of

Indians”). The reference of Indians identifies the common enemy who is “the grafted man of wickedness” and he reminds the listener who God is (“the black man be original”). The frustration with trickknowledge is echoed by Shogun Assassin in “Under Siege” when he raps, “Soldiers driven mad by centuries of lies and trickery / To go on a killing spree / Putting devils out your misery” (Killarmy). This frustration with the state of black people in America and around the world, is expressed vividly on “It Seems it Never Fails:”

It seems it never fails (x3)

that the devils got niggaz domes locked in hell

so return to the darkside

snakes are the niggaz that stares you in the eyes

death is a penalty when you die (Killarmy)

For the Gods, knowing yourself, knowing your origin and greatness is essential for survival in a society that is designed to enslave black people. In addition to knowing oneself, it is imperative to recognize the traps that are set for black men and the misinformation that is propagated by the dominant culture of white supremacy. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* encapsulates the attitude of the young black male who is struggling with poverty, poor education, likely incarceration and premature death and his transformation through the teachings of the Five Percent that implores the ethos of “each one, teach one,” a duty to enlighten others. “It Seems it Never Fails” is a song that displays the Gods frustration with the eighty-five percent or those who are lost, dumb, deaf, and blind that succumb to the tricks and lies of a society that devalues the black male. “Returning to the Darkside” is necessary for escaping mental slavery, or returning to one’s divine essence of blackness. The number four in Supreme Mathematics is

Culture/Freedom and when one knows his culture (Islam) he “frees the dome” and is able to operate without restrictions where the opposite is to fall victim to the plan of the oppressor which is to maintain the hell and slavery of the black population. The process of enlightenment through Allah’s Mathematics is a transformation that requires one to be “born” through the body of knowledge. In Supreme Mathematics being born is the number nine, which is analogous to the gestation period of a child to be born through the womb in nine months (Killarmy). The steps from knowledge to born in Supreme Mathematics must occur to elevate consciousness. 9th Prince’s verse in “It Seems it Never Fails” describes his transformation:

After the fallen moon  
Space became sad  
The planet Earth was a world of all mad  
Solid, liquid and gas  
I became an ill fad  
Crying out shame, I know the pain  
Of blessing my name  
and taggin' on the wall  
write it in blood stains  
'til the whole world can see  
the reality of a madness conspiracy (Killarmy)

Killarmy’s angst-filled verses in combination with the dark and chaotic sonic approach exemplifies the frustration and suffocating feeling of being surrounded by ignorance and poverty. 9th Prince and Islord are frustrated by most of the people in their

community (85%) that continue to fall victim to the tricks of the devil and who refuse to understand their true nature. They warn the listener to be wary of those who look like them but are being controlled, and therefore not trustworthy in the black community (“Snakes are the niggas that stare you in the eye”). How one determines loyalty to the cause is displayed by demonstration of his knowledge and in the tradition of showing and proving through rap. Killarmy accomplishes this by dropping knowledge in their lyrics. Those who are traitors and snakes in the community must face punishment (“Death is the penalty, when you die”). Death as a penalty is a maxim all Gods should be familiar with and this line is rapped on “Under Siege” by Shogun Assassin: “So prepare, death be your penalty / Now you’re a mere memory of bloody victory” (Killarmy). When the Gods talk about “penalty” this is a direct reference to the fifth jewel, justice, which is a “reward or penalty” for something done. Justice explains the progression of realizing one’s power as God who is responsible for his ways and actions. In the Jewels when knowledge, wisdom and understanding are obtained one knows his culture and is free to make decisions based on this foundation. With that freedom, responsibility and justice either by reward or penalty will occur depending on what path you take. So “death as a penalty” is when one fails to exercise his freedom of choice properly. For Killarmy, serving justice is the Gods duty for both those who choose to perpetuate slavery, and for the traitors in the community.

Jewels seven, eight and nine are Food, Clothing and Shelter, respectively and these jewels are necessary to find Love, Peace, and Happiness (10-12) (York). Food, clothing, and shelter have a literal meaning, but also represent cultivation of the mind as in feeding yourself with the proper knowledge, and metaphorically speaking, being

covered (clothing) and protected (shelter) by it as well. Shelter is a consistent theme on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and is the title of a song. The refrain of “Shelter” sums up the meaning of this jewel succinctly:

Through difficult times it's hard to maintain  
Lookin for the shelter that blocks out the rain  
Stress and pain could leave a mark on the brain  
But one thing's for sure black God remains (Killarmy)

Shelter is necessary to protect against the elements and provide a place to live and thrive. Clothing and shelter keep you comfortable and protected from the elements. So that knowledge, wisdom, and understanding add up to equality ( $1+2+3=6$ ), one obtains the right food (7), clothes himself properly (8), and finds the right shelter to live (9), to nourish his being and intelligence (York). Shelter is about being protected from elements that may be detrimental to ones' existence. The body is a temple but so is the spirit. The importance of shelter is expressed by 9<sup>th</sup> Prince also on “Full Moon” when he raps:

“Through difficult times its hard to maintain / I strive to live in the shelter that blocks out the rain / And that rain is pain / Stress on the brain will drive a nigga insane / Forced to stay awake / Late nights its hard to sleep” (Killarmy). Shelter is needed spiritually to protect the black man from the stress and negativity that he is bombarded with from the world of white supremacy. This concept is delved into in depth on “Shelter” where Beretta 9 and Shogun Assassin explain its importance:

Through difficult times lies the unexpected  
My pops disapproves cause I wanna make records  
But check it, my home life for second, I feel neglected

I bounce the first chance I get, I stop to think a second  
I wreck it, damn I'm gonna need a place to sleep  
No major CREAM  
I call up the God Supreme  
I analyze, I'm plannin up a strategy  
Fuck a fantasy I'm dealin with reality  
Mentality that's wilder than the average cat  
I snatchin CREAM and sellin niggas candlewax  
I hit the tracks, I hold cipher with my brothers  
All is understood, peace lies amongst each other  
But meanwhile, I maintain to keep the same  
I smoke a bone every now and then to ease the pain  
But through the struggle I know that only God remains (Killarmy)

Beretta 9's verse tells the story of a black youth who has decided to forge his own path in accordance with his duty and destiny and the struggles that accompany this journey. His decision to "make records" has left him in a position where he must now lean on his brothers (the Gods) to sustain himself and try and flourish in a cold world. For young black men, in the absence of a stable family structure, many turn to the streets, which provides a surrogate structure through the gang, and in this case the Gods are that surrogate family structure. Despite the mission of the Gods to elevate ones status through positive means there are still situations that force one to survive that are negative. As Beretta 9's verse explains he has to do questionable things to make it through despite his quest for righteousness ("Snatchin cream and sellin niggas candlewax"). He admits to

resorting to robbery and as a last resort to selling fake crack rocks to obtain money. For many black youth, risky decisions must be made far too often in the name of survival. Shogun's verse goes into more detail about the need for shelter to protect from the dead-end life of drug dealing:

The streets is bugged  
Seein young soldiers pedal drugs by the pound  
The scheme is to catch CREAM at a fast rate  
Start movin the product from state to state  
Lay up and watch the profits inflate  
Now you're a big time hustler, full time heavyweight contender  
But you must remember  
That your thoughts must be cold just like December  
Stay low key so you won't catch a case  
Throws comin in from the fiends who smoke base  
Madman clientele, see your pockets start to swell  
The last thing on your mind is a jail cell  
You're blind, all you see is money  
Lost in the illusion of luxury  
It's a shame, you're in the game for the fame and the name  
So spin the wheel of misfortune  
I heard where you sling that its scorchin  
Now your life is in jeopardy (Killarmy)

Shogun provides a warning for the young black man that resort to drug sales to achieve a version of shelter or that elusive sliver of the American Dream. He describes a scene where many young black men are attempting to survive and strive in a trap that can be glamorous but is really an inevitable road to nowhere, either death or incarceration. He warns of “the illusion of luxury” that is created by a life of big time hustling. Money and material items can be achieved through the underworld, but at any point this can all be taken away. Killarmy reminds the listener that this option is a trap. Reaching an elevated status on the drug game does not protect against the criminal justice system and the percentage of black men incarcerated for drug related offenses is the highest of any demographic group in the United States.<sup>4</sup> In reality, once this status is achieved the likelihood of meeting this fate increases because of the increased attention of rivals and law enforcement. So when Shogun says, “where you sling now its scorchin / now your life is in jeopardy,” he is offering a warning to black men to not be fooled by this illusion. Seeking the proper shelter and arming yourself with the right knowledge will protect you because in the end, the power exists in God and understanding ones place as God provides tools to react fruitfully in a treacherous world.

### **Love, Hell or Right**

The letter L in the Supreme Alphabet is Love, Hell or Right, which means if one loves himself and his nation, he must be willing to go through hell to come out right (York). “Love, Hell or Right” is a skit on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* where Killarmy is having a discussion about the journey they have been on thus far and how they had to make a difficult decision to cut members from the group. The idea of going through hell

---

<sup>4</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Justice’s 2010 statistics, per 100,000 people 2,207 blacks were incarcerated, compared to 966 Latinos and 380 whites (Glaze 8).

is something that the black man must recognize as a part of the process, especially an enlightened black man who has gained knowledge of self and who is outnumbered by those who don't know who they are (85%) and those who choose to take advantage (10%). The key component is always knowledge as the foundation. The goal of the lessons is to transform the mind and create awareness of one's reality so when Shogun spits a line like "19 million strong up in your atmosphere/In military gear" on "Universal Soldiers" this is in reference to question three from Student Enrollment 1-10 which asks, "What is the population of the Original Nation in the Wilderness in North America and all over the planet Earth: 19 million...17 million plus 2 million Indians in North America" (York). One of the key goals of 120 lessons is to give the black man perspective and broaden his view of his capabilities and possibilities to impact his universe. Once knowledge of self is obtained, purpose becomes clear. Beretta 9's verse on "Under Siege" indicates both transformation and recognition of mission:

My thoughts travel far beyond the galaxies

Quasars to shootin stars

Deadly bombin for the cause wildcat

Razor close likes it in the innocent, the five percent

Attribute, Born God Allah, fuck the government (Killarmy)

Beretta's verse describes a connection to elements far outside of the ghetto ("thoughts travel far beyond the galaxies") as well as his mission as an emcee ("bombin for the cause"). Dropping bombs, knowledge or science is an integral component of "God Hop," where the importance of bringing forth the truth is shocking and unsettling for those who are unaware of this truth. Later in the verse, Beretta 9 says, "victims of illusion

/ don't understand confusion / I let my thoughts be born through poetry / shown and proven." With a mission to educate the blind, deaf and dumb through poetry, Killarmy uses the microphone as a serious tool, displaying the power of understanding the 120 lessons. The lessons help rewrite thinking by putting things in perspective. This is the function of sections like Actual Facts and Solar Facts where it reads: "How far is the earth from the sun- 93 million miles" (York). This helps orient a person to the universe and think beyond the confines of the ghetto or an oppressive society. Supreme Mathematics are tenets to live one's culture by, a useful numerology that orients oneself to the universe and provide a guideline to make sense of the environmental input.

As a response to systematic oppression based on the premise of race, the lessons remind the black man of his responsibility to live according to his culture, which is Islam, a culture that has no birth record, older than the sun, moon and stars. Furthermore, when grounded in this ideology, that the black man is the original man and that the Caucasian man has a 6,000 year history on this earth, combined with general facts like the original people outnumbering Caucasians 10 to 1 on planet earth, one gains clarity as to how the problems of humanity are propagated and why the black man (in particular) is oppressed (York). For the Gods, the devil civilization being it derived a mutated form of original culture, a perverted distortion, only exists with the black man's complicity. Therefore, removing devils is not essentially a physical practice of ethnic cleansing, but a spiritual awakening to the power the black man possesses as God, not as a created slave in the devils' civilization.

### **Conclusion: Hidden Transcripts as Social Critique**

Analyze my vision / then join my collision / which is a war conviction / Militant chamber that's hidden. (9<sup>th</sup> Prince, "Blood for Blood")

Killarmy's lyrics are a reflection of the culture they live, which is expressed through beats and rhymes. Five Percenters who rap carry an extra responsibility of educating through their lyrics as the platform of an emcee is used not only to entertain but enlighten minds. As children of the ghetto, Killarmy had much to say concerning the frustration of living in conditions that stifled their growth as human beings. Tricia Rose explains, the hidden transcript is a tradition of social criticism through entertainment:

Slave dances, blues lyrics, Mardi Gras parades, Jamaican patois, roasts and signifying all carry the pleasure and ingenuity of disguised criticism of the powerful. Poor people learn from experience when and how explicitly they can express their discontent. Under social conditions in which sustained frontal attacks on powerful groups are strategically unwise or successfully contained, oppressed people use language, dance and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion. (102)

Killarmy's image and approach while subversive in its general presentation through aggressive sounds and military appearance is cryptic with their Five Percent influenced slang. On the surface the aggressive music amps up the listener from an entertainment perspective. Even deeper are the messages that are codified through the use of acronyms and the references to 120 lessons. Furthermore, Five Percent ideology is a response to a context that proved to be unreliable for many blacks in America as different epistemological paradigm was created to function as the knowledge base for a culture.

Those outside of the hip hop community can listen to a record like *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and be entertained without fully grasping what it really means. Thus, as a hidden transcript the subversive message was accessible through mainstream media outlets.

Van Zoonen introduces I-pistemology as a postmodern phenomenon. The proliferation of the internet and the multitude of voices that can be accessed through it contributes to knowledge claims becoming more fragile. Black Nationalist resistance in general and specifically Five Percent ideology created an alternative epistemological paradigm long before the internet. Many of the same reasons apply, mainly a strong distrust of the oppressive knowledge institutions. The ethos of knowing and doing for self, part and parcel to the hip hop generation, is taken even further with Five Percent rappers. It all begins with the self and knowledge. Through a learning of one's history, heritage and the relationship of the human families of the Planet Earth, one is free to make informed decisions. In many ways the rise of hip hop coincides with the I-pistemological shift outside of hip hop. Through rap music, groups like Killarmy influence others to seek their own understanding beyond school, the church or the evening news.

## Chapter 4

### **Burning Season: The Impact of the Crack Epidemic and the Struggle Against a “Dark Alliance”**

The foundation of Five Percent ideology and the I-pistemological ethos of hip hop inspired Killarmy to create a unique sound in the Wu-Tang tradition. By using their own brand of “God Hop,” Killarmy’s hidden transcript of resistance is shown and proven by dropping knowledge on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. This chapter will focus on the specific exigencies addressed on the album—the context of conspiracy against the black community through the crack epidemic and the corporate conspiracy to water down authentic hip hop by promoting negativity and using fake wanna-be thug rappers to do so.

