

## Rhetorical Re-Framing and Counter Narratives: An Ideological Critique of the Christian Hip-Hop Artist Lecrae Moore

Robert Razzante  
jw Smith

*This essay explores the burgeoning popularity of Christian hip-hop artists. We examine how one particular artist (Lecrae Moore) manages to achieve narrative fidelity, cultural integrity, and ideological transformation through both his music and rhetorical presence. Utilizing an ideological methodological approach, the relationship between rap music, hip-hop culture and the black church is contextually addressed in this analysis. We conclude that a song with a secular aesthetic and an implicit sacred message may be more persuasive in challenging the dominant narratives of violence, drugs, and the objectification of women.*

Keywords: Hip-hop, religion, ideology, counter-narrative, cultural-aesthetics

Fisher (1984) suggests one develops an epistemology through the use of narratives and storytelling. The degree to which a story resonates with an audience depends on the source's credibility. A source may increase their credibility through what Fisher (1985) calls, *narrative fidelity*. Narrative fidelity is, "the 'truth qualities' of the story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reasons: the soundness of its reasoning and the value of its values (p. 349)." Hip-hop scholars posit rap music as a specific mode of storytelling that shares insight into the experience of black U.S. Americans (Miller, Hodge, Coleman, & Chaney, 2014; White Hodge, 2010).

In a content analysis of the top-rated rap music videos for 2008, more than half of the songs referenced sexual misogyny, violence, and sexual desire whereas a third referred to religious symbols (Morgan et al., 2012). As a result, a religious hip-hop artist may lack credibility due to their message not maintaining narrative fidelity to the dominant narrative of what rap music videos portray. However, Lecrae Moore, has been able to maintain credibility to both hip-hop culture as well as his Christian faith, all while producing rap music.

Lecrae released his first recording, *Real Talk*, in 2004. However, Lecrae turned from an underground rap artist to a mainstream sensation in 2013 when his recording, *Gravity*, was recognized as a finalist for the "Best Gospel Album" at the fifty-fifth Annual Grammy Award ceremony (Moore, 2013a). As of 2016, Lecrae published an autobiography articulating the role of his faith during his life struggles through adversity. Lecrae's story and music is worth analyzing as a case study of how a hip-hop artist can simultaneously practice their faith through all while producing rap music. As such, an ideological critique allows for us to examine how Lecrae is able to maintain narrative fidelity to both ideologies while constructing his own hybrid musical identity

In this essay we primarily analyze an interview done by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) with the Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae (Moore, 2013c). This critique will include several citations from the interview, along with quotations from specific lyrics that illustrate Lecrae's message. Lecrae's interview and lyrics provide a foundation from which we examine his ability to simultaneously maintain cultural integrity to both hip-hop culture and Christianity. In particular, we attempt to examine the rhetorical strategies of the gospel singer, Lecrae, and how he is able to reframe the image of hip-hop culture while incorporating a sacred message.

---

**Robert J. Razzante** (M.Ed., Ohio University). Robert J. Razzante is a second year doctoral student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. Rob is interested in how people come to communicate through prejudice toward mutual understanding.

**jw Smith** (Ph.D., Wayne State University). jw is an associate professor of communication in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University. His research specializations include communication and disability as well as African American Rhetoric.

### **Lecrae Interview**

In 2004, Ben Washer and Lecrae Moore founded Reach Records, a Christian hip-hop record label. In a joint statement on their website, Washer and Moore (2017) note that Reach Records serves as a place for creating music from artists who are, “unashamed to be themselves and remain true to their convictions.” Furthermore, the goal of Reach Records is to, “change the way people see the world.” As such, Washer and Moore set out to challenge the status quo that hip-hop culture and religion are incommensurable. The interview with Lecrae serves two main purposes. First, the interview offers a record of Lecrae’s vision. Second, the interview provides specific examples of how Lecrae finds commensurability to both Christianity and hip-hop culture. It is within this commensurability that we argue Lecrae finds narrative fidelity to both ideologies through a hybrid musical identity.

