

***Mic Checks and Balances:
Politically Conscious Hip-
Hop's Engagement with the
Presidency of Barack
Obama***

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Abstract | Hip-hop subculture has long existed as an anti-establishment space that has provided some of U.S. society's strongest and most unfiltered critiques against the federal government. This adversarial posture has been most effectively communicated by hip-hop MC's. While far from monolithic, the collective sentiment that has most consistently been communicated to the men residing in The Oval Office has ranged from hostile to ambivalent. The presidential check and balancing inherent to hip-hop has come in a variety of forms over the years through rap music, hip-hop's most visible element. The election of the nation's first black president, however, has presented an interesting quandary for the hip-hop nation. On one hand, hip-hop has an obligation to stand up to power. On the other hand, there is also a long standing tradition for hip-hop to mobilize and band together when its members are under attack from outsiders. This article tries to explore the extent that hip-hop artists view Barack Obama as an outsider or an insider. A qualitative content analysis will be conducted of politically conscious rap music in an attempt to find out now that Obama is in the White House, has hip-hop gone soft in its traditional role in challenging White House orthodoxy? The qualitative and quantitative data used here makes it hard to make the case that hip-hop has not gone soft on President Obama in comparison to previous presidents, specifically President George W. Bush.

Keywords | hip-hop; black public sphere; politics; Barack Obama; George W. Bush.

From the very beginning, hip-hop subculture has existed as an antiestablishment space that has provided some of U.S. society's strongest and most unfiltered critiques against the nation's various power structures, with particularly strong vexation reserved for the federal government (Stapleton, 1998; Ogbar, 1999; Boyd, 2003; Kitwana, 2005). This adversarial posture has been most effectively communicated by hip-hop MC's, who have often been credited with being the subculture's griots, responsible for communicating hip-hop's collective ethos (Smitherman, 1997). While far from monolithic, the collective sentiment that has most consistently been communicated to the men residing in The Oval Office has ranged from hostile to ambivalent. Hip-hop has long taken seriously its charge of speaking the truth to power. Groups such as Public Enemy have built their corporate brand off of this framework. The presidential (mic) check and balancing inherent to hip-hop has come in a variety of forms over the years through rap music, hip-hop's most visible element. While presidential satire has long been a vital part of U.S. popular culture (Jeanson, 1980; Cutbirth, 2002), a strong case can be made that nowhere is vitriol towards the Oval Office expressed as explicitly as it is in hip-hop music. The election of the nation's first black president, however, has presented an interesting quandary for the hip-hop nation. On one hand, hip-hop has an obligation to stand up to power. This obligation is even more vital as mainstream mechanisms such as the Washington media and even the Civil Rights Movement have increasingly been co-opted by corporate forces deeply invested in the status quo. On the other hand, there is also a long standing tradition for hip-hop to mobilize and band together when its members are under attack from outsiders (Light, 1992; Schumacher, 1995; Baldwin, 1999). This article tries to explore the extent that hip-hop artists view Barack Obama as an outsider or an insider. Due in no small part to the amount of animosity that President Obama has been subjected to outside of the black community, many Civil Rights leaders have been reluctant to publicly joust with the Obama Administration in spite of the continued high rate of black unemployment, severe cuts in entitlements and his administration's aggressive escalation of the drug war that has seen over 150,000 more people arrested for marijuana-related crimes than was experienced under the Bush administration (FBI, 2011). Most significantly, Obama's foreign policy has been, at times, in almost complete lock-step with the Bush Administration on several levels. While George W. Bush received a high level of well-earned backlash from the black community for his administration's handling of Hurricane Katrina, much of the critiques lauded his way during his time in office resulted from his introduction of the Bush Doctrine. The long-held credo as it relates

to foreign policy is that domestic disputes end at the nation's borders. Many black public figures, this side of Cornell West (Stuart, 2012; Smiley, 2013; West, 2013), have adopted this motto in regards to President Obama, choosing largely to keep all beefs in the family if you will. This article examines the extent to which hip-hop has followed this pattern.

The question that is at the center of this article is, now that Obama is in the White House, has hip-hop gone soft in its role in popular culture as the 5th estate that challenges White House orthodoxy? To answer this question, I will utilize a qualitative content analysis similar to what has been found in a variety of studies on hip-hop music (Binder, 1993; Henderson, 1996; Armstrong, 2001; McFarland, 2002, 2003; Alim, 2003; Danielson, 2008; Herd, 2008; Kubrin & Weitzer, 2009). The sources for this study will be the songs produced for the studio albums of ten *politically-conscious* artists, who have earned the label of conscious MCs because they have built their artistic reputations off of making music that deals with larger socio-political issues, particularly those that resonate with the black community. Each album released by these ten artists between 2001 and 2013 will be scrutinized in this study. The analysis will include some quantitative components in examining the percentage of songs per album that address presidential politics in some capacity. As President Obama's term is still ongoing, it is expected that there might be a quantitative imbalance in this regard. Of greater interest to this study is a qualitative analysis that scrutinizes precisely what themes are communicated about each president and their policies. There are real-world consequences to not having some voices in the public dialogue in place to keep public officials honest. Hip-hop music is one such medium, as the messages in the music reach far more people than the national media does these days.

Hip-Hop and the Black Public Sphere

The public platforms afforded to media celebrities are significant in creating an atmosphere for grassroots mobilization (Barnhurst, 2003; Nicola, 2010). This makes analyzing the messages disseminated from what Talib Kweli calls "public megaphones" an important step in understanding the larger public discourse. And it should also be clear that while the focus here is politically-conscious artists, most all hip-hop music is political in some form, in spite of Kweli's protests. Light is in agreement saying,

[r]ap by definition has a political content, even when not explicitly issue-oriented, rap is about giving voice to a black community otherwise underrepresented, if not silent, in the

mass media. It has always been and remains (despite the curse of pop potential) directly connected to the streets from which it came. It is still a basic assumption among the hip-hop community that rap speaks to real people in a real language about real things (Light, 1992: 144).