When Killarmy released *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* in 1997, the rap industry was undergoing a metamorphosis that would change the face of the genre for years to come. Aside from the successful platinum release of Wu Tang Clan’s *Wu Tang Forever* in the summer, rap audiences were shifting to more party-oriented music focused on material excess. The “bling-bling” era was emerging where bragging about one’s money, jewelry or hedonistic pleasures was at the forefront of the mainstream commercial product. Killarmy emerged as an antithesis with a gritty stripped down sound and militarized appearance. Now this dichotomy alone is an oversimplification as bragging about one’s material possessions and appearance was not limited to self-proclaimed thug rappers. Killarmy rapped about violence but with a slant that was pro-black and influenced heavily by Five Percent ideology. Killarmy dressed in the street wear of the time augmented with their trademark camouflage. They wore gold chains, too, but their aim was not to make the girls dance or to make pop-friendly radio tunes, but to

demonstrate their merit through knowledge of self and through lyrical prowess. This is what separated Wu-Tang from their contemporaries—the Wu was at the forefront of lyricism in hip hop *and* their street persona was authentic, plus they admitted their mission was to teach. Take RZA’s comments from the intro of disc 2 in *Wu-Tang Forever*:

There’s a lot of music come out this year and the shits been weak...tryin to change the culture with a wack nigga singin the hook...turning this into R&B or funk, fuck that! This is emceein’...you Dr. Seuss, Mother Goose, simple-minded (rappers)...stop running up on niggas with all that wack shit! Talkin’ bout you an emcee.

Wu-Tang was a collective of rappers who focused on the skill of rhyming and speaking wise words was just as important as being or looking cool. Killarmy’s rhetorical exigence in this sense was to attack the rap industry through sonic and lyrical terrorism creating something more powerful and poignant than the fake thug rapper bragging about cars and clothes. To be able to speak in hip hop was something you had to earn. The culture that was produced from an impoverished and often highly dangerous context was being threatened by the fake creations of corporate media.

When we was doin’ hip-hop in the early days, you know we came up in the time where to be hip-hop wasn’t easy, man as it is now. You would go to a block party with a new leather jacket on and a Kangol hat and some Adidas, you was risking your life. Everybody didn’t have that because you had to be able to fight and defend yourself just to be able to wear that. (“RZA Inside the Lines with Rap Genius: Part 1”)

*Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* lyrically attacks not only institutions, but the counterfeit “fake thugs” and “wack emcees” that are propped up by fake record executives who did not care about the culture of hip hop. Killarmy’s separation from the popularized creations of the rap industry was reflected sonically and visually. Four videos were released to promote *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* including videos for “Wu-Renegades,” “Wake Up,” “Fair, Love and War,” and “Swinging Swords.” Each of these videos shared common themes—images of dramatized warfare both in the streets and in war trenches resembling the war movies of Hollywood. Killarmy portrayed warriors of the street, decked out in camouflage gear riding in an old Toyota van rather than a luxury vehicle like other rappers of the time. Their message seemed to be aimed at both the system of oppression at large as well as fake-thug rappers who glorified excess with simplistic sub-par lyricism. To understand both of these exigencies one must consider the context that led up to this moment. Killarmy represents a part of a generation raised in a ghetto environment ravaged by the crack epidemic. This chapter will trace this history and the suspicion of those at the margins of African American society who have long suspected nefarious forces at work in the destruction of the community. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* takes aim at pretenders in the community and the conspired forces that support them. Killarmy’s message, however, leaves much in question in terms of how good and evil gets defined and the psychological effects of young black men engaged in urban warfare.

### ***Dark Alliance, the Iran Contra Scandal and the Crack Era***

In other words, the conspirators are successful because the moral citizen cannot accept the conclusion that other individuals would actually wish to create incredibly destructive acts against their fellow citizens. (Epperson)

In 1996 Gary Webb's *Dark Alliance* series was released describing the CIA supported drug ring stretching from Nicaragua to Los Angeles. First printed in the *San Jose Mercury* and subsequently criticized in national papers like the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* for catering to "conspiracy mongers" in the African-American community (Webb; Golden; Katz; Kazin; Kurtz). Many in the African-American community were outraged, prompting Congresswoman Maxine Waters to demand an investigation. CIA director John Deutch promised a "full inquiry" assuring "Neither participation or condoning of drug trafficking by Contra forces" (Hall 206). This progression of actions climaxed with the well-publicized visit by Deutch to a Watts high school where he was grilled by an angry crowd (Hall 205-206). By 1997 results of the investigation were released to national news that reported no evidence of drug smuggling and no connection to the CIA (as alleged by Webb). The actual Inspector General's report however supported the findings of the Webb report (Hall 206). Despite this fact, the Webb report is still widely considered conspiracy theory primarily because of its interest by the black community (Britt; Suro and Pincus; White).

The black-owned *LA Sentinel*, for example, would not let go of the Webb story ("Cong. Waters;" Hutchinson; Madison; Parker; Samad). Its discursive formation and relationship to the African-American community was an excuse for the mainstream media to dismiss it (Britt; Dowd; Ayres; Golden; Katz; Kazin; Martinez; Schwadron;

Suro and Pincus). No matter what the dominant culture has done it is legitimized by the validity of its institutions. What good would it do for the dominant knowledge institutions to circulate this narrative of corruption? To openly admit and publicize this story would be to openly admit to the subjugation of black and Latino people for political and economic gain. The dominant position of authority claims any actions are justified under the guise of protecting democracy. To believe that the United States government would deliberately undermine its own citizens is the warped view of paranoid conspiracists. The government is assumed to be trusted as are other institutions like the schools, religions, and the mainstream news media. Those on the margins of mainstream society however, find it difficult to accept the ideology of the dominant culture at face value.

Discourses are emergent from other discourses while language restricts the terms of resistance. The black community has always been skeptical of a government that allowed them to be slaves and enforced Jim Crow laws. The allegations and suspicions of government apparatuses like the CIA being complicit in the destruction of minority communities through the drug trade is not merely a theory created by poor people. Evidence of the CIA drug trafficking was discovered back in the Iran Contra hearings (Golden; Katz; Suro and Pincus). Despite these bits of evidence, these connections were not given much scrutiny. For the United States, fighting communism justified the Contras using drug profits to finance their war effort. The Marxist Sandanista government in control of Nicaragua was a nuisance for the U.S. due to their support of other Marxist uprisings in Central and South America (Webb). An opportunity arose for U.S. Colonel Oliver North and the Reagan Administration to use the FDN's drug connections to finance their military operations. The result was a pipeline that connected FDN leader,

Danilo Bandon to street entrepreneur “Freeway” Ricky Ross, spawning a three million dollar a day business and turning Los Angeles to as Webb once said, “the crack capital of the world” (Hall 201-211; “Inside the Dark Alliance: Gary Webb on the CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion”).

The crack epidemic ravaged not only Los Angeles in the 1980s, but also the majority of urban communities throughout the United States (Curtis). Cocaine as a recreational drug reached a high level of popularity in the 1970s mostly for the affluent who could afford its high price point (“Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology”). By the early 1980s, the highly profitable cocaine trade was led by the Colombia-based Medellin Cartel who drew national scrutiny in 1979 with the deadly shootout at Miami’s Dadeland Mall (“Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology”). The Reagan Administration’s War on Drugs was primarily concerned with cocaine trafficking from Colombia and other Latin American connections including business operations with Panamanian leader Manuel Noreiga and both sides of the civil war in Nicaragua (“Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology”). U.S. military, intelligence operations and investigative agencies like the DEA and FBI were all embroiled in a tangled mass of economic activity complicated by different objectives (“Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology”). How much the officials, agents and operatives of the CIA, FBI, DEA, U.S. military, law enforcement, and high-ranking politicians were either passively complying with or deliberately initiating drug trafficking activities is difficult to quantify. The facts indicate widespread distribution and use of narcotics among all racial demographics yet the overwhelming majority of drug related murders, arrests and convictions are limited to blacks and Latinos (Vagins and

McCurdy). As such, the *Dark Alliance* series provided “concrete evidence” for a community who knew there was more to the story.

The invention of crack, a low-cost, smokable form of cocaine provided an explosion of new clientele with its intense high and widespread availability in open-air markets. Crack was a lucrative business for young men in poor neighborhoods. At the same time violence increased in the black community and the rates of incarceration and infant mortality increased as well. By the end of the first crack era, hip hop had transformed from party music into music more concerned with social justice or telling the raw, unfiltered story of the truth in the streets. Exhausted and having survived the destruction of drug and gang related violence rappers began speaking about the dangers of the drug world and airing suspicion about the government’s role in it.<sup>1</sup> The charges of conspiracy were alluded to in hip hop influenced films like *New Jack City* and *Deep Cover*. The idea in these films is black men are participants at the low-end of the drug business and the major players are both the suppliers and executors of law enforcement against the black community.

### **Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986**

Before the crack era of the 1980s, the major drug epidemic for poor communities was the heroin epidemic of the 1970s. Initially drug rehabilitation and a focus on treatment for drug users was the primary course of action for government officials. New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller made a radical shift in policy with a 1973 campaign to toughen New York’s drug laws, demanding mandatory sentences of 15 years to life for drug offenders. Other states and the federal government adopted similar laws after the

---

<sup>1</sup> Two great examples are Public Enemy’s “Night of the Living Baseheads” and The Geto Boys’ “City Under Siege” released in 1988 and 1989 respectively.

passing of the Rockefeller laws. The result was a massive increase in the prison population where blacks and Latinos having the highest rate of incarceration. The prison population increased from “330,000 in 1973 to a peak of 2.3 million” (Mann). With this context the hip hop generation was significantly affected and the music would reflect the violence and devastation of the drug-ravaged community. The early-to-mid 1990s in hip hop were marked by a surge in more graphic and violent content inspired by a culture that had changed significantly from the drug wars of the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1986 University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias died of a cocaine overdose after being drafted by the NBA’s Boston Celtics. This event sparked a media frenzy concerning the drug epidemic in America, prompting Speaker of the House Thomas “Tip” O’Neill and other high-ranking Congress members to draft the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 (Sterling and Stewart). The Anti-Drug Abuse Act re-enacted mandatory sentences for drug possession. One of the provisions of the law was a 100:1 disparity for crack cocaine compared to powder cocaine possession which sparked an increase in mandatory federal sentences for black drug offenders (Vagins and McCurdy). The Anti-Drug Abuse Act punished more low-level drug offenders (dealing in the average of 5 to 5,000 grams of cocaine) than high-level drug traffickers (dealing in the tons or millions of grams of cocaine) (Sterling and Stewart). This disparity in sentencing spiked a 38% increase for blacks incarcerated compared to whites from 1986 to 1990 alone (Vagins and McCurdy).

## **Impact of Telecommunications Act of 1996 and the Conspiracy of the Music**

### **Industry and Privatized Prisons**

If there were a wider range of things were constantly played, then we would make a wider range of choices. And what happened in 1996 was the Telecommunications Act, is that autonomous, black-owned, local radio is nearly killed. What takes place is a massive consolidation of large conglomerate ownership of nationwide outlets for different types of genres/slices of the radio listening audience. -Tricia Rose (Peterson)

The mid-1990s was a precarious time in hip hop history that brought forth several dramatic events that would alter the future of both rap music and the music entertainment industry at large. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 was passed under the Clinton administration and changed how popular music would be consumed thereafter by loosening restrictions on large media conglomerates' ability to control product. As it stands today, news and entertainment outlets are primarily controlled by eight major conglomerates.<sup>2</sup> This act allowed corporations to own an unlimited number of radio stations, prior to it, companies could only own 40 stations (Wexler 5). This led to corporate giants like Clear Channel owning 1,200 stations (Wexler 5). What this meant for the music industry was a homogenization of playlists nationwide. With greater control over content, the influence of major corporate interests was exerted to even greater levels.

Many hip hop purists lamented the shift of the culture to more materialistic and nihilistic gangster content and a virtual disappearance of conscious rap in the mainstream.

---

<sup>2</sup> Verizon Communications, SBC Communications Inc., AOL Time Warner, General Electric Co./NBC, News Corp./Fox, Viacom Inc./CBS, Comcast Corp., Walt Disney Co./ABC, the National Association of Broadcasters, and the National Cable & Telecommunications Association

While some would attribute this shift to market trends alone, many support another theory that suggests a deliberate plan to undermine the culture and poison it to benefit elite interests (Elkouby). In April 2012, an anonymous letter surfaced on a hip hop blog, [hiphopisread.com](http://hiphopisread.com) that quickly circulated around the internet confirming a conspiracy that many in the hip hop community suspected had taken place. It was supposedly written by a decision maker who worked for a major record company who “decided to leave out names and all the details that may risk my personal well being and that of those who were, like me, dragged into something they weren't ready for” (Elkouby). In the letter the writer claimed he was called to a closed door meeting on the outskirts of Los Angeles with other decision makers to discuss rap music’s new direction. The participants were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement to not disclose what was discussed in the meeting, as any breach would result in their termination. Many walked out immediately the author said, “No one stopped them. I was tempted to follow but curiosity got the best of me” (Elkouby).

The anonymous author said that one of the hosts explained the companies they worked for had invested in a highly profitable new business that “would become more rewarding with our active involvement” (Elkouby). The author said the host “explained that the companies we work for had invested millions into the building of privately owned prisons and that our positions of influence in the music industry would actually impact the profitability of these investments” (Elkouby). The author said he was confused like many others and had no idea what a private prison was:

I remember many of us in the group immediately looking at each other in confusion. At the time, I didn’t know what a private prison was but I wasn't the

only one. Sure enough, someone asked what these prisons were and what any of this had to do with us. We were told that these prisons were built by privately owned companies who received funding from the government based on the number of inmates. The more inmates, the more money the government would pay these prisons. It was also made clear to us that since these prisons are privately owned, as they become publicly traded, we'd be able to buy shares. Most of us were taken back by this. Again, a couple of people asked what this had to do with us. At this point, my industry colleague who had first opened the meeting took the floor again and answered our questions. He told us that since our employers had become silent investors in this prison business, it was now in their interest to make sure that these prisons remained filled. (Elkouby)

The author went on to explain that their job as record executives was to “help make this happen by marketing music which promotes criminal behavior, rap being the music of choice” and that “this would be a great situation for us because rap music was becoming an increasingly profitable market for our companies, and as an employee, we'd also be able to buy personal stocks in these prisons” (Elkouby).