Lecrae’s interview with PBS’s Religion & Ethics Newsweekly Series aired on February 8, 2013. The Religion & Ethics Newsweekly Series is known for, “providing distinctive, cutting-edge news coverage and analysis of national and international events in the ever-changing religious world” (“About the series,” 2013). The title of PBS’s interview with the Christian hip-hop artist is, “Lecrae extended interview: Can you be Christian and rap at the same time?” In the eight minutes and twenty-six seconds video, Lecrae speaks on the following topics of his: past, lyrical style, strategies in connecting to his audience, and personal goals through his music.

Three of Lecrae’s songs and music videos are interwoven into the PBS interview as segment dividers: “Tell the World” (2012a) at the beginning, “Just Like You” (2010) at one minute and fifty seconds, and “Mayday” (2012b) at four minutes and thirty-seven seconds. All three music videos demonstrate Lecrae’s lyrical style in conjunction with sights and sounds of hip-hop culture.

### **Defining a Christian Hip-Hop Artist**

Research on Lecrae is limited, but scholars and journalists across a wide variety of disciplines have researched themes that appear in Lecrae’s music. For example, scholars in the field of African American Studies, Communication Studies, and Hip-Hop Studies have explored the themes of: African American rhetoric, the social implications of hip-hop culture and rap music, the black church, and identity. In this review of literature, we will focus on a few sources that highlight the four categories.

#### **African American Rhetoric**

According to Cummings & Moore (2003), there are six principles that create the African American cosmology: “the centrality of Jesus; the symbolic importance of the word *freedom* as a communal worshiper; intense enthusiasm; belief in personal conversion of the individual worshiper; recognition of the African heritage; and commitment to racial parity, justice, and equality” (p. 62). Cosmology is the way one sees the world in which they live. Lecrae’s cosmology heavily influences his lyrics, and by understanding Lecrae’s cosmology, it is then possible to get an understanding of Lecrae’s message. Carroll (1966) contends that “a change in language can transform our appreciation of the cosmos” (p. 365).

Rap music has become a source of communal identification for its black audience (Rose, 1994). Parmar (2005) posits that through the use of personal experience, rappers become critical educators that use their lyrics as a way to encourage transformative dialogue. More specifically, rap music can be used as an art form to interpret different representations of African Americans in the media. Subsequently, messages in rap music expose how culture, knowledge and power play a role in that representation. Finally, African American rhetoric through rap music influences the cosmology of artists and listeners. In order to better understand how Lecrae is able to use African American rhetoric and Christianity as tools for change, norms of the black church must next be considered.

#### **The Black Church**

Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) identify the three main pillars of “priestly and prophetic functions” as: relationships, liberation, and community (p. 320). Relationships, liberation, and community within the black community serve as an historical foundation from which Lecrae bases his lyrical messages. We place extra focus on the three main pillars of priestly and prophetic functions in order to examine Lecrae’s lyrical content. Because Lecrae is a hip-hop artist who sings about his faith, he may be considered an evangelist or preacher of the Christian faith.

According to Alkebulan (2003), “the effective African preacher or lecturer understands the transformative power of the word” (p 30). In contrasting written history and oral history, Lecrae is able to use the power of spoken word to transform his static audience into aware and active consumers of his sacred and secular message. African philosophy incorporates sacred and secular synergistically, rather than separating the two (Kirk-Duggan & Hall, 2011). Lecrae’s lyrical content serves as a medium through which he binds the sacred with the secular to reach his audience. In building on the concept of oral communication role in the Black Church, we turn now to the theme of rap music.

### **Rap Music**

Hip-hop as a co-culture was formed by the African American community in the 1970s. According to Parmar (2009), hip-hop culture consists of four specific practices: turntablism (DJing), b-bopping, graffiti art, and rap music. According to Miller et al. (2014),

“Hip Hop culture has seemingly transcended its initial ‘fad’ trope and developed into more than just a musical genre; it is a voice; it is an identity; it is a movement; it is a force; it is a community of people seeking justice and higher learning; it is an environment for those seeking spiritual solace and cathartic release; it is performance art; it is, as KRS-One has argued, a place where both marginal and mainstream voices can be heard and flourish.” (p. 6)

Essentially, rap is an art form where artists express a marginalized, counter-narrative, through the medium of music.