Hip-hop's roots in being the music of the silent and the powerless has made it an important tool where it has become a vital element of the black public sphere (Gilroy, 1993) from its derivation. Rap music not only provided another mass medium for the black community to express its collective angst, but allowed it to be expressed in an unfiltered manner that was unrivaled by what was possible through other media devices previous to hip-hop music (Ogbar, 2007). This is particularly true of underground rap songs like those included in this study. The section of the black public sphere carved out by underground hip-hop is best articulated by Tanya L. Saunders (2012), who writes:

The underground hip-hop movement is a manifestation of what Paul Gilroy (1993) calls an Afro-descendent counterculture of modernity. A product of what Cedric Robinson (2000) has identified as the black radical tradition, this counterculture is a reaction to the profound ideological contradictions of Western modernity, in which egalitarian ideologies coexist with Western colonialism, slavery, material inequality, and racism (Saunders, 2012: 43).

Most wherever it has traveled, hip-hop has been used as a mechanism to challenge western, imperialistic orthodoxy. But what is hip-hop's reaction when there is a black hand steering the machine? Much has been said on how Barack Obama has been treated in America (Walters, 2007; Teasley, 2010; Enck-Wanzer, 2011; Walker, 2011); this study allows some insight into how he has been dealt with inside a significant faction of the black public sphere.

Results

The quantitative analysis of the 636 songs in this study revealed several interesting patterns. 18 percent (115 songs) of all songs produced by the aforementioned conscious rappers between 2001 and 2013 gave attention to presidential politics in some form. The most common artist to go down this road was easily Immortal Technique, who addressed presidential politics in 54 percent of his 50 songs released between 2001-2013. The next two highest artists in the sample were Pharoahe Monch and the Coup. They spoke to presidential politics in 26 and 21 percent of their songs respectively. Lupe Fiasco ranks next with 17 percent of his work addressing the president, followed

by Talib Kweli at 15.4 percent. The charts at the end of this study, however, demonstrate that the percentages should be taken with a grain of salt as KRS sits in the middle of the pack in addressing the presidency just 14 percent of the time. However, his contribution of 146 songs is over 1/5 of the entire sample studied here. Using just the raw numbers, KRS' tally of 21 presidential songs would place him just behind Immortal Technique, though this is less than 15 percent of his total output. The artists who were most hostile towards the Bush Administration were Immortal Technique and Nas, who devoted 13 percent of his tracks between 2001-2009 to the 43rd president. There is not a single reference of an artist speaking favorably of the Bush administration. Conversely, a whopping 25 percent of the presidential songs released since 2009 have framed President Obama positively. This 25 percent (7 songs) was cultivated almost exclusively by four artists: Nas, Pharoahe Monch, Talib Kweli and Common. Lupe Fiasco's positive reference consists of a single bar that does little to outweigh his unadulterated critique of Obama's foreign policy featured in his other singles. Lupe was the most antagonistic towards the Obama administration, even more than Immortal Technique, though some of this is likely due to the dearth of albums released during this period when compared to the contributions to his catalog made during Bush's two terms.

Qualitatively, five major themes emerged when coding for conscious rap's contribution to the public discourse surrounding the presidency. First, some artists provided a general critique of policy, either foreign or domestic. Second, other MC's positioned themselves, hip-hop headz and black people more generally as outsiders in the eyes of the president and his government. In this way, politically conscious MC's envision recorded hip-hop music as a space that functioned to offer an alternative voice to the federal government in a general sense. A third group of rap records featured the technique of using their platform to hold a mirror up to expose presidential hypocrisy. The fourth classification of tracks involved some songs that made direct violent threats towards the president. Far less common, occurring in 1.7 percent of all songs, were those that offered direct support for the president. 100 percent of these were for president Obama, and generally involved supporting him personally less than his policies. Of all the 115 songs in the sample that dealt with the presidency on some level, 20 percent were coded as policy critiques, 7 percent worked to expose presidential hypocrisy, and 4 percent spoke of enacting violence against the president in some capacity. All of the five songs in the latter category were devoted to President Bush, while, as mentioned before, the 11 songs of presidential support came to just under 10 percent of all presidential songs. All of these songs were reserved for

president Obama. The most frequent entryway used by conscious MC's in delving into presidential politics involved using rap music as a medium in which to promote ideologies, behaviors and historical framing of events that stood at odds with the existing presidential narrative. Few of the songs in the sample were devoted entirely to presidential politics.

Of the 115 presidential songs analyzed here, 87 were released during Bush's two terms, compared to 22 during the Obama presidency. Six other songs referenced Obama after he had secured the democratic nomination but at a time when Bush still occupied the White House. For direct comparison purposes, the artists here recorded 52 songs that dealt with the presidency in some form through Bush's first six years in office. The 12 albums released since Obama's inauguration in 2009 until this study's completion in late 2013 produced 157 total songs, 22 of them presidential. This total volume of product ranks well behind the 21 albums and 339 songs released during Bush's first six years. Perhaps this is just a quirk in the release cycle for these particular artists. But quantitatively it is hard to make the case that political antagonism in conscious rap lyrics has not fallen off since Obama took office. There is a saying in politics that angry people vote. In hip-hop, angry people speak out. While the Obama presidency has been defined by public rancor that threatened to rip the nation at its seams before it even began, there seems to be a far different conversation going on in hip-hop in closely examining the data gathered here. What these figures do not tell us, however, is the tone and vigor reflected in hip-hop's contribution to the political discourse. The numbers illustrating levels of support for President Obama do not tell us the degree and nature of the enthusiasm, nor are readers clear on the extent of the hostility towards the Bush Administration and just how deep it runs. The next section takes a deeper qualitative examination of how conscious MC's have dealt with presidential politics.