When this anonymous letter was released, an article was published in the Huffington Post questioned its validity (Raine). Similar to the Webb story, it was dismissed as a conspiracy mongering piece of evidence being wielded by the black community (Raine). Artists like Wise Intelligent of Poor Righteous Teachers and Oakland rap legend Too Short, told of their first hand dealings with industry executives and how they demanded a focus on violent and sexually explicit content (Elkouby). From the years of 1993-1997, when Wu-Tang grew to prominence and Killarmy was

introduced, the hip hop world witnessed a number of feuds and a splintering of its audience. The events leading up to the passing of the Telecommunications Act and thereafter were violently turbulent. Ultimately the East Coast/West Coast feud climaxed with the deaths of the two greatest stars of the time, Tupac Shakur and The Notorious B.I.G. The infamous East Coast/West Coast feud was not limited to Tupac and The Notorious B.I.G. alone, but included several artists from the East and West Coasts as well as the South; this discord in the hip hop community was the culmination of years of East Coast bias and disrespect for other regions representations of hip hop.<sup>3</sup>

By the time the infamous *Source Awards* aired summer 1995, there was distinctive splintering in the hip hop community regarding who was authentic in preserving real hip hop. The *Source Magazine* at the time was considered the “hip hop bible” and garnering a favorable album review was a considerable achievement (Peirznik). During the *Source Awards* ceremony in New York, Suge Knight of Death Row openly mocked Puff Daddy and Bad Boy. Southern rap act OutKast was booed when they won Best New Artist (Pierznik). Skirmishes broke out in the audience during the ceremony and the backlash from the East Coast audience prompted Snoop Dogg to go on a mini-rant on stage (Pierznik). Many East Coast hip hop purists claimed the West Coast and emerging southern artists were negatively affecting the culture with their gangster fantasies, materialism, nihilistic content and simplified lyrics.<sup>4</sup> Ironically after

---

<sup>3</sup> Hip hop journalist Davey D wrote an article in 1996 describing the history of East Coast dismissal of other hip hop from regions outside of New York City, despite the overwhelming support of New York hip hop across the country.

<sup>4</sup> For example, East Coast rapper Jeru The Damaja’s 1994 hit “Come Clean” called out fake gangster rappers from both coasts but the video featured a subtle jab at the West Coast in the video when a fake thug gets assaulted in his California-style low rider.

the success of gangster acts like N.W.A. and Dr. Dre/Snoop Dogg, many East Coast artists developed more gangster images.<sup>5</sup> West Coast and Southern artists argued that they were telling their stories and claimed certain East Coast artists were biased and jealous of their success, emphasizing the success of black entrepreneurs was the most important factor.<sup>6</sup> One of the best examples of this difference of philosophy was the beef between rapper Common and Ice Cube/Westside connection over Common's song, "I Used to Love H.E.R.," where he lamented hip hop losing its innocence after gaining greater prominence on the West Coast.

The Wu-Tang movement blurred these lines in an aggressive manner as they gained a foothold in the industry. Wu-Tang certainly maintained a menacing street image with many members and affiliates having authentic rap sheets to back it up. They also maintained a connection to Black Nationalism through the jewels of the Five Percent that they would drop in their rhymes. Affiliates like Killarmy and Sunz of Man delved into this esoteric content more in depth where the clan kept it more on a surface level. The single and video for the Sunz of Man/Killarmy collaboration "Soldiers of Darkness" provided the template for this chamber of deep sonic counter terrorism—harrowing dissonant beats combined with rapid fire lyrics laced with reference to Five Percent ideology, religious texts, historical references, and apocalyptic prophecies with no regard for flashy hooks or danceable tunes. If Wu-Tang was on the opposite spectrum of Bad Boy, Killarmy was even more antithetical. With these factors in mind, *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* takes aim at the flashier, hedonistic excess of the oncoming bling-bling era

---

<sup>5</sup> In the mid-1990s East Coast rap became increasingly hardcore with the emergence of rappers like Mobb Deep, Notorious B.I.G, and Jay-Z telling tales of robberies and street hustling.

<sup>6</sup> The Geto Boys and UGK, both rap groups from Texas, talked about East Coast bias against the South in "Do it Like a G.O." and "Texas" respectively.

with a gritty, militant approach. Their message aimed against the power structure that creates a crack epidemic and a culture consumed with destroying itself for succumbing to the devil's excesses.

### **“Thugs are Guilty of High Treason”**

Track 3 on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* is a tune called “Burning Season” which is a narrative rapped by Killa Sin that describes the assassination of a neighborhood drug dealer. 9<sup>th</sup> Prince provides the refrain and describes the problem and mission in direct terms: “It’s burning season/the thugs are guilty of high treason / many of them bleedin / others gettin sent to the grave for no reason” (Killarmy). “Burning Season” is a kind of Robin Hood tale that brings forth some of the contradictions of black men who are trying to survive with enlightened minds but trapped bodies. When *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was released member Islord was doing a stretch in prison and during the album’s promotional run group mentor General Wise was murdered. “Burning Season” is Killarmy’s idealized vision of crime and justice where treasonous thugs are robbed and murdered for the cause. The line between righteousness and wickedness is very thin as young black men must survive with the tools they are given. Killa Sin’s first verse describes the action as he plots to rob the neighborhood drug dealer:

Ayo nigga I'm on the cash rules  
Wasted in my hand, half a hundred grand  
Injure that pretender in the black Land  
Heard he be the crack man  
Selling major jums by the pager son  
He the one sporting crazy jewels laced that weigh a ton

So here's the plan  
Get the glock I got the ooh-wop  
Follow him for two blocks  
And pop him if he do cock  
His gat back better snap his nap back for that black  
Pass the stacks to Fat Cat and find out where the crack's at (Killarmy)

Killa Sin's first verse describes the plot to rob the flashy crack dealer in his neighborhood. The "pretender in the black Land" and his conspicuous appearance ("crazy jewels") make him a target in an environment where poverty reigns. The plot involves a basic robbery where Sin and his partner Buddha move to first take the dealer's car, cash and jewelry, then his stash of crack. The action in the first verse continues as Sin's plan is to strip his car ("Get his whip stripped and take my own route") and flee. Sin contemplates the risks ("maybe jakes will chase me") but dismisses his worry ("never have the space to embrace me"). The action picks up as his comrade joins him but meets an unfortunate fate:

My nigga Buddha came with the Ruger aim  
Somebody screamed stop the violence  
So this nigga had the silencer spitting black talons at any challenger  
Yo, it was a ghetto Vietnam I tried to flee and harm  
Me and Har my nigga Buddha caught about three in the arm  
But one traveled to his abdomen  
I grabbed him and embraced him  
Had to see how bad this crab had laced him

Yo, rapidly bleeding started pleading for his life

Take care my seed and my wife

Make sure she's feeding him right (Killarmy)

The ensuing shootout was “a ghetto Vietnam” that left his partner with a bullet travelling through his flesh. Now the mood changes as this decision to commit a robbery has resulted in his comrade leaving his wife a widow and his child fatherless. The story progresses to the second verse where Sin’s emotions are mixed while he moves to escape the thugs and the police:

Many times I fought the urge to resort to crime

But I find my criminal mind complying with the villain kind

I'm filling nines 'til they overflow

Going blow for blow with the rest

Cause them try and test the best

It's a slug fest

Round one sounds wrong I found one

Lurking in the back now clapped him with my pound son

The shells drop

Old ladies yell for the cops and shorty shot, shit

Fell in the arms of his pops I didn't mean to

Why he had to run in the way

Should have taught him how to duck when he heard the fucking gun spray

(Killarmy)

In this verse Killa Sin laments the urge to resort to criminal activities while he contemplates his latest course of actions on the run. In a series of shootouts he strikes a kid with a stray bullet but has to shake his remorse so he can keep moving away from police gaining ground on him. He continues to shoot his way out of the situation and in flight says a “prayer for the kid” he accidentally shot. At this point in the action, Killa Sin realizes the “police and hounds” are gaining on him. With the stress and danger mounting and feeling “all alone in this war zone” Killa Sin leaves another casualty as he flees:

Scared to death kid

Catch my breath I bear left

Hit the weeds and then rest to calm my chest

But an undercover had discovered my plot and plan

I shot the man so I dropped my glock and ran (Killarmy)

Now in fugitive status his future remains uncertain other than needing to resort to criminal activity to survive the next day. After shooting the undercover cop, Killa Sin “makes a rally to a dark alley” and runs into “crackhead Fred and his bitch named Sally” who direct him to a spot where he can lay low for a while and peddle heroin and angel dust:

Keep my whereabouts on the hush hush

I had to provide some heroin high, sick grooves, and five bags of dust

I didn't wet up or let it slide because I was petrified

If homicide got me they gonna watch me die

Fuck that, I'm going all out

No half stepping

My last weapon is cocked to keep that ass jetting

I lay low for like five days or so

Put some troopers on the block round the clock to make me dough

Yo out of sight and out of mind be my motto

I promise myself I'm gonna make it to see tomorrow (Killarmy)

The irony of this narrative is Killa Sin needing to resort to drug dealing in order to survive. Who then are the thugs that are guilty of high treason? The heroes and villains of this story are difficult to separate. The mission to rob the flashy neighborhood drug dealer has not proceeded without casualties since Killa Sin's comrade, an innocent bystander, and an undercover cop have been shot. The protagonist is himself a criminal whose days seemed numbered as he flees law enforcement as well as his rivals. Options are limited in this bleak scenario and the contradictions Killarmy presents are clear. On one hand, the mission to attack treasonous thugs is clouded by the criminal means to exercise street justice. Not only does the hero of this story have to rob and steal, but he is also involved in drug activity for the means of survival. The lines of good and evil are blurred by the perspective of the participants. Intent becomes irrelevant when the results leave casualties that are caught in the middle of street warfare.

### **All is Fair in Love and War**

Street warfare, the psychological strain of living in a combat zone and collateral damage is a consistent theme of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. Track 9 "Fair, Love and War" features Killa Sin, Beretta 9, Dom Pachino, and Shogun Assassin trading verses describing the complexities of living on a concrete battlefield. In between the rappers verses is commentary from the unidentified news reporter: "War is never pretty. But there

is something dirty and disturbing about today's world conflict, because today's battles are fought with the dark heart of terrorism” (Killarmy). The video for “Fair, Love and War” dramatizes the potential for violence to occur at any moment in an oppressive, impoverished environment where any ordinary day can quickly turn tragic.

In the video a storyline plays out in a low-income New York City neighborhood. Members of Killarmy rap among their Wu brethren in various shots of street alleys and rooftops. The narrative begins with a young black male greeting his friends on a street where several people are hanging out. Initially all seems innocent and jovial until the young man gets into his car parallel parked out the street. As he backs out he accidentally bumps the car behind him, which has another black male behind the wheel and a young lady in the passenger seat. The bump causes a cup of coffee to spill in the young lady’s lap, which triggers a chain of unfortunate events. The young man who accidentally bumped the car gets out to make sure everything is fine and is apologizing. A group of men on the sidewalk however are egging on the situation and encouraging conflict between the two men. The man who caused the accident is attempting to take the high road and walk away from a potentially explosive situation until he is pushed by the man whose car he hit.

A fistfight breaks out, both men tussling and throwing punches in the street with onlookers peering out of windows at the action. The conflict goes on for a while when two police officers walking their beat on foot notice the brawl. Immediately the two officers rush in to break up the fight. Quickly this scene becomes more complicated as the two young men end up tangling with the police. The situation is extremely volatile as one of the officers is placed in a headlock by one of the combatants. Next the screen flashes to a freeze frame of a young girl no more than five years old walking with her

mother. The following frame shows the young girl being loaded into an ambulance, the scene indicating she had been shot, likely an accidental shooting by one of the officers attempting to break up the fight. The average day in the neighborhood is now transformed into a riotous evening as an outraged community expresses anger at a cop's bullet mortally wounding a little girl.

The narrative in the video of "Fair, Love and War" depicts a confluence of circumstances common to poor, inner city neighborhoods. Simple mishaps like an innocuous fender bender become a tragic as a reactionary mindset creates worse problems in a cycle of violence. The group of young men hanging out on the block fed into the egotistic machismo of the street mentality by encouraging the young man to fight, even when the man who caused the accident tried to apologize and walk away. Once he was pushed, however he felt the need to engage in a scuffle as backing down would be detrimental to his credibility in his neighborhood. Once the police intervened a little girl ended up being shot by accident and tensions flared between the police and a community already mistrustful of law enforcement. The video ends with a montage of war footage from various conflicts around the world and the news narrator speaking these words:

Lives are being lost.

Around the globe each flashpoint has its own personality.

A border dispute here, a displaced homeland there,

a greedy politician or drug lord almost everywhere.

But whether the location is South America or South Yemen there is a

connection between many of these struggles. They are angry conflicts of desperate people who feel they have neither the resources nor the clout to fight their enemies at the negotiating table.

So they take their negotiations to the streets. (Killarmy)

The reality of living in a community ravaged by poverty leaves many of its inhabitants to make decisions that only ensure their short-term survival. In both “Burning Season” and the video for “Fair, Love and War” the mentality of short-term survival prevails. Killa Sin’s character in the “Burning Season” narrative does not think about the possible negative outcome long enough to deter him from attempting his robbery and he is left at the end of the song promising himself he will “make it to see tomorrow.” The two men fighting in the “Fair, Love and War” video do not think about the possible negative outcome of their conflict because the most important thing is to save face or lose their street credibility. Both stories end up with casualties who were not involved. Killarmy illustrates the despair that influences this poor decision making as young black men in an impoverished context are often looking out for today and not the future. In many cases, they feel as if the future is uncertain when you live in a war zone. Children and bystanders uninvolved in street activity can become collateral damage in a war that psychologically damages all who are subjected to it.

Killarmy dramatizes the ugliness of the street and the contradictions of enlightened individuals that are trying to escape the ghetto. From an outsider’s perspective resorting to criminal activity and violence is no better than any other criminal element of the inner city. What Killarmy demonstrates in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* are the complex conditions that force urban youth to make decisions that are destructive,

even with positive intent. With these contradictions in mind, Killarmy asserts their authenticity by presenting a raw, unfiltered version of hip hop that demonstrates the range of emotions and contemplation of black youth trapped in the ghetto, instead of simply glorifying a criminal lifestyle. This approach follows hip hop's I-pistemological ethos of doing for self in the face of a system that is not trustworthy. Killarmy represents the underground of authentic rappers who have something important to say and gain prominence by their skills and realness in opposition to the artificial creations of corporate media. As I will explain in Chapter 5, this brand of authenticity carries its own set of issues.

### **Blurred Lines**

Killarmy, we roll in armored vans

Mobilizing sinister plans

Fertilizing cocaine plants on forty square acres of land

Extortion, importing, escort services

Niggas too nervous to even purchase on this drug surface

To be committed by the CIA

Criminals in the army engage in war games

'Cuz we're living in the last days (Dom Pachino in Killarmy, "Camouflage Ninjas")

Killarmy's message seems contradictory at times when the lyrics are taken literally. On one hand, the raps peppered with Five Percent ideology can be read as a deliberate action to enlighten listeners and promote positivity and pride in blackness. Conversely, many of the lyrics demonstrate criminality and an "ends justifying the

means” mentality that does not seem that different from the thug rappers of their era. Killarmy’s message shows the range of complexities for black youth who gain knowledge of self but have not completely escaped the destructiveness that engulfs their community. Killarmy represents an enlightened thug who despite his criminal ties is not strictly in it for money only, but is trying to do something positive. Unfortunately, idealism does not always trump reality and many young black men find themselves in these dangerous situations regardless of ideology.