As previously stated, rap music may be conceptualized as African American rhetoric that unites its audience. Biggs (2012) analyzed how rap music and spoken poetry stem from indigenous epistemology as a mode for understanding marginalized experiences. In the African community, knowledge is passed from one generation to another through oral history. Based on similar principles as West African griots, hip-hop artists articulate lived experiences through spoken word. Rap music as a counter-narrative particularly exposes knowledge from a marginalized point of view with efforts to claim self-authorship of racial, political, and economic issues.

Barnes (2008) explores the history and creation of a genre of music called Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). Under the umbrella term of CCM, hip-hop artists who sing about their faith may fit in the smaller labels of Holy Hip-Hop, Christian Hip-Hop, Christian Rap, and Gospel Rap (Harris, 2014). Whatever the label may be, Belcher and Haridakis (2013) suggest five reasons why people listen to music: to pass time, to manage moods, for the content, for the aesthetics, and self-expression. An audience may conceptualize Lecrae as a Holy Hip-Hop artist, Christian Hip-Hop, Christian Rapper, or Gospel Rapper, but audience members might just see Lecrae as a hip-hop artist first.

### **Identity**

Clay (2003) postulates how the identity of black youth can be conceptualized through the lens of hip-hop culture as a form of cultural capital. Clay asserts that the cultural capital of hip-hop validates a black identity that has been historically marginalized. Black youth who embrace the cultural capital of hip-hop culture do so as a means to understand inclusion and exclusion and how it relates to racial and economic identity. However, juxtaposed to religious identity, hip-hop culture may seem trivial.

Religious southern Calvinists see rap as “the ugly realities of urban communities under assault by poverty, violence, and racial injustice. At its worst, it seems to celebrate the horrors of gang violence, rape and misogyny, hostility toward gays and immigrants, and an anarchic gun culture” (Moore, 2013c, p. 26). The disapproval of certain factions of Christianity toward rap music is essential in understanding the dominant narrative of hip-hop culture when paired with religion. Moore’s description of the Calvinist perspective provides a foundation from which to examine the tension between the dogmatic ideology of religion and the counter-narrative perspective from hip-hop culture. Through his rap music, Lecrae reframes the identity of rap music enthusiasts who happen to be spiritual beings too.

In addition to analyzing the audience’s identity, it is important to examine the identity of Lecrae himself. Brown-White (2003) emphasizes how “harmony and balance should be attained without the speaker losing integrity, meaning without divesting the person’s cultural orientation” (p. 266). Brown-White introduces a paradox that

expresses the balance of cultural integrity a Christian hip-hop artist may need to endure. The idea of cultural integrity is crucial in observing how Lecrae is able to balance a secular and sacred image simultaneously.

### Method

Performing a written rhetorical criticism of traditionally oral cultures can create a paradox. However, it is through writing that one can deeply explore the contents of a text. More specifically, Ong (2013) notes that, “literacy can be used to reconstruct for ourselves the pristine human consciousness which was not literate at all...Such reconstruction can bring a better understanding of what literacy itself has meant in shaping man’s [sic] consciousness toward and in high-technology cultures (pp. 14-15). As such, our ideological critique serves as a means to explore how Lecrae constructs an identity as a hip-hop artist who happens to sing about his faith. We perform our critique though analyzing an orally recorded interview alongside the lyrical content of his music. Such a combination allows for us to maintain integrity to both the orality of Lecrae’s music and self-concept as seen through his lyrical content.

We analyze Lecrae’s interview with PBS through the lens of an ideological critique. We use the ideological method because it allows critics to “look beyond the surface structure of an artifact to discover the beliefs, values, and assumptions it suggests” (Foss, 2009, p. 209). More specifically, this method enables us to examine the dominant ideology of hip-hop, and how the dominant ideology is demystified and reframed by the Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae. After uncovering the dominant ideology of hip-hop, we compare and contrast the dominant narrative of hip-hop culture with Lecrae’s counter-narrative of what constitutes hip-hop culture. We finally analyze how the dominant ideology of hip-hop is reinforced through social forces, and how Lecrae is able to challenge the dominant ideology through his music.