Critique of Policy

There were several ways that the conscious MC's in this study voiced their displeasure with some aspect of presidential policy. 23 of the 115 (20 percent) songs dealing with presidential politics in this study were placed in this section, the second highest tally in the five groupings outlined earlier. Immortal Technique is the most frequently appearing artist in this section with five references. KRS and Lupe come in next with four songs critiquing presidential policy. President Bush was the sitting president for 17 of the 23 references in this section, compared to six for President Obama. The term

in office seemed to have little impact on the critiques as Bush tallied eight songs devoted to critiquing his policy in the first term, and nine in his second. Each is more than Obama has received through the 2nd half of his second term. The conscious MC's selected for this study provide a nuanced perspective on a range of political issues such as the nation's drug war, illegal immigration and unequal access to health care globally. In each case, hip-hop is positioned not only in opposition to the federal government and its titular head, the president of the United States, but also as a sanctuary for people of color who have largely been casualties of the drug war and draconian immigration policies. Hurricane Katrina was one of the more common sources of appraisal in this study. Mos Def provides an extensive treatment of Katrina on "Dollar Day". Not only does Mos devote the entire song to Bush's (mis)handling of Hurricane Katrina, he demonstrates the necessity of unfiltered platforms like hip-hop music. Mos is far more explicit in his characterization of Bush administration rescue efforts than were the mainstream mediums that eventually joined the chorus in condemning Bush's management of the catastrophe. Mos rhymes, "It's like Dollar Day for New Orleans/It's water water everywhere and homies dead in the streets/And Mr. President's a natural ass/He out treatin niggaz worse than they treat the trash". Not only does Mos place this responsibility directly at the feet of President Bush, he makes clear the racial motivations behind the neglect as well in a manner that is only casually broached by mainstream media and even other hip-hop artists.

On "Welcome to the Terror Dome", Pharohe Monch begins the song by synthesizing three issues - Katrina, the War in Iraq and police brutality - as part of a general pattern of Bush neglect. Before the DJ blends in the beat, listeners are transported to a rally where Pharoahe bellows from a megaphone to a cheering crowd:

In a time when we're spending billions of dollars in a war to control oil in Iraq, 3,000 soldiers have come home in coffins. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians have lost their lives. Our brothers and sisters in New Orleans are left homeless and hungry. They murdered Sean Bell. They murdered Amadou Diallo. They murdered Timothy Stansbury. And it's time to say NO MORE! NO MORE!, NO MORE!, NO MORE!, NO MORE!

Later in the song's final verse, Pharoahe makes the argument that all of these issues tie together as part of an effort by the federal government to create a permanent war culture. The primary policy critique seen on "Terror Dome" is reserved for the War on Terror. However, Monch also argues here that this single policy initiative has produced an atmosphere of panic that creates justification for domestic negligence in other policy areas such as education and the environment. For many in the Hip-Hop Nation,

the War on Terror did not represent an expansion of freedom, but rather it allowed for the kind of under-prioritization of home that allowed the carnage that was created not by the natural disaster of Hurricane Katrina, but rather by the calculated choices of elected officials.

The Bush presidency will be most remembered for the Iraq War. So it is not surprising that it was most common for the politically conscious MC's in this study to use their forum to openly challenge the invasion of Iraq. The Iraq War spanned two administrations, making its assessment by hip-hop particularly noteworthy, because most of the criticism for the conflict was reserved for Bush. Of the nine songs in the study that addressed the Iraq War, seven critiqued the Bush administration. Under Bush, not only is there opposition to the war voiced in politically conscious rap, often the Iraq War is described as a far bigger threat to the security of the hip-hop nation than terrorism. The Coup frames the Bush Doctrine as not only imperiling the axis of evil nations, but the entire world. On "Babylet'sHaveABabyBeforeBushDoSomethingCrazy", they use humor to make the point that the biggest threat to world security is not Osama Bin Laden, but the whimsical decisions of George W. Bush. KRS is a consistent and vocal voice opposing the war in Iraq, expressing dissent across three albums and two terms in 2002, 2004 and 2008. On "Tears", he says:

Yeah, I'll be there at the door
not at the war
At Matthew 5:44
"But I say, unto you Love your enemies, bless them that curse you
Do good to them that hate you
And pray for them which despitefully
Use you
and persecute you"
This goes for them terrorists too
But them 'publicans done put themselves up above again
Lookin' for blood again, hate no love again
Got them soldiers runnin' in, with a gun again
With a ton of sin, in a holy war, how we gonna win?
I think it's time for KRS-One again.

The last line in the bar is suggestive in that KRS is cognizant of the fact that his voice is an alternative one that is needed in the public discourse surrounding the war. Additionally, KRS's reference to the soldiers is not happenstance as he makes deliberate efforts to distinguish his disdain for policy from his support for the troops on the ground doing the fighting. There is much to digest in KRS's take on the Iraq

War on “Tears”. Once again, he makes a point to draw sharp lines between the policy makers and those on the front lines executing the policy. His line early in the rap where he says, “while we chillin in that Escalade, they dodgin rocket propelled grenades”, even paints a vivid picture of how few Americans are being asked to sacrifice their own security for the war effort. KRS makes clear, however, that these efforts are not making anyone safer. In fact, KRS indicts President Bush on the song for using the resources for war to undermine Americans’ economic security. Some families lost much more than their homes, however, and this is not lost on KRS who later in the track demands that the president directly gives some answers. The song is also notable because it concludes with KRS questioning the very legitimacy of President Bush by evoking memories of Supreme Court rulings on hanging chads at a time when the media, and even the Democratic Party establishment, had long swept such matters under the rug.

Most of the critical analysis of the War on Terror is aimed squarely at President Bush. But, as noted previously, there is a case to be made that President Obama has doubled-down on these policies. Toure writes pointedly of the similarities between Obama’s record and his predecessor’s, both foreign and domestic:

[h]e’s bailed out banks instead of prosecuting bankers, and extended the Bush tax cuts, and in the 2011 debt ceiling talks, offered to make deep cuts to entitlements, especially Medicare. Obama’s foreign policy has also often been decidedly conservative: he supported a surge in Afghanistan, escalated drone attacks which have resulted in considerable collateral damage, and ordered the extrajudicial killings of Americans who were at war with America. These are all decisions that would have the left howling if made by President Bush (Toure, 2012).