More broadly, Killarmy’s image and message attacks the stylized gangster image of materialistic hedonism that popularized rap in the mid-1990s. Killarmy represented militant resistance to a system that forced young black men to make destructive choices for economic gain. The crack epidemic in America is the immediate context that influenced rap music’s content through the economic controls of the criminal justice system. The “get money” aesthetic in rap is directly linked to the drug and gang culture that exploded in the 1980s. More deeply embedded in this context is the specter of conspiracy that allowed this context to flourish. Many in the black community view the crack epidemic as a deliberate plot to undermine the black and Latino communities and to assist in creating a permanent slave underclass that would fill the criminal justice system and provide more reasons to marginalize communities for economic profit at home and abroad. The black community in particular long claimed greater powers at work in destroying the community as no one in the community makes weapons or owns shipping vessels. An understandable paranoia sets in when one realizes they may be nothing but pawns in a game. The music industry’s possible role criminal industrial complex leaves important questions about the roles of life and art and where the imitations begin and end.

The understanding of one's place in the world then becomes a guessing game of ideology and purpose as individuals make decisions based upon their perceptions of reality and where they see themselves in this reality. Reality is defined by the things one can verify from their own experience and how the events in society influence condition.

“Conspiracy theory” as reality is disciplined, as it does not benefit institutions of authority to have a conspiracy theory gain significant traction in mainstream consciousness.

### **Conclusion: Journalistic Framing of the Conspiracy Panic and I-pistemology**

Conspiracy theories like the *Dark Alliance* series and the alleged conspiracy of the music industry and privatized prisons are disciplined by the mainstream as far-fetched paranoid delusions. Disciplining of conspiracy theories through the conspiracy panic demonstrates the inadequacy of journalistic coverage to logically refute conspiracy claims. The conspiracy panic does its work by labeling and marginalizing conspiracy theorists. Those who are labeled conspiracy theorists find it difficult to make their voices legitimate in mainstream discourse. Once something is thrown in the conspiracy theory category it is considered an illegitimate argument. No matter what truth is in, a conspiracy theorists' claims the mainstream does not take the argument seriously. The fact remains that cocaine does not grow in Harlem, Staten Island, South Central L.A., or any other ghetto in America. CIA operatives have been documented through public record to be involved in drug trafficking (Hall). The Telecommunications Act of 1996 has narrowed the scope of voices that are heard in hip hop. The incarceration rate has exploded exponentially over the last 40 years primarily through drug legislation. All the specifics can be questioned, however there is evidence of an epidemic that had to be

supported if not driven by forces outside low-income communities. A conspiracy panic does nothing to deter those who believe in conspiracy theory. It only reaffirms the position of the dominant ideology through authority alone, not evidence.

Disciplining alternative theories of events also reaffirms public suspicion of the dominant knowledge institutions. Hip hop culture was built on a self-trust in its own body of knowledge. For communities under siege there must be explanations that are not included in the mainstream. Hip hop's epistemology universally includes accounts of events that critics label as conspiracy theory. For a generation of people that survived the crack epidemic and continue to witness family members' suffer from a disproportionate criminal justice system, answers are needed to explain conditions. What is offered by dominant knowledge institutions is unsatisfactory. The hip hop community observes the world it exists in and knows something is horribly wrong.

The disciplining of marginal discourse and marginal citizens is the focus of the next chapter. The black male as a menace to society is a familiar image in racialized discourses of American media. Killarmy's sonic terrorism was an authentic representation of frustrated youth of the urban ghetto. Ironically, the same authenticity and literal interpretations of their lyrics would be used as an argument against Five Percent ideology. The following chapter will contextualize and explain the double bind rappers face in their presentation and the constraints of political resistance in a commercialized market.

## Chapter 5

### Terror Is Him—Black Male Image and the War on Terror

Killarmy's militant image and message captivated an audience both infatuated by the Wu-Tang mystique and disdainful of the flashy materialistic direction of rap music's wanna-be thugs. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was a tough pill for every rap fan to swallow, as some viewed Killarmy as a poor imitation of the more popular Clan. Regardless of these disagreements on style, message, and authenticity the legacy of this album will forever be linked to one of the most horrific scenes of domestic terrorism witnessed in the United States. As explained in Chapter 1, NBC's *Meet the Press* cited Killarmy's *Silent Weapons For Quiet Wars* as an influence for Beltway snipers, John Allen Muhammad and Lee Boyd Malvo. As unfair as it may be to cite causation or even inspiration for the Beltway Attacks, it is without question that Killarmy used the terrorist motif as a major element of their presentation. The image of "Islamic terrorist" is more than enough to inspire fear and loathing among Americans and it seems unfathomable that an album like *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* would be mass marketed by a major record company post 9/11. Interestingly, much of the lyrical content would seem eerily prophetic just a few years later as America witnessed the most unsettling time in its modern history.

With the climate of terrorism in mind, it is important to consider the complex and contentious relationship between Islam and the American culture. More specifically, Orthodox Muslims and certainly the general public unfamiliar with the Five Percenters or their message are largely misunderstood. The Gods and Earths were an integral and influential force in hip hop from its inception and their vernacular is a fundamental

component of the hip hop lexicon. For many however, Five Percenters are a gang, a jailhouse religion or worse, an extremist group with terrorist ideals. To understand this complex relationship and misunderstood opinion, a look into the history is warranted, particularly the origins of the group on the streets of New York and the connections to the criminal justice system that creates such a perception. This chapter focuses on the perception of Five Percenters as criminals and the double bind rappers face in a commercial market, where authenticity is verified by criminal connections. Furthermore, Killarmy's use of the terrorist motif gives an authentic edge to their sonic protest while simultaneously providing fodder for the disciplinarians of public discourse.

### **Gods, Gangsters and Gangster Rappers**

Michael Muhammad Knight has written one of the most definitive accounts of the history of the Five Percent in his book, *The Five Percenters*. The mislabeling of the Five Percenters as a gang is primarily due to a complicated history of poverty and youth culture on the streets of New York City. Knight discusses how the original purpose and message of Father Allah has become distorted through the years, for many view Five Percenters as a racist sect. However the Father always said they were “neither anti-white, nor pro-black” (Knight 142). Moreover, before his assassination, Father Allah made several positive strides with the youth he mentored in New York and enjoyed a productive relationship with New York's Mayor John Lindsay who saw the positive benefit of the group and collaborated with them on anti-poverty programs throughout the city.

Despite these progressions, Five Percenters would be labeled as a street gang by law enforcement agencies. After the Father's demise the programs he created with Mayor

Lindsay would be coveted by Bronx and East Harlem gangs that fought for access to the programs (Knight 143). Once Mayor Lindsay was out of office, the funding dried up. The New York streets at this time were extremely dangerous as Harlem and Brooklyn were the home of several violent gangs. Five Percenters had to deal with other religious factions which caused conflict and sought them harm. Much of their struggle was against other Islamic factions like the FOI and the Swords of Islam in Flatbush (Knight 143). Another foe was the Jewish Defense League, which according to Knight was “linked throughout the 1970s to attacks on Arabs, harassment of Russians, vandalism, firebombings, kidnapping threats and even the attempted hijacking of a plane bound for the United Arab Emirates” (143). The Jewish Defense League was a faction with paramilitary training patrolling borders between neighborhoods. With the environment including numerous ethnic gangs several Gods were inspired to protect their neighborhoods with their own brand of street justice. In Brooklyn, Five Percenters were said to be responsible for “vigilante style killings of ten suspected drug dealers” (Knight 144). In addition to these vigilante killings many former gang members were recruited into the Five Percenters:

In 1976 these crews accounted for 141 arrests, 18 percent of all gang arrests in Brooklyn, causing the NYPD to identify the “Five Percent Nation” as a loose alliance of gangs. In 1978 they were responsible for 418 arrests, 28 percent of Brooklyn’s gang arrests. One year later, the various gangs had dissolved into the Five Percenters, which were then considered a single gang. 113 known Five Percenters were arrested in Brooklyn, nearly half for robbery or criminal possession of a dangerous weapon. (Knight 144)

In light of this gang connotation, many feared the Five Percenters as they protected neighborhoods from gang activity by using retaliatory violence. This complex relationship caused the lines to be blurred between community builders or protectors and gang members. As the Gods became feared on the streets other gangs formed specifically to oppose them (Knight 146). The negative has often overshadowed the positive aspects of the Gods and Earths:

To some extent, Gods and gangs may have conquered each other. Like Black Panthers, Young Lords and Zulu Nation, Five Percenters countered the senseless violence of gang life with a message of unity and respect. At the same time, old gang beefs sometimes resurfaced in new settings, causing beef between Five Percenters and the Zulu Nation through the late 1970's. (Knight 149)

By the 1980s hip hop was gaining prominence in the mainstream, and the Five Percent influence was heavy amongst many of its stars. Knight wrote that LL Cool J who “flirted with five percent ideas as teenager” acknowledged many using the label to shield their criminal activities (Knight 150). By this time the crack era was in full swing resulting in several Five Percenters becoming either users or street entrepreneurs. One of the most notable of these young hustlers who would be tied to hip hop was notorious drug kingpin Kenneth “Supreme” McGriff from Queens, New York who formed the Supreme Team, a crack enterprise that claimed loyalty to the Five Percent.

Named in part after a Five Percenter rap crew, ‘Preme and company “loved the Nation”...Ernesto “Puerto Rican Righteous” Pinella brought Latino dealers and connected the Team to Colombian cocaine distribution. Supported by united legions of Black and Latino street soldiers...Preme came to rule the Beasley

projects. Using rooftops as surveillance towers, whose watchmen encoded their walkie-talkie communication with Supreme Alphabet and Supreme Mathematics. (Knight 152)

One of the most infamous members of the Supreme Team was Kelvin Martin also known as Shameek Allah and even more commonly known for his street handle 50 Cent, a brazen young thug who robbed the toughest crack dealers in New York. The original 50 Cent was well known for “strutting through Brooklyn with a Colt .45 and .357 Magnum on his hips and making nonchalant robberies in broad daylight” (Knight 152). Despite being well known for robbery and kidnapping loved ones for ransom, he only got caught for small arrests. Numerous attempts were made on 1950s life and he survived several gunshots. Eventually his luck ran out and he was gunned down in his project building. Years later the name 50 Cent would become famous to the world, when a young Queens rapper named Curtis Jackson would adopt the moniker because he was inspired by the legendary thug’s mentality. The rapper 50 Cent would first gain notoriety with his song “How to Rob” a tongue-in-cheek tale of his industry takeover where he robs the prominent rappers of the day. 50 Cent, the rapper would become embroiled in a famous beef with Irv Gotti, and his Murder Inc. label, home to stars like rapper Ja Rule. Murder Inc. would become a force in the rap industry but was not without controversy. In 2003 the feds raided Murder Inc.’s office claiming that Supreme McGriff was the real owner of the company (Knight 154).

Criminal connections between rappers and Five Percenters as well as the history of street violence in New York and other urban centers on the United States help to explain the public perception of the Five Percent as a treacherous subculture. Many Five

Percent members were introduced to the teachings while incarcerated, drawing the ire of correctional officials. In several states, Five Percent material was banned in the prison despite the idea of free practice of religion. Law enforcement has been keeping tabs on the Nation of Gods and Earths since its inception, including a large surveillance file started by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI in the 1960s. This tradition would continue into the hip hop era with suspicions about criminal ties with the most famous proponents of Five Percent ideology in hip hop, the Wu-Tang Clan.

### **Wu-Tang's FBI Investigation**

I need help. The government is after me. They already killed Tupac and Biggie Smalls. Someone help me...someone help me please! (Ol' Dirty Bastard, "Diesel")

The recently released FBI file of the late Russell Jones (Ol' Dirty Bastard) alleges criminal activity of the Wu and associates including drug trafficking, illegal gun running, murder, carjacking, and other violent crimes. "Information developed by the detectives determined that the WTC purchased numerous guns from the Stubenville, Ohio area...members of the WTC have been identified as being present during the purchase in a photo spread...one of the guns has been identified as the murder weapon in the killing of Robert Johnson on Staten Island on 12/30/97" ("FBI File of Russell 'Old Dirty Bastard' Jones"). The document claims that someone within the Clan ordered Robert Johnson's murder as well as others. In addition, the FBI document alleged that incorporated businesses were used to launder money from criminal enterprises and that members earn recording contracts by engaging in criminal activities. An informant whose name is redacted from the document claims that the Clan has ties to the Bloods gang on

Staten Island and that he and others were used as enforcers for the Clan. “The Detectives are seeking the assistance of the FBI and U.S. Attorney’s Office to further their case along as to package the numerous crimes committed by the WTC Organization in the form of Federal charges and a RICO prosecution” (“FBI File of Russell ‘Old Dirty Bastard’ Jones”).

The investigation loosely linked ODB to a homicide that occurred in Stuebenville when they stopped a vehicle in Ohio and found a shotgun and ammunition. Members of the Clan (whose names were redacted) were detained for hours. The connections between crimes in Ohio and New York led to a joint investigation with New York and Ohio police. The rest of the document details ODB’s numerous run-ins with the law including a shootout in New York and his illegal possession of body armor in California.

According to the report, ODB was the victim of several robberies. In one robbery he was shot in the projects where members of his family lived and subsequently drove himself to the hospital. The document lists several legitimate Wu-Tang business operations in different locations in New York, Ohio, Massachusetts, and Virginia. Essentially the FBI investigation intimates the Wu-Tang Clan being involved in an ongoing criminal enterprise that used its legitimate business fronts as a smokescreen for illegal activity. Ultimately no RICO prosecution was ever launched despite the allegations included in the report.

Members of the Wu-Tang Clan and their affiliates have never shied away from admitting their criminal past, but the general premise is that rap music saved them from negative activity and was used as a platform for economic empowerment. In *Tao of Wu* RZA details the lowest point in his life when he and future members of the Clan were

street hustling to survive. RZA lamented the days when he would make trips to hustle in Ohio:

Before we got down there Stubenville's nickname was Little Chicago. After we got established there it became known as Little New York. We made money and were able to feed ourselves, but it was the most negative point in my life. This was the time I broke my one vow to myself. I never wanted to be a drug dealer- I thought I was killing my own people- but for my own survival I entered that world. I betrayed myself. (RZA 90)

The turning point in RZA's life was when he was on trial for attempted murder in Ohio, the result of an altercation with rival hustlers. His acquittal gave him a new lease on life. He decided to do something positive and pursue a rap career and bring his brothers with him. Allegations of criminal racketeering included in ODB's FBI file bring into question the legitimacy of the Wu's turn away from street activity to the legitimate world of rap music. Ironically, it is the street activity that authenticates the persona of the rapper. The narrative of street hustler turning his life around through rap is a common one. For the critics of hip hop and rappers in particular, allegations like these further vilify the image of the black male. If the black male (in general) is viewed as a potential criminal, then the black male who identifies openly with an Islamic sect like the Five Percenters is even more of a villain. The double bind occurs when this image is actually beneficial to the production and marketing of the music. Killarmy's image and lyrics in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* taps into the deepest fear about the black male, that he can be not only a thug, but also a terrorist.