In this ideological critique, we are specifically interested in the themes of Christianity and hip-hop culture in relation to Lecrae as a Christian rap artist. In the scope of this essay, we critique the dominant ideology for hip-hop culture which “sees structural and social evil as a given, to be endured and raged against rather than appealed to” (Moore, 2013c). The dominant ideology for Christianity used in this essay is “characterized by an emphasis on humanity’s depravity, God’s sovereignty, and divine election” (p. 24). This study examines the rhetorical strategies employed by Lecrae, and how he is able to re-conceptualize the image of rap music. Through his music, Lecrae demonstrates how one can bring two distinct cultures together to form a new culture that embraces both Christianity and hip-hop culture. We argue that, through navigating ideological tensions, Lecrae is able to maintain narrative fidelity to both while creating a hybrid musical identity.

We organize our critique into four different sections: need for a role model, cultural connotations, relating with the audience, and transformation, redemption, and liberation. In each section we attempt to examine how Lecrae’s ideology co-exists with the separate ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop culture. Each section begins with a quote from Lecrae’s interview with PBS, followed by quotations from four of Lecrae’s songs. We begin by taking a look at how Lecrae addresses the issue of finding a role model in hip-hop music.

#### Need for a Role Model

*“I didn’t grow up with, you know, just like these positive male influences who said, ‘hey son,’ you know, ‘this is how you do this, this is how you do this,’ you know. The men that I had in my life, did the best that they knew how, and um, they didn’t grow up with positive male influences, so it was really kind of just a trial and error deal. And I really began to look to, um, obviously to hip-hop for wisdom and guidance” (Moore, 2013b, 0:58).*

Belcher and Haridakis (2013) posits that one of the main reasons why people listen to music is for self-expression, and finding one’s identity in music. In his song “Just Like You” (Moore, 2010), Lecrae tells a story of how he grew up desperate for a positive male influence and how his drug-dealing uncles failed to fulfill that role:

I got this emptiness inside that got me fighting for approval 'cause I missed out on my daddy saying,  
 way to go,  
 And get that verbal affirmation on know how to treat a woman,  
 Know how to fix an engine,  
 That keep the car running.

So now I'm looking at the media and I'm following what they feed me,  
 Rap stars, trap stars,  
 Whoever wants to lead me  
 Even though they lie they still tell me that they love me,  
 They say I'm good at bad things at least they proud of me.

As the song progresses, Lecrae tells the audience how his faith helped him find his positive male influence in Jesus. More specifically, Lecrae redirects his message from being just like his uncles, to being just like Jesus. Lecrae begins to follow his uncles because they were the only ones that showed him affection. However, the affection his uncles showed him was not the type of love he was pursuing. Lecrae combines the ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop by showing how one can fight against oppression by escaping through one's faith.

In contrast to the Calvinist ideological perceptions of rap music, Lecrae chooses to sing about his faith rather glorifying misogyny, drugs, or crime. Lecrae's counter-narrative illuminates the hardships youth may have when they lack a positive role model. Rather than falling in line with the dominant ideology that young black males turn toward drugs and crime, Lecrae offers an alternative perspective. Lecrae's faith guided him through the uncertainty of not having positive male role models. In the next section, we further explore Lecrae's motive in demystifying the negative connotations associated with hip-hop culture and rap music.

### **Cultural Connotations**

*"Culturally, it [rap] has been used as something that's negative and bad, but I think you can take it and use it for redemptive purposes and helpful purposes as well"* (Moore, 2013b, 5:53).

Hip-hop tends to portray an image of "hypermasculinity, violence, and sexuality" (Chang, 2006, p. 24). The dominant narrative reveals a connotation of hip-hop that is tied to the "consumption of commodities-cars, jewelry, and women in particular" (Watts, 2004, p. 24). Even though hypermasculinity, violence, and sexuality may be a dominant ideology of hip-hop culture, Lecrae reclaims hip-hop culture as a culture that rectifies the image of women in rap music. In his song, "I Love You" (Moore, 2010), Lecrae expresses his love for a particular woman rather than objectifying her:

If your lady love God and you gotta good girl  
 Stay with her, pray with her, take her on a date  
 Tell her you appreciate...  
 How she love me, how she cares  
 And how she's every woman everywhere,  
 And baby I'm sorry for all the days I let you down  
 But I got something to say, I love you girl.