“Ital/Roses” by Lupe Fiasco is one of the few songs that takes President Obama on directly in this regard where Fiasco rhymes:

Called the President a terrorist
Corporate sponsors like, how the fuck you gon' embarrass us?
Ain't my fault, I was just repeatin this
Professor emeritus
from America
But my tone
was like an Afghani kid without a home
Blew that bitch up with a drone
An Iraqi with no daddy, Palestinian throwing stones
The fuck you think they call him, I'mma leave that all alone

Lupe Fiasco also makes similar efforts to make explicit for listeners the connections between domestic and foreign policy in the United States, and how this impacts poor people of color all across the world. He skillfully uses “Around My Way” to connect the global to the local. The song includes several uncompromising critiques at both the Obama and Bush Administrations. Here, he links the respect for life shown by the federal government in the aftermath of Katrina with the respect for life demonstrated through the use of aggressive American foreign policy, saying:

Crucifixes, racism and a land grab
Katrina, FEMA trailers, human body sandbags
A peace sign and a pants sag
A money toss cause a 9 stripper mad dash
A friend request following a hash tag
Now everybody want it like the last laugh
A Michael Jackson jacket or a daft mask
Purple Jordans or the mixed girl in your math class
Stable is when the Ba’ath had Baghdad
But corporate jets really had to have that gas bad
War and they hope they all fall from the ratatat
Cause that’s just more dinosaur for the Cadillac.

“Around My Way” is not the only time Lupe aims to kill two presidential birds with one stone of a verse. Lupe also provides a presidential assault on two fronts on the song “Words I Never Said”, where he rhymes:

I really think the war on terror is a bunch of bullshit
Just a poor excuse for you to use up all your bullets
How much money does it take to really make a full clip
9/11 building 7, did they really pull it?
Uhh, and a bunch of other cover ups
Your child’s future was the first to go with budget cuts
If you think that hurts then, wait here comes the uppercut
The school was garbage in the first place, that’s on the up and up
Keep you at the bottom but tease you with the uppercrust
You get it then they move it so you never keeping up enough
If you turn on TV all you see’s a bunch of “what the fucks”
Dude is dating so and so blabbering bout such and such
And that ain’t Jersey Shore, homie that’s the news
And these the same people that supposed to be telling us the truth
Limbaugh is a racist, Glenn Beck is a racist
Gaza strip was getting bombed, Obama didn’t say shit
That’s why I ain’t vote for him, next one either
I’m a part of the problem, my problem is I’m peaceful
And I believe in the people

Talib Kweli does not speak out against Barack specifically on 2007's "More or Less", but he does seem to show antipathy towards knee-jerk support of Obama during the early stages of his historic campaign when he rhymes, "More accountability for politicians before we shoutin let's vote!" Overall, however, there is not nearly the level of hostility directed towards President Obama, nor even hip-hop's tried and true cynicism that Kweli displayed for candidate Obama. In spite of the fact that President Obama carried on some of the very same policies that President Bush repeatedly came under fire for here from conscious rappers, he has paid little political price for this on wax.

Presidential Hypocrisy

Another artistic device utilized by politically conscious rappers was the practice of using their microphones to shine light on perceived hypocrisy either in the lifestyle or policy produced by either president. This was often pulled off in the form of satire. This was used in eight of the 115 presidential songs, just 6.9 percent of the presidential songs and 1.3 percent of all songs. Immortal Technique, the most political of politically conscious rappers, provides most of the qualitative data for this section. He provides five of the eight songs analyzed here, with KRS-1 contributing the other three. All of these songs fell under the terms of George W. Bush. Immortal uses this technique to great effect on "Obnoxious", where he points out the public disconnect between the actions and rhetoric of the war mongering president, saying, "If I said it I meant it, that's the way I deal with enemies/Like pro lifers, that support the death penalty/And don't talk about war, when niggas know that your pus/A fucking hypocrite draft dodger like George Bush". Some of the assessments in this section attack the priorities of the president as it relates to appropriation of funds such as when KRS said on "Surviving" from his *Krystyles* album, "And so I gotta keep survivin, is the song that I keep singin/I try to keep my head off the floor/the country's goin to war/while Bush is givin dough to NASA and ain't feedin the poor".

As to be expected, President Bush's handling of the Iraq War is at the center of a lot of this exposure of hypocrisy. A key aspect of the Iraq War that was consistently omitted from the larger public discourse was the role that the United States government played in actually empowering their new found rivals. Immortal Technique makes this historical context explicit when he says of the eight-year conflict, "They bombed innocent people, tryin' to murder Saddam/When you gave him those chemical weapons to go to war with Iran/This is the information that they hold back

from Peter Jennings/Cause Condoleezza Rice is just a new age Sally Hemmings". Technique is clear here that mainstream gatekeepers such as the late Peter Jennings of ABC News are not fully informing the public, and that this mission is left instead to the 5th estate of conscious hip-hop. In addition to documenting America's decades-old links to Saddam Hussein, the bar is also notable because it goes beyond condemning President Bush. Technique also takes aim at cabinet members like former National Security Adviser and Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who he views as a traitor to the black race in the tradition of Sally Hemings, Thomas Jefferson's former slave-turned lover. Later in this study, Nas will also take a verbal swipe at Secretary Rice as she is seen as being instrumental in promoting the Bush Doctrine. Other Bush cabinet members such as Donald Rumsfeld and John Ashcroft come under attack in this sample as well. It is telling that none of Obama's cabinet members found themselves in the crosshairs of conscious hip-hop's considerable lyrical scope.

Returning to the overarching focus of this section, several rappers not only say that the unilateral manner in which the War on Terror was executed provides a poor model for future democratic nations, but argue that America has consistently played both sides of conflicts throughout the Middle East. Immortal Technique makes this point again on "Industrial Revolution", where he rhymes, "I want fifty three million dollars for my caller stands/like the Bush administration gave to the Taliban." The Bush Administration labeled the mission in the Gulf as Iraqi Freedom and made the case that in addition to protecting American citizens from chemical warfare, the mission would also bring democratic rule to the Iraqi nation that had been previously run by a despot. However, the hip-hop nation largely rejects this characterization of events. For example, on "The 4th Branch's" second verse, a song off of Immortal Technique's 2003 *Revolutionary Vol. 2* album, he brings federal policy makers to task for their arbitrary application of democratic principles. Rather than join along with the blind patriotism that swept up much of the nation post 9/11, Technique frames the War on Terror as targeting subversives, both foreign and domestic. The enemy that he identifies here is not Al Qaeda or the Taliban. While many Americans were monitoring the color-coded charts produced by government to gauge the threat to their security that was being posed by constantly plotting terrorists lurking in the shadows, for Technique the threat is the U.S. government that operates in the light of day. The song speaks to America's false promises of security while undermining its citizens constitutionally protected civil liberties. It speaks to America's convenient application of democratic principles in conflicts abroad historically. And it lambasts American corporations who have been empowered by government to profit from the carnage on