## Militant Imagery

In the tradition of the Wu-Tang Clan, Killarmy's members use several aliases in addition to their rap names. For example, 9<sup>th</sup> Prince also goes by the handles of "Madman" and "Prince Saddam," Dom Pachino is also known as the "P.R. Terrorist and Islord is also known as the "Thief of Baghdad" (Killarmy). The front cover of the album is a picture of the six rappers in what looks like a wooded area decked out in full camouflage regalia, while the back cover is a picture of the rappers sitting around a large table apparently diagramming plans with a picture of various Wu-Tang album covers on a wall in the background. The album insert includes G.I. Joe style identification cards with each members name and mission. 9<sup>th</sup> Prince is labeled "The Last Lyricist of Today's Genesis," Dom Pachino is the "Lyrical Pioneer," Beretta 9 is the "Marksman Assassin on some 'Fuck it Let's go to War,'" and Shogun Assassin's mission is "Seek and Destroy" (Killarmy). Also included in the cover jacket is an illustration of thousands of soldiers on a battlefield with one of them hoisting a Killarmy flag with featuring the Wu-Tang symbol (Killarmy).

The militant street soldier and terrorist motif is amplified in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*' music videos. For example, the video for "Wake Up" features the members of the group rapping alongside Wu affiliates Sunz of Man in a dark gathering in the woods. The "Wake Up" video opens with the shadow of the New York City skyline fading into the background while the woodland scene fades in with flashes of light and fog engulfing the frame. Disciples old and young are walking through the woods in full military regalia holding flashlights and war flags. The emcees 9th Prince, Hell Razah, Killa Sin, and Prodigal Sun rap their verses while various shots flash in of several men in

their military gear with ski masks and gas masks. The crew is on a mission marching through the darkness with their flashlights in search of something. Several shots include the rappers standing on a makeshift stage in the woods preaching their message to their young disciples. The video ends with a shot of the men walking away with the caption at the bottom of the screen stating, “the Saga continues...”. The image of a large gathering of black men in the woods decked out in military gear, several of them masked and holding war flags may be menacing to outsiders. The idea conveyed is that there is a war raging and Killarmy is on a mission with a swarm of young men down for the cause.

Other videos like “Wu-Renegades” and “Swinging Swords” also convey the image of Killarmy being on a mission that is far beyond rapping for entertainment. “Wu-Renegades” features the group riding around packed in an old Toyota minivan, again dressed in camouflage street wear. This time the scene is the concrete jungle where the rappers execute their performance shots in snowfall on the streets in front of project buildings. In between the performance shots is a shot of the Wu logo outlined in burning fire. The video conveys the idea of ongoing urban warfare with Killarmy serving as street prophets of a higher purpose. The “Swinging Swords” video is slightly different as the rappers perform without camouflage in a dive bar intermixed with shots of the rappers performing their lyrics in a bedroom annoyed by their female companions’ attempts to calm them down. It appears that the women in the “Swinging Swords” video do not fully understand the stress or seriousness of their operation. Other scenes show the group walking through water in their military gear and covering their heads as bombs go off in field battle.

The message the videos from *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* along with the visuals and information included in the album art presents Killarmy as a group of warriors on a mission to achieve their goals by any means necessary. Their militarized presence and connection to Islamic and Middle Eastern icons creates a fearsome presence when juxtaposed with the black male image in American society. Furthermore, the terrorist motif integrated with the image of the black male as a common street thug conjures even deeper fears about the possibilities of domestic insurgency. Terrorism as a political strategy is fearsome largely because it can strike anywhere at anytime. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* features lyrics that aim at the dominant knowledge institutions of American society, an incendiary rhetorical strategy that uses threatening imagery and draws inspiration from the legacy of historical villains.

### **Lyrical Specialists, Underworld Terrorists**

Yo, I read Genesis and speak, lyricist, X-ray visionist

Lyrical specialist under world terrorist

My razorblade cuts with sharpness

Sharpin' the sword and re-killed by the lord

The last platoon set up a camp fire on the moon

Be built of a will, illuminate soon

All my soldiers train with eagle claws

First degree of military laws

We create a massacre like Texas chainsaw

Blood for blood keep the unity thick like mud

Killarmy attack in pellet fighters...

Like Hitler and the battle of Britain

Analyze my vision then join my collision

Which is a war conviction, militant chamber that's hidden (9<sup>th</sup> Prince in Killarmy,  
“Blood for Blood”)

*Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* features lyrical passages that describe metaphorical war plans and make allusions and historical references from across the political spectrum. Both 9<sup>th</sup> Prince and Shogun Assassin make reference to Hitler on “Blood for Blood,” a somber, brooding track with minor guitar chords strummed to punctuate its grimness. Hitler is referenced in a way that does not denounce his racial politics; instead he is referenced with a level of respect for his diabolical war prowess (“I got a war plan more deadlier than Hitler / it was written down in ancient scriptures”). This may seem an odd choice for black men with a militant ideology against white supremacy, but it serves to provide shock value. Although Killarmy never uses any overt anti-American phrases nor do they use the word “jihad” on the album. The listener is left to read between the lines to connect the ideologies and institutions they are attacking. Other references on the album provoke an anti-establishment mentality and the recurring theme of mission and method of assault:

I attack like Iraq, serious as a heart attack

Professional assassinator professor

Assassinate your mindstate and broke the metal plate

Lyrical Nostradamus, psychotic mind of Sadaam

Ex-con, attack the Pentagon

With unorthodox firearm from Vietnam

I crucify em, like Muslims murdering Jews from Jerusalem  
Now who's the supreme lyricist? You can't siege this  
When I die, my name will be worshipped like Jesus  
War visual individual incriminate the criminal  
My culture nickel put holes in your face like dimples (9<sup>th</sup> Prince in Killarmy,  
“Wake Up”)

9<sup>th</sup> Prince’s verse includes several phrases that are designed to evoke controversy. He describes his mission as a revolutionary visionary that commands his street soldiers through his lyrical onslaught. As a “lyrical Nostradamus” with the “psychotic mind of Saddam” he combines the prophetic visionary power of the historical figure Nostradamus with one of America’s most hated enemies, Sadaam Hussein. There is a haunting irony in the following line: “attack the Pentagon / with unorthodox firearm from Vietnam.” Only four years after the release of this album, the Pentagon was actually attacked on the fateful day, 9/11. He goes even further with “I crucify them / like Muslims murdering Jews from Jerusalem” inciting the fear of many outside the Islamic community who view Muslims as terrorists. 9th Prince provokes both Judaism and Christianity in this verse (“when I die, my name will be worshipped like Jesus”) by openly mocking the religious image of Jesus Christ and claiming immortality through his acts of war. Moreover, his proclamation of immortality after death draws parallels with the narrative of the Islamic suicide bomber who obtains riches through the sacrifice of his own life to kill many enemies.

Killarmy’s terroristic lyrical strategy has the impact of inciting uneasiness in Americans who fear Islam as well as the black male. Critics may take these words

literally but as 9<sup>th</sup> Prince says on “Wu-Renegades” his mission is to “build controversy then perform surgery” which in a rhetorical sense could be meant to call into question and dissect the institutions that could inspire young black men to produce a product like *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. Killarmy represents a frustration that is commonly ignored in mainstream society. For those who would question where ideas like this would come from, the answer is not difficult to find. Many young black men do not feel a part of the American society. In fact many young black men feel that they are victim, so with the climate of a silent war waged by an establishment that is bent on the destruction of the black race, lyrical terrorism is the appropriate strategy.

Puerto Rican terrorist from the Middle East

Refusing the Mark of the Beast...

I release thoughts that remain on your brain like scars for life

Made possible by the mic device

I slice wielding a sharp instrument

Sharper than the tip of the pyramid

Used to drill holes in the mind of the ignorant

Its my assignment burn up the climate

Using rays from the sun

Dom Pachino, Madman assassinating tracks with Shogun (Dom Pachino in

Killarmy, “Clash of the Titans”)

Killarmy uses stark imagery with a sudden unexpectedness that resembles a terroristic battle strategy. The combination of hardcore rap beats and the sound effects of war combined with shocking jabs at religion and the American establishment is

intentional when Dom Pachino says “thoughts that remain on your brain like scars for life” or like Shogun Assassin says on “5 Stars” ...“plant a timebomb in your ear and hold your brain for hostage” (Killarmy). Lyrics like these invoke terrorism by bringing forth the unexpected, where the listener is assaulted by the violent imagery and forced to take the message seriously. A critic or rap fan who has an allegiance to the Christian Church might be shocked by some of 9<sup>th</sup> Prince’s lines: “I killed Jehovah;” “Madman ran up in church and stuck the reverend, stabbed him with a cross;” “razorblade stashed inside the Bible, stalk through the church, madman on arrival” or “I take off the heads of those who worship Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden.” Killarmy use their brand of shocking lyricism to inspire the listener to understand the seriousness of their ideas of revolution and simultaneously draw the ire of critics who look for the worst in hip hop.

### **5 Star General, Giving Killing Orders**

This is my rifle

There are many like it but this one is mine

My rifle and myself are defenders of my country

We are the masters of our enemies

We are the saviors of my life

So be it until there is no enemy

Find peace within

This is my rifle

There are many like it but this one is mine

My rifle is my best friend

It is my life

I must master it as I must master my life

Without me my rifle is useless

Without my rifle I am useless

I must fire my rifle true

I must shoot straighter than my enemy who is trying to kill me

I must shoot him before he shoots me

I will (soldiers training mantra from *Full Metal Jacket*)

The Army, seven man deep, back to back

I be pullin' out gats, launchin' deadly attacks

I be goin' to war, unheard and unseen

Awaken from your dreams, my gunshots and screams (Beretta 9, "Blood for Blood")

The first half of Stanley Kubrick's film, *Full Metal Jacket* dramatizes the transformation of young marines from basic trainees into trained killers. Sergeant Hartman berates his young recruits and psychologically conditions them to be callous by breaking down their humanity scene by scene to develop the cold-hearted mindset necessary to engage in bloody warfare. The "this is my rifle" chant is repeated as a refrain on "Under Siege," a sparse thumping track on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* that sounds like a military march onto a battlefield. Soldiers are not born but made and the training they receive conditions them to remove their emotion in a kill or be killed context. The dialogue from *Full Metal Jacket* is used with chilling effect on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and gives the impression that brainwashing is necessary to turn young men into cold-blooded killers. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* may have been

considered inconsequential noise for those outside of Killarmy fans until the album was connected to the Beltway Attacks. What the Beltway Attacks revealed was an older ex-Army officer John Allen Muhammad's influence on a young Lee Boyd Malvo, an influence that transformed a young man into an assassin. With this in mind the art of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and the real-life events of domestic terror are scrutinized by critics who are willing to demonize black Muslims and "gangster rap."

The *Meet the Press* episode that connected Killarmy to the Beltway Attacks was primarily focused on one song "5 Stars." Tim Russert mentioned some of the lyrics from the song and a note supposedly from the killers was found with five stars drawn on it. "5 Stars" closes *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* with a galloping drum beat augmented by the "Suicide is Painless" guitar riff and the sounds of rockets being launched, helicopter blades chopping in the wind and explosions. The first verse is handled by 9<sup>th</sup> Prince and Beretta 9 who describe a fully engaged battle:

(9<sup>th</sup> Prince):

As night falls the commando's teams seize the palace  
Fiercely assault commands the volts  
Explode in the air like lightning bolts  
We rippin' out your spleen  
At battlegrounds like the dense jungles of Phillipines  
Drunk monk sip O.E. out the canteen  
Men at war with guillotines...  
Troops not waiting  
All you hear is bullets penetrating

Deep like the assassination that almost killed Reagan

(Beretta 9):

I snatch up defeated troops in desert Tim boots

Camouflage like the sands I locate in Iran

For war be the issue

Elite crews and God-U's

Snipers on the rooftop watch out for the pit bulls

Waited 'til sunsets and moving like ninjas

Camouflage masked avengers

Y'all niggas best surrender

Your souls and your weapons we be the Armageddon

Killarmy bring on board this military acquisition

Your crew will take position on the seven seas mission

Beretta 9 be wildin conflicts in San Quentin

Chorus:

Yo, 5 Star General giving killing orders!

Militant assassins surround the headquarters!

These lyrics were explicitly cited as inspiration for the Beltway Attacks, specifically Beretta's line "snipers on the rooftop watch out for the pitbulls / waited till sunset we movin' like ninjas." The *Meet the Press* segment sparked debate about the intent of the Five Percent Nation and prompted members in the nation and rappers who have been influenced by the nation to defend their position. Mark Goldblatt wrote a scathing critique in *USA Today* entitled "Hip-Hop's Grim Undertones," where he called

the Five Percent Nation a “virulently racist black group... to which several of today's most popular rap acts have acknowledged longstanding ties.” Goldblatt acknowledged that John Allen Muhammad was a former member of the NOI, but built his argument around rap lyrics quoting lyrics from rap groups Da Lench Mob, Sunz of Man, and Brand Nubian:

As the Anti-Defamation League and a few scholars have noted, Five Percenter theory stands behind the apocalyptic visions of race war expressed in the rap music of some of the more influential hip-hop performers... Sunz of Man, an offshoot group of the wildly popular Wu-Tang Clan, repeats similar ideas in the song Can I See You: "Camouflaged for the mission; use your third eye to see the Israelite; detect those who tell lies carry .45s in these last days and times I was born to survive a soldier, and I strive, with a duty to civilize these 85s an original black man with a plan to run these devils off our land; now listen real close while I explain the operation." (Goldblatt)

The lyrics Goldblatt quotes from “Can I See You” actually belong to Beretta 9 of Killarmy who did a guest verse on the song. Goldblatt expresses the suspicion of rap critics who are fearful of Black Nationalism and rap in general by noting that “artists who have crossed over to mainstream audiences... rappers Busta Rhymes, Rakim and Nas, have flirted with Five Percenter concepts.” Goldblatt was disturbed at the political influence of Five Percenters and their ability to reach the masses with “extreme” ideas. “What's unnerving is that these acts are not only among the most critically acclaimed hip-hop stars, but they are acclaimed precisely because they're considered the most politically sophisticated rappers” (Goldblatt). Goldblatt attempted to explain the group’s basic tenets

but misinterpreted “5 Stars” as a part of the Nation’s ideology. Dasun Allah wrote a response piece in the *Village Voice* where he quoted Five Percent representative Wa’de Allah who said, “‘We do not use five stars,’ ...Our universal flag consists of the Sun, Moon, and star. We use one star” (Allah). The confusion is due to the *Meet the Press* report that connected the shootings to Killarmy’s song “5 Stars.” Dumar Allah attempts to clear the confusion by giving a condensed history from an insider’s perspective, taking issue with being called a “virulent, racist group” and mentioning the Father saying “We are neither pro-black, nor anti-white. We are pro-righteousness and anti-devilishment” (Allah). Goldblatt did not interview anyone in the organization for clarity; what is clear is how easy it can be for someone from the outside to misunderstand a record like *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, which is intentionally meant to be shocking to illuminate the ills of society. Thus, the double bind is evident, the same elements that make *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* such an authentic piece of art- the rappers struggles in the street, the frustrations expressed through violent imagery and iconoclasm serve to feed the fear of the mainstream society that already fears and vilifies the black male.