Even though the aesthetic sound of the song can be categorized as rap, the lyrics may not jibe with what one defines as the dominant ideology of hip-hop culture. Instead of degrading women, Lecrae sings his appreciation for what this particular woman does for him. Lecrae combines the ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop by showing that through the love of a significant other, one can find salvation.

Morgan et al.'s (2012) content analysis of rap music suggests that rap artists sing about hypermasculinity, violence, and sexuality more so than one's faith. Because a majority of rap songs portray this image, the dominant ideology of rap music is reified through misogynistic lyrics and videos. However, it takes artists like Lecrae to share an alternative ideology in order to reconstruct an ideology of rap music that can raise awareness for social justice and religious appreciation. In order for the counter-narrative to disassemble the hypermasculine, violent, and sexual image of hip-hop culture, audience members need more exposure to these alternative messages.

### **Relating with the Audience**

*"Over the years I've been learning to one, make good music, but two, resonate and relate with people and not be so into trying to give a theological discourse in four minutes in a song. But maybe there's a song that needs to be written about my past or maybe there's a song that needs to be written about a relationship between me and my*

*father who I don't have a good relationship with. Those are the types of things I think people resonate and relate to"* (Moore, 2013b, 6:33).

The toughest job for any Christian hip-hop artist is the ability to, "bridge the divide between pop culture and the old, old story" (Moore, 2013b). In order for Lecrae to appeal to both Christianity and hip-hop, he must come up with music that has a hip-hop aesthetic and an either implicit or explicit lyrical connection to Christianity. In his song "Confessions" (2012c), Lecrae rearticulates the meaning of being wealthy:

Look, I ain't gonna pretend that car and my crib  
 Give me worth and meaning 'cuz I know they never did  
 Them numbers in my bank account are no reason for livin'  
 And sleepin' with bad women really doesn't keep me driven  
 I'm sure this man sittin' beside me is beside himself  
 Tryna' find himself  
 Yeah, he flyin' first class thinkin' everyone behind him is a peon  
 Goin' home to a model chick he prolly gon' cheat on  
 He'll be empty for eons; you know what I be on  
 Money don't solve it all, man, look what happen to Dion  
 I bought my dream house, but only made me wake up  
 It all falls down even if you got ya' cake up

Hamlet (2012) posits how successful preachers are those that can, "communicate within the cultural milieu of the people" (p. 94). Lecrae is successful because he realizes that too many biblical verses may turn a portion of his audience away. However, the way he manages to subtly hint toward his faith in his lyrics while also producing rap music enables Lecrae to appeal to diverse audiences. His implicit themes please those who listen for the hip-hop aesthetic as well as those who actively listen for the Christian message. In negotiating his identity through music, Lecrae is able to balance both ideologies of Christianity and hip-hop at the same time without sacrificing either one.

In Lecrae's interview with PBS, he mentioned how he wanted to stay away from preaching to his audience. Later in the interview he mentioned how critics call him a Christian hip-hop artist, but he would rather be conceptualized as a rapper who happens to sing about his faith. In stating this, Lecrae strategically reframes his identity away from a Christian artist to that of a hip-hop artist first. Labeling himself primarily a hip-hop artist appeals to those who listen to rap music for the aesthetic sound. In addition to the hip-hop aesthetic, Lecrae's music happens to contain the Christian message some audience members seek.

### **Transformation, Redemption, and Liberation**

*"As you move through my song, and my soundscape, you're going to hear: a fall, a pain, and problems of life. You're going to hear, um, you know, the redeeming portions of life and how things can be redeemed and there's hope, and you're gonna hear that all weaved in. And I'd be crazy, you know, not to talk about the thing that's most passionate to me, and it is my faith. You know, how can I leave that out? It's all that I am, and it defines me so you gonna get that in my music as well"* (Moore, 2013b, 7:55).