both sides of the War on Terror. On “The Cause of Death”, Immortal Technique diagnoses the entire 9/11 event and the aftermath as a study in government hypocrisy. One would be hard pressed to find such a blistering assessment of the events surrounding 9/11 and America’s subsequent response in any public platform. What would likely jump out at most observers initially is the song’s core thesis, that the deaths on 9/11 were caused by the American government itself. Technique is far from the first to float the theory that 9/11 was an inside job, but he supports his claim with independent arguments that have even received some limited traction in mainstream assessments of 9/11. According to the highly respected BBC, for example, the historical ties between the CIA and Osama Bin Laden that Technique speaks to in the song’s first verse are without dispute (BBC, 2004). These links have been fervently denied by U.S. government officials. Technique stands on the other side of the debate and contends that the U.S. response post-9/11 was hypocritical because “George Bush and Bin Laden (are) two separate parts of the same seven headed dragon”. The song leaves virtually no member of Bush’s inner circle unscathed, and even argues that Bush is merely a puppet, referring to the administration’s foreign policy not as the Bush, but rather the “Wolfowitz Doctrine” in honor of 43’s former Deputy Secretary of Defense. In the end, Technique encourages listeners to seek their own truth, encouraging his fans to “read it yourself” rather than accept his framing of events or the president’s. Perhaps history may have been written differently as it related to the War on Terror, and other presidential policies, if these types of perspectives were scattered more widely through the population.

Hip-Hop as an Alternative Political Space

The most common literary tool used by MC’s in dealing with presidential politics did not involve any policy critique, nor exposing presidential hypocrisy. Most frequently, MC’s attempted to set hip-hop up as a space in which to craft alternative narratives from those disseminated by power elites in politics and media. Much of this involved the contesting of conventional wisdoms as it related to official government positions on issues such as the War on Terror and the War on Drugs. But this group of songs also featured many rappers imagining the Hip-Hop Nation as a wholly separate entity from the U.S government, to the point of sometimes even aligning themselves with America’s announced enemies. Frequently, hip-hop MC’s have felt that the best way to show their opposition to presidential politics is in their active choice not to participate at all. Immortal Technique embodies this sentiment on “No Mercy” when he says,

“competition is worthless like the electoral vote”. This view in hip-hop is not unique to the 21st century, but has a long tradition in the culture because it is believed that presidents do not represent people like those who are at the foundation of hip-hop. Mos Def positions himself amongst the larger body of working class and impoverished minorities in much of his catalog. On “Murder of a Teenage Life,” released in 2006, Mos makes clear the boundaries that exist between the president and the communities that Mos Def represents, saying, “I am from the block the president did not campaign on”.

Hip-hop imagined itself in opposition to the federal government, in this study, most commonly under President Bush. However, there was no shortage of artists who continued this on into the Obama Administration as well. On “Reach Out” Nas still describes himself as being an outsider to people like the current president. He rhymes here:

Can see myself in Presidential campaign dinners
But I'm passing blunts around a bunch of gang members
When you're too hood to be in them Hollywood circles
And you're too rich to be in that hood that birthed you

One of the ways that President Obama has distinguished himself from his predecessor is in the aggressive manner in which he pursued “targeted killings” of American citizens who were viewed as threats to national security. The most notable cases involved two separate unmanned drone attacks on Anwar al-Awlaki and his 16-year-old son in Yemen. Many liberals have given Obama a pass for this constitutional overreach in a manner that would be hard to envision under President Bush. Talib Kweli provides no concessions, however, on “Upper Echelon”. Kweli aligns himself with those who have been the target of Obama’s foreign policy when he says, “I'm on a higher plane/I'm destroying em' while I build them/My threat can't be contained/so my name on Obama kill list”. In this way, Kweli makes the case that the haphazard racial profiling demonstrated during the War on Terror, which makes anyone with an Arabic-sounding name a threat, has carried on into the administration of the first black president with an Arabic-sounding name. Like many Americans, there are moments - as we’ll see later - where the election of the first black president is celebrated within hip-hop and the black community writ large. But one of the benefits of this study, and this section of the research in particular, is it shows the ways that conscious hip-hop artists have challenged the general narratives surrounding Obama’s presidency. One of the more common themes to emerge since 2009 was that Obama’s

election ushered in an era of post-racialism. On “It Only Gets Better”, Kweil is firm in his stance that the election of President Obama has hardly ushered in a post-racial America when he says: “We love that color 25% more like we like to face prison/But just because the president was black there's no racism?/Postracial?/More like most racial/The hate for you disgraceful/Don't let them take you off your base, let them motivate you/Don't let it overtake you”. Immortal Technique reinforces this point on “Third World”, where he suggests that not only does Obama’s pending election fail to deliver on post-racial America, but it is not going to end the class warfare that many MC’s have spoken out on either, rhyming in 2008:

I'm from where people pray to the gods of their conquerors
and practically every president's a money launderer
From the only place democracy is acceptable
Is if America candidate is electable
And they might even have a black president, but he's useless
'Cause he does not control the economy stupid!

Mos Def argues that not only will Obama’s election not usher in a color-blind post-racism, but will not change much of anything at all. While some of Obama’s most ardent critics, such as Lupe Fiasco, give some small nods of acknowledgement to the history made with his election, Mos is not among those who sing his praises. Mos reinforces this on “Twilite Speedball” when he rhymes, “But guess what? To hell with parade day rain/tsunami or sunshine/Obama just the same/Life is a game.” And though Pharohe Monch offers the strongest possible support of President Obama on other portions of *W.A.R* as will be discussed later, he is in league with Mos in arguing that his election does not represent the transformative event that some have suggested, rapping on “The Grand Illusion”, “Put away your hope, same political policies/Two-thousand and ten, only minus the space odyssey”. Later we will see that Chicago-based MC Common is one of the most vocal supporters of President Obama but he uses his microphone to challenge the official orthodoxy of the Iraq War in a manner that was few and far between during the Bush presidency. Common’s simple bar on the title track from 2005’s *Be* of “Bush pushing lies, killers immortalized/We got arms but won't reach for the skies” shows the importance of hip-hop serving as a platform that openly challenges mainstream institutions’ interpretation of events. Oakland rapper Boots Riley provides one such interpretation on “Head” from their *Pick a Bigger Weapon* album released in 2006. The song provides a description of events that can scantily be found outside of outlets like conscious hip-hop. It is one of the few songs in

this sample that is entirely devoted to presidential politics, so it is quoted here at length.