### **Hardcore Rap and the Double Bind of Entertainment**

What the fuck do the Five Percent got to do with the sniper? How could they do that? How could they put Brand Nubian, Wu-Tang, and Busta Rhymes as a part of the same culture [as the sniper]—as if we are influenced in the same way, and we are capable of shooting somebody on some bullshit because of the Five Percent influence? At the end of the day, [the NGE's] always been a threat because we're the truth, and they've been trying to conceal it. I ain't gonna be compromised through none of this. (Allah)

The hip hop community was aghast at the allegations that the Five Percenters were somehow responsible for the Beltway Attacks. Critics from outside of the hip hop culture jumped to a conclusion without thoroughly examining the context of Five Percent ideology or attempting to understand what the culture is by seeking the insight of any of its members. Cherry-picking basic tenets that seem fanatical to the average American only serves to simplify an argument when the situation at hand is complex. For many in the mainstream, the connections between Islam and terrorism are obvious and groups like the NOI and Five Percenters are groups who at their heart are anti-American. *New York Post* columnist Daniel Pipes weighed in by writing:

It came as no surprise to learn that the lead suspect as the Washington, D.C.-area sniper is John Allen Muhammad, an African-American who converted to Islam about 17 years ago. Nor that seven years ago he provided security for Louis Farrakhan's "Million Man March". Even less does it amaze that he reportedly sympathized with the 9/11 attacks carried out by militant Islamic elements. All this was near-predictable because it fits into a well-established tradition of American blacks who convert to Islam turning against their country. (Pipes)

Pipes represents an element of the mainstream that is incredulous at the thought of what attracts black people to an Islamic ideology that is considered alienated from American society. To suggest that American blacks “turn against their country” by converting to Islam ignores any context that would inspire any conversion. How can someone turn against a country that has a “well-established tradition” of treating them as less than a citizen? For many black Americans the assumed progress of the Civil Rights Era is moot in the face of poor education, poverty and a disproportionate incarceration

rate. The hostility of some black Americans stems from a distrust in the institutions that dominate society. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* is the product of a youth culture that still struggles to survive in a society that has ignored the extreme conditions of poverty and violence. Killarmy's shocking approach makes the frustration they express more authentic but at the same time it validates the position of those who want to rid society of contrarian thought. Certainly, those who resort to extreme measures like the Beltway Snipers have chosen a destructive path that is unacceptable. Critics like Goldblatt and Pipes are quick to cite the influence of Islam, yet unwilling to critique John Allen Muhammad's U.S. military influence. Art in the form of rap music becomes a scapegoat and proof that Islam is something to be feared. Pipes in his article asks two questions to try to figure out how do deal with the problem of Islam:

*First:* The troubling coincidence of conversion to Islam and hatred of the United States needs to be looked at very closely. To what extent does Islam attract the disaffected, to what extent does it actively turn them against their country? Probing the source of the disaffection that can inspire terrorism has important security implications.

*Second:* To what extent does the rhetoric and example set by prominent figures such as Louis Farrakhan and Siraj Wahhaj influence followers like the alleged sniper to engage in violence? If it does, given that this is wartime, do steps need to be taken to curtail their rhetoric? (Pipes)

In a climate of terror, "wartime" never ends. Islam for many has been labeled as a direct threat, and in many ways, its rhetoric has been curtailed in rap music post 9/11. The popularity of groups like Killarmy has waned significantly since *Silent Weapons for*

*Quiet Wars* was released and is virtually non-existent in the mainstream. This is not any indication of any significant change in condition for the community and culture that Killarmy represented. Oversimplifying the argument and blaming radical elements of Islam produced a climate where anything resembling a militant view cannot be accepted by mainstream outlets or the American public. A double bind emerges as an album like *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* that was meant to be radical simultaneously creates an argument against itself, even as it brings forth uncomfortable truths. Most rappers face this double bind because the street life they describe is authenticated by actual street experience. Popular rap music has shifted away from aggressive political content and into hedonistic excess or sordid tales of street hustling. The corporate entities seem more comfortable with promoting these elements of hip hop culture even though the lifestyles promoted are destructive. Rappers who rage against the established order, however are not tolerable as this kind of destruction or the idea of it is looked at as a form of terrorism.

### **Conclusion: Disciplining Dangerous Knowledge Through Media Discourses**

Bratich discussed a significant shift in how conspiracy panics would be handled by media outlets. The Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 would be connected to an underground network of militias who were ardent conspiracy theorists. The logic behind this shift is that people who believe in conspiracy theories could be potentially dangerous and should be taken more seriously as possible threats to national security. With the advancement of internet technology, conspiracy theory had a new platform to be accessed. This presented a danger that brought more scrutiny to discourse focused on government conspiracy.

Conspiracy panics could now attach a clear and present danger to conspiracy theorizing...Conspiracy knowledge is dangerous because it could lead to violence. In the conspiracy panic discourse, paranoia about the NOW leads to the formation of armed groups who commit terrorist acts...Since the Oklahoma City terror, conspiracy theories have become identified as dangerous knowledges and their popularity deemed a social menace...But even as militias were problematized as a clear and present danger soon a related but more diffuse phenomenon would be articulated within a conspiracy panic discourse. It is the transmutation from the militias to a problem with “extremism.” (Bratich 64)

To label knowledge as dangerous brings into question the legitimacy of anything that seems opposed to the discourse of the dominant knowledge institutions. The rationale of the conspiracy panic disciplines any discourse that is contrarian and labeling a discourse extremist further marginalizes the possibility for it to be examined for its possible truth. The climate of terror adds to the suspicion of discourses that make uncomfortable claims about the government even if some of the claims made are legitimate. To link Islam to extremism is predictable considering the events of 9/11. Killarmy’s use of terrorism as a motif and lyrical approach drew the ire of critics several years after the release of *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* when the fateful events of the Beltway Attacks occurred in 2002. The *Meet the Press* segment opened the door for a public debate about the potential menace of the Five Percenters. Alarmists like Goldblatt and Pipes sought to warn Americans of the danger of Five Percent influence on hip hop. By linking Five Percent ideology in hip hop to political extremism, mainstream media disciplined an already marginal discourse. What was surprising to many was how

ingrained the influence of the Gods and Earths is on hip hop. Ironically, it took a conspiracy panic to even approach the discussion. In typical yellow journalist fashion, the connections were sensationalized and no serious engagement of the issues that bring incendiary rhetoric forth or the positive aspects of education were ever discussed. By simplifying the argument Islam in the form of Five Percent rap is pushed out of mainstream rap and with it the positive benefit of self-inquiry.

Rap music has been used by critics and political pundits as evidence of a dysfunctional black community by focusing on the worst aspects of its presentation. Ironically the entities that market and distribute the music profit from its popularity and controversy. In a sense, rap music has been used to legitimize discourses that portray black men as violent criminal elements of society. The interplay of undisciplined speech through rap and its regulation by political commentators is a cycle that is repeated without resolution. In *Black Noise*, Tricia Rose discussed this phenomenon:

In contemporary popular culture, rappers have been vocal and unruly stray dogs. Rap music, more than any other contemporary form of black cultural expression, articulates the chasm between black urban lived experience and dominant, “legitimate” (e.g., neoliberal) ideologies regarding equal opportunity and racial inequality. As new ideological fissures and points of contradiction develop, new mutts bark and growl, and new dogcatchers are dispatched. (102)

Extending Rose’s dog metaphor in the case of Five Percent hip hop brings forth a sense of irony. If rappers are stray dogs to be caught and handled by dogcatchers, then five Percent rappers are even more dangerous element to be disciplined. Grand Puba of Brand Nubian once said, “the Asiatic Black man is a dog spelled backwards.” Similarly,

RZA offered thoughts on this reversal on the Gravediggaz song, “The Night the Earth Cried:” “The devil cursed God and reversed God / turned God into dog and made our people search hard” (Gravediggaz). Rap music’s relationship with mainstream politics is dependent on identifying violence and misogyny as recurring talking points for television and radio shows. As such, the conversation must remain familiar and free of ideological confusion that complicates the exchange. The oversimplification of arguments against hip hop and in defense of hip hop, create a circle that is unproductive for changing any conditions in the urban ghettos of America. Furthermore, because the violence and negativity associated with hip hop is understood as an authentic reflection of the black community, rappers are encouraged to take on the thug image to advance their careers. Violence and criminality seem more authentic than any other representation of black men is troubling because it reflects long-standing stereotypes and fears about black men. Rose discusses this troubling reality in *The Hip Hop Wars*:

The history of association of blacks with ignorance, sexual deviance, violence, and criminality has not only contributed to the believability of hip hop artists’ fictitious autobiographical tales among fans from various racial groups but has also helped to explain the excessive anxiety about the popularity and allure of these artists. The American public has long feared black criminality and violence as particularly anxiety-producing threats to whites- and the convincing “performance” of black criminality taps into those fears. (39)

Rose goes on to describe how hip hop capitalizes on these stereotypes creating the bind that rappers must engage to compete economically. Of course, there are exceptions to the rule, since artists who are not focused on being gangsters, thugs or pimps exist.

However, the rule in the mainstream is the gangster, pimp or thug persona dominates the charts. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was released at a time when hip hop was undergoing a transformation. Killarmy simultaneously embraced the hardcore street image and proclaimed the importance of knowledge of self with a revolutionary spirit. To connect Killarmy and other rap like it to domestic terrorism signaled the death knell for politically subversive rap in the mainstream. Killarmy's approach as self-proclaimed lyrical terrorists made the connection easy for critics. The simplicity of these connections ignores the nuances of the arguments *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* presented, arguments that were inspired by deplorable economic conditions and a history of institutionalized racism.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Killarmy's *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* represented a segment of hip hop culture that was frustrated by politics and social conditions of black youth in the urban ghettos of America. With Five Percent ideology as their foundation, Killarmy contributed to the knowledge base of hip hop by providing a raw, unfiltered, and incendiary offering geared toward youth who felt trapped by their social condition. Both Five Percent ideology and hip hop rely on an I-pistemology that serves as an alternative source of knowledge that was counter to the narratives of the dominant knowledge institutions. Rap music is used not only as a tool of expression but a tool of resistance and through coded language, Killarmy's hidden transcript ended up at the forefront of a conspiracy panic that coincided with the War on Terror. The authenticity of the album was aided by the perceptions of black men as fearsome and Killarmy's use of terrorism as a motif for their music played into fears about black Americans and Islam. The subversive message presented on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* was powerful because of its authenticity that simultaneously helped to bolster fear and subjugation by the dominant society toward the black male.

Chapter 1 provided the background for the study by situating it within the research areas of hip hop, conspiracy theory, and Black Nationalism. In addition to these bodies of research, I introduced Van Zoonen's I-pistemology as a guiding template for the project to help explain the ethos for the knowledge base of hip hop culture, where reliance on the self is the basis for knowing particularly in an oppressive context. Chapter 1 also introduced the object of the study, Killarmy's *Silent Weapons For Quiet Wars*, a

rap album that was cited by NBC's *Meet the Press* as a possible inspiration for the Beltway Sniper Attacks of 2002. In order to explain the role of conspiracy theory, chapter one discusses Bratich's formulation of the conspiracy panic, or mainstream media's coverage of alternative accounts of newsworthy events. The conspiracy panic labels alternative discourses as conspiracy theory to delegitimize claims of government conspiracies against the public. In terms of hip hop scholarship, this study used Tricia Rose's idea of the "hidden transcript" of resistance in rap music. Chapter 1 concluded with an overview of black Islamic resistance in America, discussing the rise of Five Percent ideology, an important part of hip hop history and the ideological inspiration for Killarmy's album.

Chapter 2 focused on the complex process of identity making through the influence of popular culture and how hip hop creates its own expression of resistance by drawing from multiple influences. This chapter explained how the Wu-Tang philosophy was created from a combination of Five Percent ideology and the inspiration of kung-fu films. Killarmy follows this template by creating their own version of sonic chaos that is used as an aggressive template for militant revolutionary rhymes. The music that is created by Killarmy while being influenced by the capitalist apparatuses of media also opposes the dominant institutions of American society with a general distrust of these institutions. Furthermore, Killarmy following the I-pistemological ethos of hip hop resistance uses specific media texts to create their own template of sonic revolution. The tradition of sampling in hip hop brings together media texts that are re-appropriated for new meaning. Chapter 2 engaged Jean Baudrillard's discussion of simulacra, or the historic process of symbol appropriation. Killarmy uses sampling for both "embodied"

meaning (characterized by “the tensions in the music, rhythm, melody, harmony and timbre”) and referential meaning, which is characterized by “extra-musical associations” (Manuel 231). Chapter 2 then provided examples of how the samples were appropriated to construct meaning on the album. The chapter concluded by discussing the document that bears the same title as the album, a text that outlines the conspiracy to control society, specifically the lower-class.

Chapter 3 examines Five Percent ideology and its epistemological influence on Killarmy’s lyrics on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. Killarmy follows the tradition of black resistance by “dropping knowledge” drawn from the 120 lessons and applying it in a hip hop context. With a general distrust of the knowledge institutions of the United States, The Nation of Gods and Earths created their own body of knowledge based on numerological principles and the parables of the Nation of Islam lessons. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* exemplifies the use of Rose’s “hidden transcript” where Killarmy criticizes the dominant power structure through militant lyrics. By following the tradition of Five Percent rappers who show and prove knowledge of self with their own style of “God Hop” Killarmy position themselves as soldiers prepared to battle the “trickknowledge” of the “devil’s civilization.” As Five Percenters, Killarmy turns oppression on its head and asserts their authority as Gods. Chapter 3 highlights Killarmy’s hidden transcript of resistance in their lyrics with clever usage of acronyms and allusions to Five Percent lessons. Killarmy’s lyrics admonish the dominant knowledge institutions of American society as well as black people who follow the “devil’s civilization” blindly. Five Percent ideology meshes with hip hop as both rely on

an I-pistemeological base of authority where alternative knowledge is formed in the context of oppression.