Barnes (2008) demonstrates the three divisions in Contemporary Christian Music (CCM): separational, integrational, and transformational. Each division offers a distinct purpose portrayed by different lyrical styles. A separational lyrical style includes direct theological discourse, whereas an integrational style chooses to leave theological discourse out of the lyrics. However, a transformational style uses both the aesthetic and lyrical elements to move its audience. In his song "Fuego" (Moore, 2012d), Lecrae uses a combination of metaphors and slight hints toward his faith as a way to provide vivid imagery:

Light the sky up change your bio  
 Live for something more than things you buy up  
 Serve and save learn and change  
 Trust in the king who can turn this thang  
 Yeah they ain't every seen a shine like this

Look up they never see the sky like this  
 I'm on and this little light I got  
 Imma let it shine til the day I drop  
 Heart quit pumping only way I stop  
 Til then I'm a light post on your block.

Former Kansas City mayor, Emanuel Cleaver II, proposed that the way to achieve liberation is through, “community, relational ethics, and human relationships with the supernatural, others, and oneself” (Brown-White, 2003, p. 266). Lecrae pushes for liberation in a political world, but he also pushes for salvation in a religious world simultaneously. Lecrae’s transformative message in this music was similar to Cleaver II’s motives as a mayor. Lecrae’s most popular songs are those that rely on the aesthetics of hip-hop music as a means to persuade his audience to engage with his lyrics. In attracting audience members through a hip-hop aesthetic, he then creates an opportunity to share the transformational message of his faith.

In an interview with CNN (Almasy, 2010), Lecrae states that, “every rapper is a preaching something. They are either preaching that you can find satisfaction in a million dollars or fifty women, or that you are not a real man unless you are a killer” (p. 2). In essence, Lecrae’s motivation for his music lies in providing an alternative narrative of rap music and Christianity. Rather than singing along with the dominant ideology of violence, drugs, and the objectification of women, Lecrae uses his rap music for transformation, redemption, and liberation for himself and his audience.

We conceptualize Lecrae as a hip-hop artist who either implicitly or explicitly preaches a sacred message in a secular world. Lecrae is able to spread his faith and not have to rely on the church for help in disseminating his message. More specifically, Lecrae strategically utilizes rap music as a medium to spread his message to those who might not necessarily hear his message otherwise. Lecrae answers the question that there *can* be a Christian hip-hop artist, and a successful one too.

### Discussion

In this essay we analyzed how the Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae, was able to share the message of his faith through the medium of rap music. Even though he is recognized as a gospel artist, Lecrae categorizes himself as a hip-hop artist who happens to sing about his faith (Moore, 2013b). Though his music, Lecrae is able to navigate the tension between Christianity and hip-hop culture. Through such tension, we argue that Lecrae is able to maintain narrative fidelity to both. It is also important to point out that Lecrae is not the only artist that attempts to re-articulate the dominant ideology of Christianity and hip-hop culture.

Lecrae is a cofounder of a record label titled, Reach Records, which “aims to serve through art, to bring healing and show others a different way to view their world” (Reach Records, 2011). Lecrae’s goal for the record label manifests through his lyrics in Fuego when he says, “Live for something more than things you buy up/ Serve and save learn and change.” More specifically, he uses a rap aesthetic as a means to share a sacred message of service and change. Furthermore, through the art of rap music, Reach Records attempts to show that Christianity should not confine itself to the church, and that hip-hop culture should not confine itself to the misleading dominant ideology of misogyny, violence, and drugs. Lecrae and other artists of Reach Records are cultural diplomats that bring both Christianity and hip-hop together to create a new fashion of listening to music and to live one’s faith.

What Lecrae and company are doing with Reach Records, is reminiscent of what artists have done in the past. For example, in the early 60s, Sam Cooke created his own record label, SAR, as a way to expose young gospel artists to a more secular audience. Around the same time, The Staple Singers of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, dedicated their music to preaching Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s message. Once Dr. King passed away, the Staple Singers turned toward social activism while still maintaining their gospel roots. Other artists such as, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Curtis Mayfield, and Aretha Franklin also balanced their gospel and secular identities while maintaining cultural integrity to their respective genres of music. What we see with Lecrae and Reach Records is not new, but rather a revival of previous generations’ pioneers.