(Chorus)

Bush and Hussein together in bed
Giving H-E-A-D head
Y'all motherfuckers heard what we said
Billions made and millions dead

In a land not very far away from here
George W. Bush was drinkin beer
His daddy was head of the CIA
Now listen up close to what I say
The CIA worked for Standard Oil
And other companies to whom they're loyal
In a whole 'nother land by the name of Iran
The people got wise and took a stand
to the oil companies, ay ain't shit funny?
This is our oil, our land, our money
CIA got mad and sent false info
to Iraq to help start the Iran/Iraq wo'
Pronounced war if I have to be proper
The CIA is the cops that's why I hate the coppers
Saddam Hussein was their man out there
They told him to rule while keepin people scared
Sayin any opposition to him, he must crush it
He gassed the Kurds, they gave him his budget
Said you gotta kick ass to protect our cash
Step out of line and feel our wrath
You know the time without lookin at the little hand
Time came for them to cut out the middle man
Children maimed with no legs and shit
Cause the "Bombs Over.." you know the OutKast hit
And they really want you to hate him dead
When just the other day they made him head
War ain't about one land against the next
It's po' people dyin so the rich cash checks

Such accounting of events is especially crucial because, as Nas documents on “Sly Fox”, many of Bush’s policies had a ready-made platform. Nas rhymes of this link between Fox and Bush on the song’s first verse, saying, “Reception/deception/Comcast digital Satan/The Fox has a bushy tale/And Bush tells lies and foxtrots/So, I don't know what's real”. “Sly Fox” is categorized here as a song that offers an alternative frame to presidential narratives largely because the song is centered around challenging a news agency that Nas argues helps to shape and promote this presidential narrative.

However, the song also has elements of highlighting presidential hypocrisy. Later on the song Nas rhymes, “They say I’m all about murder murder and kill kill/But what about Grindhouse and *Kill Bill*?/What about Cheney and Halliburton? The back door deals on oil fields”. And Nas ends the song with a nod of support towards the soon-to-be president, Barack Obama. Fox has been most aggressive in assailing the character and motives of Bush’s successor, but Nas suggests that the real motive behind the abuse endured by the president and many hip-hop headz is one and the same: a disdain for black people and their culture. After implicating Bush and Fox for the maintenance of the racial and social class status quo, Nas imagines Obama to be standing with the marginalized when he rhymes, “Don’t let the hype into your eyes and ear drum/Murder our own fox/Not A-Team with Baracus/And he hates Barack because he march with the marches”. In stark contrast to his unofficial endorsement of candidate Obama cited here, Nas saw little relief on either side of the aisle during 2004 campaign’s season. On “American Way” from the *Streets Disciple* album, he rhymed, “Vote fo who/now? You’re red, white and blue?/I’m American too/but I ain’t with the president’s crew/What you peddlin’ and who you peddlin’ to?/You ain’t got the ghetto with you.” Not only does Nas go hard after Bush’s cabinet member, Conde Rice, on “American Way”, but he puts both he and the community that he claims to speak for squarely in opposition to the entire political establishment.

Overall, to this point, however, conscious rap has not been a space in which to seek out similar cutting edge critiques of president Obama and his policies. Of the 68 total songs coded as presidential alternative, just 22 fell under Obama’s term. Outside of presidential critiques of Bush or Obama, where this alternative model was strongest was in imagining hip-hop as an entity that was separate from presidential politics and policy altogether. For example, KRS on “The Solution” suggests that the solution for the hip-hop generation to enjoy the full pursuit of happiness which has eluded them in the United States is to literally form its own independent government institutions. Conscious rappers see themselves as voices that are needed to check the media that has failed to check the politicians. It should be noted once again, however, that conscious rappers have shown sophistication in their critiques to make a sharp distinction between the policy makers of the War on Terror and those who have been employed to carry it out. On “Just a Moment”, Nas (a fierce and consistent critic of the Bush Doctrine in this research study) says, for example, “For soldiers and troops away with helmets and boots/And families back home who pray they make it home safe/Hopin’ that they don’t get hit with a stray or missiles/This is just a moment to let

you all know that we miss you/Mommy, I'm still here, wishin' I was there with you".
Pharoahe Monch follows suit on "Agent Orange" where he raps:

Its not a Vietnam song
I know women from desert storm who came back deformed
Missin limbs and disease and they legs is numb
Chemicals twice as strong as agent orange
Its messages in the bass drum
War goin off in your mind, No man is safe from
Its not a Game Boy, X-Box or PlayStation
It's Resident Evil when every president's a mason
Robbin y'all fools like Dick Grayson.

The two sets of verses are also notable in that they put a woman's face on the war, which is rarely the case in mainstream coverage of the conflict that usually highlights the male sacrifice while nervous women wait back home on the mainland. This is particularly noteworthy coming from a hip-hop space which has most often been condemned for its disproportionate misogyny. On "Mistakes", Immortal Technique makes clear that he stands in allegiance with his working class peers on whose backs the war was largely fought.

Presidential Violence

On occasion, MC's have done more than just spoken out in opposition to presidential policies. There were a handful of instances where rappers promoted violence against a sitting president. Immortal Technique says of President Bush on "The Illest", "willing to smoke/the president, while he's sniffing his coke, you know it don't mean shit to me". It would be a mistake to suggest that this is just random, mindless violence as is the common characterization of rap music. Later on "Payback", Technique provides a detailed explanation of what is at the root of his hostility saying:

When Afghanistan was fighting the Russians
Reagan and Bush gave Bin Laden weapons and told him get to bussin
We even called 'em freedom fighters
Financed the cost with CIA-imported cocaine
That whole Iran Contra scandal, niggas took the blame...
Take over, set up a public government, Arabs ain't hearing it
So the same freedom fighters, George W. call 'em terrorists
Poetic justice, payback's a bitch, these fuckin hypocrites.