Chapter 4 describes the belief in the conspiracy of the crack epidemic in the black community and the inauthentic corporate rap as two specific exigencies for Killarmy on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. The album is placed in the context of the mid 1990s, when the Telecommunication Act of 1996 became law. 1996 was also the year Gary Webb's *Dark Alliance* series was published, a series that implicated the CIA's role in supporting the crack epidemic of the 1980s. Beginning in the 1970s with the Rockefeller Drug Laws, the War on Drugs produced a substantial increase in incarcerations in the United States. The *Dark Alliance* series was disciplined as a "conspiracy theory" because of the interest of the black community. Mainstream media used this "conspiracy panic" to discredit the allegations that the CIA was deliberately involved with destroying the black community. Killarmy describes the dangerous living conditions created by the crack epidemic and provides gritty street tales that go into the psyche of ghetto youth who despite their path of enlightenment are trapped by their socioeconomic situation. As mainstream consolidation increased in the music industry, so did hedonistic, nihilistic gangster content in rap music. Killarmy's style and lyrical approach rhetorically asserted authenticity to hip hop fans inundated with fake thug rappers.

Chapter 5 describes the framing of Five Percenter as criminals and possible terrorists. Killarmy's rhetorical approach as lyrical terrorists provided an authentically shocking image. The militant style is a consistent theme on *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and helps to provide ammunition for the conspiracy panic that ensued during the Beltway Attacks, when Five Percenter's influence of rap was put under scrutiny by the

media. Chapter 5 traces the history of Five Percenters and their entanglements with law enforcement agencies, causing many to classify them as a street gang. Ironically, the Wu-Tang Clan was the focus of an FBI investigation in the late-1990s. Killarmy and other rappers face a double bind as their authenticity as rappers is based on their criminal involvement. Much of what makes *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* become a viable commercial product is the fears it invokes. Black males are generally feared as possible criminals and to add “Islam” and “terrorist” to the black male image only complicates the ability to resist oppression.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

African descendants in the United States have been conditioned to accept the role of second-class citizen by the institutions that produce official knowledge (education system) and legal institutions that have historically created laws that have adversely affected the black community. This marginalization led to different Black Nationalist movements that were created to reform the mentality of a people who suffered from institutionalized racism. Beginning with the history taught in school, the narrative of black people is the narrative of a colonized people, brought to the New World as a slave, emancipated after the Civil War then marginalized by the Jim Crow South as well as other regions until they were liberated by the civil rights movement. Black Nationalist groups like the Nation of Islam and Nation of Gods and Earths created their own bodies of knowledge as the knowledge institutions of the dominant society were deemed unreliable and untrustworthy. In order to create a situation where African-Americans could accept the role of a slave, an ideology to justify both the roles of the subjugators and the subjugated had to be in place. As black people gained certain rights in America,

they also began to challenge the cultural narratives that relegated them to this inferior status.

Black Nationalism emerged in the 20th century as both counter ideology and strategic initiative to combat white supremacy, urging black people to gain a knowledge of self before they can know anything else and most importantly, act on this knowledge. To reiterate Van Zoonen's I-pistemology where "the self is the arbiter of all knowledge" begs the question, "who is the arbiter of knowledge but the self?" Knowing must be from within and a discerning mind is necessary to process the stimuli from the environment, particularly an environment that is hazardous to one's well being. The underlying principle that the Nation of Gods and Earths begins with is knowledge. It is from the foundation of knowledge where all else springs forth.

Hip hop emerged as a cultural phenomenon in the 1970s where a new music and culture was created by using whatever was possible for expression. In the face of poverty and poor education, an I-pistemology was formed that included a new way of speaking, creating and resisting an oppressive power structure. Killarmy followed this tradition by creating a unique sound that drew from influences all over the pop culture spectrum. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* offered a contribution to hip hop's knowledge base by providing the template for sonic terrorism with a raw, gritty and violent approach to music. Killarmy's message was shocking rhetorically as it attacked the institutions of the dominant society with graphic imagery and apocalyptic visions. By choosing to name the album *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, Killarmy aligned themselves with hip hop's I-pistemology, since *Behold a Pale Horse* was widely read among the hip hop generation of the mid 1990s. Black youth who were subjected to the violence and tragedy of the

crack epidemic had new suspicions about a system that oppressed their ancestors. For many, not much had changed in terms of white supremacy, only the methods used to exert it. Conspiracy is something to be assumed at any given interval. The *Dark Alliance* series was released around the same time Killarmy was recording *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, but many in the black community and hip hop generation did not need it to verify what they already felt. *Dark Alliance* only provided a valid source for the black community's frustration. As in most cases when a "conspiracy theory" gains traction, it is immediately disciplined by mainstream discourse, by labeling it a conspiracy theory first, and then discrediting it and those who believe it.

As such, Bratich's formulation of a conspiracy panic is appropriate. Citizens can research and find evidence of government conspiracies and cover-ups, but these ideas are not allowed to gain traction as any significant shift in public opinion can undermine the authority of the dominant institutions. This is why the disciplining of alternative discourse works well when conspiracy theorists can be labeled dangerous. This labeling makes others suspicious of conspiracy theories and turns others away from them. People generally do not want to be considered insane or paranoid and certainly do not want to be labeled as terrorist. Thus, hip hop's political rhetoric looks very different in 2015 than it did in 1997. This is not to say conscious or politically subversive rap no longer exists. Artists like Immortal Technique, Lupe Fiasco, K-Rino, and Jedi Mind Tricks to name a few, have released politically subversive music post 9/11. Killarmy and other Wu-Tang affiliates have released albums as solo artists. The difference is most of this socially conscious work remains underground and rap music backed by major corporations has become more homogeneous, focused on as Rose said the "gangster-pimp-ho trifecta."

The image of terror in America takes on several forms. It morphs and transforms to fill certain fears and fantasies both authentic and imagined. Japanese Americans, for example, were feared enough during WWII to be placed in internment camps. Terror is the face of the Ku Klux Klan. The widely circulated narrative of terrorist as Muslim extremist has gained more credence post 9/11 and multiple groups are labeled terrorist groups by mainstream media. The terrorist meme abhors any vacuum; it must be filled with some fanatical revelation of a lone actor or splinter group hell bent on destroying the dominant structure. From a political standpoint this is dangerous because anyone who disagrees with a prevailing view can be targeted as an extremist. Pushing a centralized agenda is an important element of maintaining political and social order. The media disciplines the eye and ear to recognize what should be wrong. Terrorists are potentially anyone with extreme views. All views can be extreme depending on the lens. People who feel they are pushed to the fringes often adopt “radical” positions. When individuals feel they lack options, it is a natural instinct to tribalize and form binds based on narrow categories.

The media can exacerbate paranoia by its consistent bombardment of images, sound frequencies and montages of madness and titillation. One could argue that the language used to fight against degradation, oppression, marginalization, and subjugation is itself an entrapment as the language used was forced upon the oppressed by the oppressor who set up the game and power relationship. The message in *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* is subversive to what are obvious targets and pillars of white oppression-religion, the police state and education though social indoctrination. Those who know the script can predict the outcome regardless of the specific characters. With the trove of

intelligence into Black Nationalist groups like the NOI, Black Panthers, and Five Percenters, not to mention the hip hop community, which has been linked to the underworld of drug trafficking and organized crime, it is unfathomable that executives at Priority Records were oblivious to what Killarmy was representing. The archetype for black resistance looks a certain way and has been co-opted for public consumption. The positives are a difference in the spectrum of choices for the listener and an alternative content that is anti-materialist. The negative is the more radical positions can alienate and legitimize discipline from the dominant society. The black militant presence is a containable presence that provides evidence for its argument against it by its existence alone. Thus, this narrative feeds on a fear dynamic that makes it viable from both sides.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The scope of content to study was limited to one album. As such, there were still other rap lyrics that were cited as comparative examples to Killarmy lyrics. By focusing on themes, I was able to draw examples from the album to explain how the process of meaning making works and was constantly negotiated. Killarmy represented a sound and style that resonated with a certain type of fan. The legions of Wu-Tang fans is enough to justify the importance of studying *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*, but it only helps to explain one segment of the hip hop community. The scope was also limited by focusing on one album where songs from different albums or other artists could be analyzed with a focus on the same themes. The thematic approach limited more in-depth explorations of comparative content. Also, the study did not include specific discussions of the role of gender or sexuality as the primary focus was knowledge production. Other albums and

songs by different artists can help to further explain the phenomena of hip hop, conspiracy theory, Islam, and terrorism.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Future studies can continue the conversation by engaging Van Zoonen's I-pistemological framework. In my opinion, I-pistemology describes hip hop's knowledge base perfectly as the elements of suspicion and discontent with the dominant knowledge institutions of society fits into the spirit of hip hop music and culture. With this in mind, any future study would need to be placed in context in regards to era. Hip hop looks and sounds very different now than it did in the 1970s, 1980s, or 1990s. The influence of mainstream media and corporate consolidation of the music industry has altered the way youth engage hip hop. Perhaps comparative studies can be done to compare sub-genres across eras. The role of new media can also be used as a template for explaining how hip hoppers create their own forms of meaning and expression.

Other studies can extend the conversation by focusing on similar themes, but with more artists. This study only focused on one album but there is much left to be explored in the Wu-Tang catalog alone. Single albums can be placed in the context of the time they were created and released as well as the socioeconomic factors that contributed to their creation and reception. I think there is also much to be said about how hip hop operates regionally. I only scratched the surface in this area in chapter 4. Hip hop has experienced internal battles regionally as other areas became viable from its beginnings in New York. Studies can be dedicated to these tensions as different bodies of knowledge and authority are created by place or region alone.

Other areas of research can focus on the relationships between hip hop production and the black male image, specifically the image of the domestic terrorist post 9/11. Moreover, studies related to gender and sexuality and the connections to hip hop culture can be explored using the I-pistemological framework. It would be interesting to see new studies challenge previous conceptions of hip hop's advantages and shortcomings for political discourse particularly in a commercialized context. I wish to continue to challenge the ideologies we accept as concrete reality. In the context where society is over stimulated by media, how does *any* organic expression emerge? Hip hop has been co-opted by the dominant knowledge institutions, including academic discourse. As such, conversations about hip hop should push the boundaries of what we already know and have discussed. There is much to be gained from digging deep into hip hop's I-pistemological knowledge base to explain socioeconomic and political engagement across the globe.

## Works Cited

- “5 Stars by Killarmy Feat. Masta Killa on WhoSampled.” *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Allah, Dasun. “Civilized People: Five Percenters ‘Build’ on Negative Press.” *Village Voice*. Village Voice, 12 Nov. 2002. Web. 04 Jan. 2015.
- Aplin, T. Christopher. “Expectation, Christianity, and Ownership in Indigenous Hip-Hop: Religion in Rhyme with Emcee One, RedCloud, and Quese, Imc.” *MUSICulture* 39.1 (2012): 42-69. Print.
- Auzanneau, Michelle. “Rap in Libreville, Gabon: An Urban Sociolinguistic Space.” *Black, Blanc, Beur: Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in the Francophone World*. Ed. Alain-Philippe Durand. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002. 106-123. Print.
- Ayres Jr., B. Drummond. “C.I.A. Chief Visits Watts to Counter Crack Talk.” *New York Times*. New York Times, 16 Nov. 1996. Web. 04 Jan. 2015.
- Barkum, Michael. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Print.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. Print.
- Bellon, Joe. “The Strange Discourse of the X-Files: What it is, What it Does, and What is at Stake.” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16.1 (1999): 136-154. Print.
- Berlet, Chip. “Big Stories, Spooky Sources.” *Columbia Journalism Review* 32.1 (1993): 67-71. Print.
- “Blood for Blood by Killarmy on WhoSampled.” *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.

- Boyd, Todd. "Check Yo Self, Before You Wreck Yo Self: Variations on a Political Theme in Rap Music and Popular Culture." *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 289-312. Print.
- Boyd, Todd. *The New H.N.I.C.* New York: New York University Press, 2003. Print.
- Britt, Donna. "Finding the Truest Truth." *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 4 Oct. 1996. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Bulic, Kamenko. "The Aesthetic Alchemy of Sounding Impartial: Why Serbs Still Listen to 'The BBC Conspiracy.'" *Journal of Journalism* 12.2 (2011): 183-197. Print.
- "Burning Season by Killarmy on WhoSampled." *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- "Camouflage Ninjas by Killarmy on WhoSampled." *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Campbell, Melissa. "'Go White Girl!': Hip Hop Booty Dancing and the White Female Body." *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 18.4 (2004): 497-508. Print.
- Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*. New York: St. Martin's, 2005. Print.
- "Clash of the Titans by Killarmy Feat. Streetlife on WhoSampled." *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Clerc, S. J. "DDEB, GATB, MPPB, and Ratboy: 'The X-Files' Media Fandom, Online and Off." *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files*. Eds. David Lavery, Angela Hague, and Marla Cartwright. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996. 36-51. Print.

- Common. "I Used to Love H.E.R." *Resurrection*. No I.D., 1995. CD.
- "Cong. Waters Says: 'CIA Is Guilty in Cocaine Scheme.'" *LA Sentinel*. LA Sentinel, 10 Oct. 1996. Web. 30 Oct. 2014.
- Cummings, Melbourne S., and Abhik Roy. "Manifestations of Afrocentricity in Rap Music." *Howard Journal of Communications* 13.1 (2002): 59-76. Print.
- Curtis, Ric. "Mike Agar: 'The Story of Crack'" *Addiction Research and Theory* 11.1 (2003): 39-42. Print.
- D, Davey. "How the East Coast Started This Bi-Coastal War." *Daveyd.com*. Daveyd, n.d. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.
- Deep Cover*. By Michael Tolkin and Henry Bean. Dir. Bill Duke. Perf. Laurence Fishburne, Jeff Goldblum, and Charles Martin Smith. New Line Cinema, 1992. DVD.
- Dowd, Maureen. "Liberties; from D.C., with Love." *New York Times*. New York Times, 17 Nov. 1996. Web. 04 Jan. 2015.
- "Dress to Kill by Killarmy on WhoSampled." *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Elkouby, Sebastien. "The Truth about the Letter That Shocked the Internet Claiming the Music Industry Promoted Gangsta Rap to Fill Prisons." *Hip is Read*. Hip Hop is Read, 22 May 2012. Web. 23 Dec. 2014.
- Emery, C. Eugene, Jr. "Paranormal and Paranoid Intermingle on Fox TV's 'X-Files.'" *Skeptical Inquirer*, 19 (1995): 18-19. Print.
- Epperson, A. Ralph. *The Unseen Hand: An Introduction to the Conspiratorial View of History*. Tucson: Publius, 1985. Print.