Finally, Slater and Rouner (2002) contend entertainment-education is a persuasive means to affecting one’s attitudes, thoughts, and behavior. The more an audience member connects with the narrative, the more persuasive

the message becomes. For Lecrae, and other artists who balance a sacred and secular message, music becomes a persuasive means to sharing a counter-narrative. More specifically, a song with a secular aesthetic and an implicit sacred message may be more persuasive in challenging the dominant narratives of violence, drugs, and the objectification of women. It is within this liminal position that Lecrae maintains narrative fidelity to both audiences. That is, a listener may ascribe to the secular sound of rap music, the sacred message of his lyrical content, or a combination of both. Such narrative fidelity provides grand implications for the black church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As the black church continues to grapple with the issues of remaining relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, artists like Lecrae Moore will probably become more significant in this quest. We contend that a redefining of hip-hop culture will be essential in attracting younger audiences to the more traditional religious institutions in the black community. For far too long, the dominant rap music negative narratives have been allowed to dominate both the genre and the rationale for existence and success in the black community. Christian artists like Lecrae Moore who can “keep it real” but also keep it “religiously relevant” will only grow in popularity and persuasive appeal. We further postulate that these kind of artists will probably be the future “reachers and preachers” in the community. Future studies may employ a generic criticism as a means to further explore gospel rap music. That is, a generic criticism may enable one to explore how Lecrae’s counter-narrative creates narrative resonance among many artists in gospel rap. Our current ideological criticism serves as a particular case study with Lecrae himself. However, rich insight might come from exploring the tension among many artists within gospel rap as a particular genre of music. Future studies might particularly examine how other artists within Lecrae’s music label, 116, navigate the ideological tension between religion and hip-hop culture.

### **Conclusion**

An ideological critique of Lecrae Moore offers readers insight an artists’ identity negotiation between two seemingly disparate narratives. Rather than considering himself a Christian hip-hop artist, Lecrae identifies as a hip-hop artist who sings about his faith. As such, through his work, audiences are able to witness how Lecrae is able to successfully navigate the narratives of both hip-hop culture and Christianity as a means toward developing his hybrid-identity. Furthermore, audiences members may identify with Lecrae’s narrative through transferability (Tracy, 2013). That is, through observing Lecrae’s negotiation of identity, we advocate that audience members can learn how to negotiate disparate dominant narratives in their own identity construction.