On “Payback’s” final verse, Immortal implores Bush to take matters into his own hands and kill himself for the sake of the union. Immortal Technique is not isolated in offering this type of assignation fantasy. Nas updates this motif on “What Goes Around”, where he concludes the song by proudly rapping, “Don't hesitate to say you heard it from Nas, what is destined shall be/George Bush killer till George Bush kills me”. KRS uses a clever play with words involving lawn maintenance to get a similar point across where he explicitly speaks for the hip-hop nation on “Don’t Give up” when KRS rhymes, “Cause I don't give a fuck, I'ma get a bigger truck/Drive to the White House lawn, and light the Bushes up/It's hip-hop, now follow us man/If we sell out, you give up, you diggin me fam”. These visions seem to be inspired by the fact that many in the hip-hop nation feel powerless to change the circumstances around them, so instead they try and find agency by taking out the person with the most powerful title in the union. Dead Prez expressed this transformation from powerless to powerful on “W-4” from their *Revolutionary But Gangsta* album released in 2004. The song, as the title suggests, plays upon the common frustration over paying taxes into a system that gives little back to poor black and brown people. Dead Prez takes a first-person account and describes the pressure that mounts when people feel they have few options left but to resort to violence in an effort to take the power back, “I been working all my life but ain't got nothin' to show/I ain't tellin' you nothing you don't already know/I been working all my life but ain't got nothin' to show/Wanna run up in tha White House and kick in tha do' ohhhhh”. It is notable, in Immortal Technique’s rhyme from 2008’s *Third World* in particular, that there is no equivalent level of venom towards the president elect of the time, Barack Obama. On “Payback”, Technique goes out of his way to communicate his rage towards “the outgoing president” in 2008. While there is certainly attention given to Obama’s policies, not once is there even a subtle suggestion of violence towards the president, which would certainly make Barack Hussein Obama the first president to escape the crosshairs of the hip-hop nation. To interpret this as outright support might be presumptuous, however; as the next section shows, there are also very few instances of explicit support for the president.

Presidential Support

Through hip-hop’s first 30 years, one will be hard-pressed to find any positive homage to presidents. On the other hand, Barack Obama actually had rappers campaign and raise money for him. Yet his policies have delivered little for this constituency so far.

While the vast majority of songs that dealt with presidential politics and policy on some level worked from an adversarial position, there were a few hip-hop artists on record who actually framed the president in a favorable light. For example, Talib Kweli constructs the Obamas as worthy role models on “Come Here” saying, “we can do it like Common and Mary and come closer/We can do it like Barack and Michelle, give me a fist bump”. Nas also presents the Oval Office as something that is now de-stigmatized for his audience on the song “Cherry Wine”, where he raps that his dream girl is, “maybe an educator, a lady with etiquette/who can be from out the hood or even work for the president”. It is interesting to contrast this with Nas’ earlier position on 2004’s “American Way”, where he labeled Condoleezza Rice “a house nigga” for having the gall to work for President Bush. The fact that Nas, in 2012, now sees working for the president not only as something that he would be amenable to, but actually as something to aspire to, is noteworthy indeed. Always deeply introspective, however, Nas gives some insight into his changing position on “Black President” released in 2008 from *The Nigger* album. On “Black President”, Nas deals with the history of skepticism towards the Oval Office as he considers his views on Barack Obama. Nas walks listeners through a history of the relationship that black Americans have had with the Oval Office over the past 200 years. Nasty Nas leaves listeners with a lot to absorb in the song’s three verses. Nas begins by describing the feelings of neglect that many blacks experience in America’s ghettos as he paints mental pictures of the substandard housing conditions and police brutality that many are subjected to. “Black President’s” first verse concludes with a notion that deviates sharply from the messages that have been derived from hip-hop through the years, the belief that “a president is needed” to help solve the problem. Before Barack Obama, Nas and others saw presidents as helping to create the problems of the inner city, not solve them. The second verse gives some insight into this shift as Nas rhymes from the perspective of president-elect Obama who wonders about his safety. Here, Nas walks us through a presidential history in demonstrating how groundbreaking Obama’s election is and how many whites are not emotionally prepared for this paradigm shift in presidential politics. Later in the verse, Nas makes a particularly strong statement by proclaiming his readiness to bear arms to keep the black president and his family safe. This should not suggest that all of Nas’ political cynicism has evaporated, and he makes this clear by concluding the verse by questioning whether or not Obama would still stay real after he took office. In spite of this cynicism, Nas uses the third verse of the song to give a larger social context that justifies guarded support of President Obama. He lambasts both the nations’ governors and Obama’s opponent, John McCain, for being

out of touch with people like him and the issues that affect his community. The last verse also illuminates that Nas' support of Obama is not coming from a place of knee jerk racial mobilization. He pokes fun at controversial black religious leader, Jeremiah Wright, who nearly threw Obama's campaign off the rails when his controversial post 9/11 sermon gained mainstream media traction. And Nas calls himself a "Jesse Carjacker", shortly after the barb at Wright, demonstrating that not all black presidential candidates have received the hip-hop endorsement which would make pointing to Obama's race exclusively as a rationale for support spurious at best.

During the candidacies of Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, many artists wore the fact that they disengaged from the political process as a badge of honor. However, on "Black Hand Side" Styles P uses his bars on a Pharoahe Monch cameo to say, "you don't overstand if your vision ain't abstract/Me and the projects, a lot of us is lab rats/Voted for Obama, hoping he wouldn't have that". Obama again is imagined here as someone who can relate to the struggle of the hip-hop generation in a way that other black political and civic leaders have not. On "Evolve" Pharoahe Monch, who earlier in this study said that you could put away hope because there were going to be the same old policies, makes a statement of ultimate sacrifice. In the song's first verse he says, "Take the bullet for Barack on the balcony and vanish/Extinguish the sun when I drool, play pool with the planets". These odes of support are fleeting to be sure, but in their sparsity have been reserved exclusively for Barack Obama.