- Farhi, Paul. "From the Fringe to the Mainstream." *American Journalism Review* 32.4 (2010): 32-37. Print.
- "FBI File of Russell 'Old Dirty Bastard' Jones." *Scribd.com*. Scribd, n.d. Web. 3 Jan. 2015.
- Forman, Murray. *The Hood Comes First: Race, Space, and Place in Rap and Hip-Hop*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002. Print.
- Full Metal Jacket*. By Stanley Kubrick, Michael Herr, and Gustav Hasford. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Matthew Modine, Adam Baldwin, Vincent D'Onofrio, and Lee Ermey. Warner Bros., 1987. DVD.
- "Full Moon by Killarmy on WhoSampled." *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Gang Starr. *Above the Clouds*. DJ Premier, 1998. CD.
- Geto Boys. *City Under Siege*. Warner Bros. Records, 1989. CD.
- Geto Boys. *Do It Like a G.O.* Warner Bros. Records, 1989. CD.
- Glaze, Lauren E. "Correctional Populations in the United States, 2010." *U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics*. U.S. Department of Justice, Dec. 2011. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Goldblatt, Mark. "Hip-hop's Grim Undertones." *USATODAY.com*. USA Today, 28 Oct. 2002. Web. 3 Jan. 2015.
- Goldberg, Robert Alan. *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. Print.
- Golden, Tim. "Though Evidence Is Thin, Tale of C.I.A. and Drugs Has a Life of Its Own." *New York Times*. New York Times, 21 Oct. 1996. Web. 3 Jan. 2015.

- Graham, Allison. "Are you Now or Have you Ever Been? Conspiracy Theory and the X-Files." *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files*. Eds. David Lavery, Angela Hague, and Marla Cartwright. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996. 52-62. Print.
- Gravediggaz. *The Night the Earth Cried*. RZA, 1997. CD.
- Grealy, Liam. "Negotiating Cultural Authenticity in Hip-Hop: Mimicry, Whiteness and Eminem." *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 22.6 (2008): 851-865. Print.
- GZA, Ghostface Killah, RZA, and Killah Priest. *4th Chamber*. RZA, 1995. CD.
- Hatch, John B. "Rhetorical Synthesis through a (Rap)prochement of Identities: Hip-Hop and the Gospel According to the Gospel Gangstaz." *Journal of Communication and Religion* 25.2 (2002): 228-267. Print.
- Hill-Collins, Patricia. *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. Print.
- Hodai, Beau. "Alex Jones and the Informational Vacuum." *Extra!* 24.2 (2011): 14-15. Print.
- Howley, Kevin. "Spooks, Spies, and Control Technologies in the X-Files." *Television and New Media* 2.3 (2001): 257-280. Print.
- Hutchinson, Earl O. "'Conspiracy' Theory" *LA Sentinel*. LA Sentinel, 24 Oct. 1996. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.
- "Inside the Dark Alliance: Gary Webb on the CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion." *Democracy Now!* Democracy Now, n.d. Web. 17 Feb. 2015.

- Johnson, Andre E. *Urban God Talk: Constructing a Hip Hop Spirituality*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013. Print.
- “Jeru The Damaja - Come Clean [HQ Ver.]” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.
- Katz, Jesse. “The Cocaine Trail: First in a Three-part Series.” *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Time, 20 Oct. 1996. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.
- Kazin, Michael. “Conspiracy Theories: The Paranoid Streak in American History.” *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles, 27 Oct. 1996. Web. 14 Dec. 2014.
- Killah Priest. *B.I.B.L.E. (Basic Instructions for Those Leaving Earth)*. 4th Disciple, 1995. CD.
- “Killarmy - Fair, Love & War.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.
- “Killarmy - Wake Up (HQ Video / Dirty).” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2015.
- “Killarmy - Wu Renegades (HQ Video).” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 07 Jan. 2015.
- Killarmy. *Dirty Weaponry*. 4th Disciple, 1998. CD.
- Killarmy. *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars*. Priority Records, 1997. CD.
- Kitwana, Bakari. *The Hip Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African-American Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 2002. Print.
- Knight, Michael Muhammad. *The Five Percenters: Islam, Hip-hop, and the Gods of New York*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2007. Print.

- Knight, Peter. *Conspiracy Culture: From the Kennedy Assassination to "The X-Files."* New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Kurtz, Howard. "Running with the CIA Story: Reporter Says Series Didn't Go as Far as Readers Took It." *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 2 Oct. 1996. Web. 14 Jan. 2015.
- Lavery, David, Angela Hague, and Marla Cartwright, eds. *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996. Print.
- Levy, Clair. "Rap in Bulgaria: Between Fashion and Reality." *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Ed. Tony Mitchell. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. 134-148. Print.
- Madison, Joe. "The CIA and Crack." *LA Sentinel*. LA Sentinel, 31 Oct. 1996. Web. 14 Jan. 2015.
- Malach, Michelle. "I Want to Believe...in the FBI: The Special Agent and the X-Files." *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files*. Eds. David Lavery, Angela Hague, and Marla Cartwright. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996. 63-76. Print.
- Mann, Brian. "The Drug Laws That Changed How We Punish." *NPR*. NPR, n.d. Web. 14 Feb. 2015.
- Manuel, Peter. "Music as Symbol, Music as Simulacrum: Postmodern, Pre-modern, and Modern Aesthetics in Subcultural Popular Musics." *Popular Music* 14.02 (1995): 227-239. Print.
- Martinez, Gebe. "Probes Begin into Claims of CIA-L.A. Drug-smuggling Tie." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles, 21 Sept. 1996. Web. 18 Feb. 2015.

- McPhail, Mark. "Passionate Intensity: Louis Farrakhan and the Fallacies of Racial Reasoning." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 84 (1998): 426-429. Print.
- Medhurst, Martin J. "The Rhetorical Structure of Oliver Stone's *JFK*." *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 10 (1993): 128-143. Print.
- Melly, Timothy. *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000. Print.
- Miller, Shane. "Conspiracy Theories: Public Arguments as Coded Social Critiques: A Rhetorical Analysis of the TWA Flight 800 Conspiracy Theories." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 39.1 (2002): 40. Print.
- Mitchell, Tony. "Introduction: Another Root—Hip-Hop Outside the USA." *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Ed. Tony Mitchell. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. 1-38. Print.
- Mitchell, Tony. "Doin' Damage in my Native Language: The Use of 'Resistance Vernaculars' in Hip Hop in France, Italy, and Aotearoa/New Zealand." *Global Pop, Local Language*. Eds. Harris M. Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003. 3-17. Print.
- Miyakawa, Felicia M. *Five Percenter Rap: God Hop's Music, Message, and Black Muslim Mission*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. Print.
- Muhammad, Cedric. "Hip-Hop Fridays: Rap COPINTELPRO XI: Meet the Press and Tim Russert Connect the Sniper Shootings with Hip-Hop and the 5 Percent Nation of Islam." *BlackElectorate.com*: BlackElectorate, 01 Nov. 2002. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

- Neal, Mark Anthony. "Sold Out on Soul: The Corporate Annexation of Black Popular Music." *Popular Music and Society* 21.3 (1997). Print.
- Neal, Mark Anthony. *Songs in the Key of Black Life: A Rhythm and Blues Nation*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.
- New Jack City*. Dir. Mario Van Peebles. Perf. Mario Van Peebles. Warner Bros., 1991. DVD.
- Pardue, D. "'Writing in the Margins: Brazilian Hip-Hop as an Educational Project.'" *Anthropology and Education* 35 (2004): 411-432. Print.
- Parker, E. "To Many: CIA-crack Allegations Are True." *LA Sentinel*. LA Sentinel, 24 Oct. 1996. Web. 18 Feb. 2015.
- Parks, Lisa. "Special Agent or Monstrosity?: Finding the Feminine in the X-Files." *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files*. Eds. David Lavery, Angela Hague, and Marla Cartwright. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996. 121-134. Print.
- Pennay, Mark. "Rap in Germany: The Birth of a Genre." *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Ed. Tony Mitchell. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. 111-133. Print.
- Pennycook, Alastair. "Language, Localization, and the Real: Hip-Hop and the Global Spread of Authenticity." *Journal of Language, Identity and Education* 6.2 (2007): 101-115. Print.

- Perullo, Alex. and John Fenn. "Language Ideologies, Choices, and Practices in East African Hip Hop." *Global Pop, Local Language*. Eds. Harris M. Berger and Michael Thomas Carroll. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003. 19-51. Print.
- Peterson, Latoya. "Tricia Rose on The Hip-Hop Wars, Race, and Culture." *Racialicious*. Racialicious, n.d. Web. 14 Feb. 2015.
- Pierznik, Christopher. "The Day the Music Died: The 1995 Source Awards." *I Hate JJ Redick*. I Hate JJ Redick., n.d. Web. 12 Feb. 2015.
- Pipes, Daniel. "[Beltway Snipers]: Converts to Violence?" *Daniel Pipes*. Daniel Pipes, 25 Oct. 2002. Web. 07 Jan. 2015.
- Pirie, David. "In the Cold." *Sight and Sound* Apr. 1996: 22-23. Print.
- Public Enemy. *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. Def Jam Recordings, 1988. CD.
- Public Enemy. *Night of the Living Baseheads*. Def Jam Recordings, 1988. CD.
- Raine, Michael. "Gangsta Rap Conspiracy Theory Goes Gangbustas." *The Huffington Post*. The Huffington Post, n.d. Web. 10 Jan. 2015.
- Reeves, Marcus. *Somebody Scream!: Rap Music's Rise to Prominence in the Aftershock of Black Power*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2008. Print.
- Rose, Tricia. *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk about When We Talk about Hip Hop—and Why It Matters*. New York: BasicCivitas, 2008. Print.
- RZA, and Chris Norris. *The Tao of Wu*. New York: Riverhead, 2009. Print.
- "RZA Inside the Lines with Rap Genius: Part 1." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 25 Apr. 2012. Web. 20 Feb. 2015.

- Samad, A. A. "The CIA Drug-dealing Holocaust: We Need to Frame the Issue, to Sustain It." *LA Sentinel*. LA Sentinel, 24 Oct. 1996. Web. 18 Feb. 2015.
- Schwadron, Terry. "Postcards from Cyberspace." *Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles Times 25 Nov. 1996. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.
- "Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars." *The Lawful Path*. The Lawful Path, n.d. Web. 3 Sept. 2013.
- Soukup, Charles. "9/11 Conspiracy Theories on the World Wide Web: Digital Rhetoric and Alternative Epistemology." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 93<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention, Chicago, IL, Nov. 15, 2007.
- Soukup, Charles. "Television Viewing as Vicarious Resistance: The X-Files and Conspiracy Discourse." *Southern Communication* 68.1 (2002): 14-26. Print.
- Stempel, Carl, Thomas Hargrove, and Guido H. Stempel III. "Media Use, Social Structure, and Belief in 9/11 Conspiracy Theories." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 84.2 (2007): 353-372. Print.
- Sterling, Eric E., and Julie Stewart. "Undo This Legacy of Len Bias's Death." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 24 June 2006. Web. 18 Feb. 2015.
- "Sunz Of Man Feat. Killarmy - Soldiers Of Darkness [Official Video HD] Uncensored." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 10 Feb. 2015.
- Suro, Roberto, and Walter Pincus. "The CIA and Crack: Evidence Is Lacking of Alleged Plot." *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 4 Oct. 1996. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.

- Swedenburg, Ted. "Islam in the Mix: Lessons of the Five Percent." N.p., 19 Feb. 1997.  
Web. 18 Feb. 2015.
- "Swinging Swords by Killarmy on WhoSampled." *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d.  
Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Terrill, Robert E. *Malcolm X: Inventing Radical Judgment*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004. Print.
- "The D.C. Sniper Beltway Attacks." *Crime Library*. Crime Library, n.d. Web. 10 Sept. 2013.
- "Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology." *PBS*. PBS, n.d. Web. 14 Feb. 2015.
- UGK. *Texas*. Pimp C, 1993. CD.
- "Universal Soldiers by Killarmy on WhoSampled." *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d.  
Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Vagins, Deborah, and Jesselyn McCurdy. "Cracks in the System: Twenty Years of the Unjust Federal Crack Cocaine Law." *Aclu.org*. ACLU, Oct. 2006. Web. 17 Feb. 2015.
- Van Horn, Chara K. "Hidden Agency: Conspiratorial Control Over the Shaping of the 9/11 Commission Report." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the NCA 96<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, San Francisco, CA, Nov. 14, 2010.
- Varda, Scott J. "Making the Fantastic Persuasive: Malcolm X's Use of History as Rhetorical Argument." Paper presented at the annual meeting of NCA 92<sup>nd</sup> Annual Convention, San Antonio, TX, Nov. 15, 2006.

- “Wake Up by Killarmy on WhoSampled.” *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Webb, Gary. *Dark Alliance: The CIA, the Contras, and the Crack Cocaine Explosion*. New York: Seven Stories, 1998. Print.
- Wermuth, Mir. “Rap in the Low Countries: Global Dichotomies on a National Scale.” *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA*. Ed. Tony Mitchell. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001. 149-170. Print.
- Wexler, Celia. “The Fallout From the Telecommunication Act of 1996: Unintended Consequences and Lessons Learned.” *Common Cause*. Common Cause, 2005. Web. 10 Dec. 2014.
- White, Jack E. “Crack, Contras, and Cyberspace.” *Time Magazine*. Time Magazine, 30 Sept. 1996. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Wilcox, Rhonda and J. P. Williams. “What do you Think?: The X-Files, Liminality, and Gender Pleasure.” *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files*. Eds. David Lavery, Angela Hague, and Marla Cartwright. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996. 99-120. Print.
- Wildermuth, Mark. “Structural Conspiracy and Epistemology in the X-Files.” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 26 (1999): 147-157. Print.
- “Wu-Renegades by Killarmy on WhoSampled.” *WhoSampled*. WhoSampled, n.d. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.
- Wu-Tang Clan. *Diesel*. RZA, 1997. CD.
- Wu-Tang Clan. *Wu-Tang Forever*. RCA/Loud Records, 1997. CD.
- York, Malachi Z. *The Problem Book*. N.p., 1986. Web. 20 Sept. 2014.

## **Appendix A: Supreme Mathematics**

1. Knowledge
2. Wisdom
3. Understanding
4. Culture/Freedom
5. Power/Refinement
6. Equality
7. God
8. Build or Destroy
9. Born

## Appendix B: Supreme Alphabet

- A. Allah
- B. Born
- C. Cee
- D. Divine
- E. Equality
- F. Father
- G. God
- H. He or Her
- I. I, Islam or Eye
- J. Justice
- K. King
- L. Love, Hell or Right
- M. Master
- N. Now, Nation or End
- O. Cipher
- P. Power
- Q. Queen
- R. Ruler
- S. Self/Savior
- T. Truth
- U. You or Universe
- V. Victory

W. Wisdom

X. Unknown

Y. Why

Z. Zig Zag Zig

## **Appendix C: Twelve Jewels**

1. Knowledge
2. Wisdom
3. Understanding
4. Freedom
5. Justice
6. Equality
7. Food
8. Clothing
9. Shelter
10. Love
11. Peace
12. Happiness