## References

- About the series: religion & ethics newsweekly delivers one-of-a-kind news coverage from around the nation and the world.* (2013). Available: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/about-the-series/>
- Alkebulan, A. (2003). The spiritual essence of African American rhetoric. In R. Jackson II & E. Richardson (Eds.), *Understanding African American rhetoric: Classical origins to contemporary innovations* (pp. 23-40). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Almasy, S. (2010, November 10). For the rapper, a new life, a new message. Retrieved from <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2010/11/10/for-the-rapper-a-new-life-a-new-message/>
- Barnes, S. (2008). Religion and rap music: An analysis of black church usage. *Review of Religious Research*, 49(3), 319-338.
- Belcher, J., & Haridakis, P. (2013). The role of background characteristics, music-listening motives, and music selection on music discussion. *Communication Quarterly*, 61(4), 357-396.
- Biggs, C. (2012). Spreading the indigenous gospel of rap music and spoken word poetry: Critical pedagogy in the public sphere as a stratagem of empowerment and critique. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 36(2), 161-168.
- Brown-White, S. (2003). Afrocentric rhetoric transcending audiences and contexts: A case study of preacher and politician Emanuel Cleaver II. In R. Jackson II & E. Richardson (Eds.), *Understanding African American rhetoric: Classical origins to contemporary innovations* (pp. 263-282). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Carroll, J. (1966). Language, thought, and reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf. In Cummings, M., & Daniel, J. (2000). *The rhetoric of western thought*. (7th ed., pp. 360-375). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing.
- Chang, J. (2006). Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation. In Balaji, M. (2009). *Owning black masculinity: The intersection of cultural commodification and self-construction in rap music videos*. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 21-38. doi:10.1111/j.1753-9137.2008.01027.x
- Clay, A. (2003). Keepin' it real: Black youth, hip-hop culture, and black identity. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46(10), 1346-1358.
- Cummings, M., & Moore, J. (2003). "Jesus is a rock": Spirituals as lived experiences. In R. Jackson II & E. Richardson (Eds.), *Understanding African American rhetoric: Classical origins to contemporary innovations* (pp. 57-67). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fisher, W. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs*, 51(1), 1-22.
- Fisher, W. (1985). The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communication Monographs*, 52(4), 347-367.
- Foss, S. (2009). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice*. (4th ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc.
- Hamlet, J. (2012). The reason why we sing: Understanding traditional African American worship. In A. Gonzales, M. Houston & V. Chen (Eds.), *Our voices: Essays in culture, ethnicity, and communication* (5th ed., pp. 92-97). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Harris, T. (2014). Refocusing and redefining hip hop: An analysis of Lecrae's contribution to hip hop. *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, 1(1), 14.
- Kirk-Duggan, C. A., & Hall, M. (2011). *Wake up!: Hip-hop Christianity and the black church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Lincoln, C., & Mamiya, L. (1990). The black church in the African American experience. In Barnes, S. (2008). Religion and rap music: An analysis of black church usage. *Review of Religious Research*, 49(3), 319-338.
- Miller, M., Hodge, D. W., Coleman, J., & Chaney, C. D. (2014). The hip in hip hop: Toward a discipline of hip hop studies. *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, 1(1), 6-12.
- Moore, L. (2010). Just like you. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Rehab* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.
- Moore, L. (2012a). Tell the world. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.
- Moore, L. (2012b). Mayday. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.

- Moore, L. (2012c). Confe\$\$ions. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.
- Moore, L. (2012d). Fuego. [Recorded by Lecrae Moore]. On *Gravity* [MP3 file]. Atlanta, GA: Reach Records.
- Moore, L. (2013a, July 1). *Biography in context: Contemporary black biography*, 108.
- Moore, L. (2013b, February 8). Lecrae extended interview: "can you be Christian and rap at the same time?" Retrieved from <http://video.pbs.org/video/2332849392/>
- Moore, R. (2013c, May). W.w.jay-z: How Christian hip-hop could call the American church back to the gospel- and hip-hop back to its roots. *Christianity Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/may/ww-jay-z.html>
- Morgan, T. N., Hampton, C. A., Davenport, S., Young, E., Badzinski, D. M., Richardson, K. B., & Woods, R. H. (2012). Sacred symbols with a secular beat?: A content analysis of religious and sexual imagery in modern rock, hip hop, Christian, and country music videos. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, 24(3), 432-448.
- Ong, W. J. (2013). *Orality and literacy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Parmar, P. (2005). Cultural studies and rap: The poetry of an urban lyricist. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 9, 5-15.
- Parmar, P. (2009). An historic analysis of hip hop. In *Knowledge reigns supreme: The critical pedagogy of hip-hop artist KRS-ONE*. Rotterdam, New York: Sense.
- Reach Records. (2011). *The music of a movement*. Retrieved from <http://reachrecords.com/about>
- Rose, T. (1994). Voices from the margins: Rap music and contemporary black cultural production. In *Black noise: Rap music and black culture in contemporary America* (pp. 1-20). Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.
- Slater, M. D., & Rouner, D. (2002). Entertainment – education and elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion. *Communication Theory*, 12(2), 173-191.
- Tracy, S. (2013). *Qualitative research methods*. UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publications.
- Washer, B. & Moore, L. (2017). About. Retrieved November, 28, 2017, from <http://reachrecords.com/about/>
- Watts, E. K. (2004). An exploration of spectacular consumption: Gangsta rap as cultural commodity. In M. Forman & M. A. Neal (Eds.), *That's the joint: The hip-hop studies reader* (pp. 593–610). New York, NY: Routledge.
- White Hodge, D. (2010). *The soul of hip hop: Rims, timbs and a cultural theology*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books.