Common is the most vocal supporter of President Obama included in this study. Common pays his respects to the sitting president on "Changes" when he puts him on a pedestal with other revered icons, both global and hip-hop alike. Before Obama's election, during the 2008 campaign season, Common released "The People" where he said, "From Englewood to a single hood in Botswana/I see the I in We my nigga, yours is my drama/Standin in front of the judge with no honor/My raps ignite the people like Obama". On one of hip-hop's seminal records, 1992's "No Vaseline", Ice Cube discredits gangster rapper Eazy E's street cred by mocking him for sitting down with President George Herbert Walker Bush. Though, to be fair, Eazy went to the Bush fundraiser that he was accidentally invited to more as a sign of ironic mockery; the larger point was that to be supportive of the president was almost the most un-hip hop, un-street thing that someone could do (Ogbar, 2007). All indications above suggest that this still held true during the terms of the younger Bush's presidency. Yet, on "Blue Sky" Common can feel comfortable rhyming, "international heroes/at world premos/Red carpet/Imagine taking pictures with the president/Told him for health care, my music is the medicine". Of course, it can be argued that no rapper short of Jay

Z has enjoyed a more cozy relationship with the current president than the artist formerly known as Sense, particularly in light of the controversy that ensued over Common's White House visit. Not only did Common participate in inauguration activities, he and the president also share home residences. So when Common uses Obama as a metaphor as he does on "Sweet", saying "My name synonymous/with prominence/I'm to hip hop what Obama is/to politics, Common is," listeners cannot be totally caught off-guard. What is more surprising is outspoken critic of both the Bush and Obama presidencies, Lupe Fiasco, acknowledging that Obama's ascension to the White House does have symbolic value for the black underclass in America. His song "Hood Now", from *Food and Liquor II*, describes all of the ways that the black underclass has transformed mainstream America; from wearing sagging jeans while sitting in Ivy League classes, to rap group Three-Six Mafia winning an Oscar. In spite of his unfiltered critiques of Obama and his policy, Fiasco still puts his journey to the White House in league with these other hood achievements when he rhymes, "and you know me, I don't vote/But the White House, you already know/It's hood now, it's hood now/Yes sir, it's hood now". Verses like these show that there is at least a faction of support for President Obama that was found lacking for previous presidents. However, there are still only a few instances of explicit support. Several artists such as KRS-1, Immortal Technique, Dead Prez, the Coup and Mos Def withhold their support altogether. Those who do fall in this category seem to communicate their support for Obama more out of a love and pride for black people than the president and his policies. Even in songs like "Black President", there is some skepticism expressed. Finally, it should be noted that much of the support found here occurred in 2008 or prior when Obama was still a candidate. Few MC's have spoken up in this manner since Obama took office in 2009.

Conclusion

The qualitative and quantitative data above makes it hard to make the case that hip-hop has not gone soft on President Obama in comparison to previous presidents, specifically President George W. Bush. Though there is not an overwhelming outpouring of support for Obama by any means, he is the first president on record to curry any favor at all on wax. At the very least, the fact that MC's with diverse and critical core audiences such as Nas, Common and Pharoahe Monch feel comfortable in expressing support, without fear from appraisal from either fans or other MC's, is significant. Also, there are few presidents who have not found themselves immersed in

some sort of violent fatalistic fantasy at the pistol hand of some MC. Yet, President Obama, his family and his cabinet are spared this in a manner that George W. Bush was not. There are several points of intersection in regards to each president's foreign policy, yet Obama is not criticized as often, nor with the level of hostility that Bush is. The section denoting songs that represent an alternative to federal government shows the greatest balance of critiques between Obama and Bush. Of the 68 songs in this section, a quarter (17) of the songs was recorded during Obama's time in office. This section does show that the hip-hop nation has not totally bought into Obama's America. Clearly, they have not been as antagonistic towards Obama as they have towards past presidents, but to identify the hip-hop nation as a space for presidential support would be a gross overstatement of their position. Yet we have seen under President Bush what happens when policies are not subjected to intense public debate. Hip-hop has usurped its responsibility in this regard with potential dangerous consequences domestically and abroad.

Other observations from this study include the fact that hip-hop is not a space where specific policy will be addressed often. It is time for hip-hop MC's to address policy in more sophisticated ways than would have been expected previously when the culture was still trying to find its footing through its awkward adolescent and teenage years. The explicit efforts that President Obama made (and continues to make) to gain appeal with the hip-hop generation, whether it be attending fundraisers organized by Jay Z or using rap music to help sell Obamacare to the public (Darcy, 2013), demonstrates that hip-hop has some degree of influence in today's society. In order to leverage its power and influence going forward, they will need to more formally address the specific policies that impact them more directly than was demonstrated in this particular study. While this article leaves some questions unanswered that other scholars can build on going forward, there is much that can be taken away from the findings here. First, it shows that a sizable swath of the hip-hop nation is intensely engaged with the political process. This is likely to result in future presidents and local politicians following President Obama's lead in taking seriously the concerns of this demographic. Related to this, the findings here poke serious holes in the arguments raised by some that modern hip-hop is defined exclusively by materialism, misogyny and violence. Perhaps this is disproportionately found in mainstream, more radio-friendly rap, and to be sure those topics were not excluded from the music of the conscious MC's presented here by any means. But this data suggests that the discussion needs to be broadened beyond these foci if one wants to get a more accurate read on the zeitgeist in modern hip-hop. The data unearthed here also provides insight

into the larger black public sphere beyond hip-hop music, as it highlights the issues that are of concern to the black community and the role that it is believed that Barack Obama should play in solving them. There has been a sense that Obama has largely been given a pass for his presidential shortcomings within the black public sphere in a manner that would be hard to fathom for other politicians, even those who are allies of the black community. The findings here give some concrete data to this general discussion.

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Appendix

Table 1 - Coding for Sampled Politically Conscious MCs' Studio Albums: 2001-2013

Artist	Album	Year	President	Total Songs	Pres. Songs	Policy Critique	Presidential Hypocrisy	Presidential Alternative	Presidential Violence	Presidential Support
Immortal Technique	Revolutionary Vol 1.	2001	Bush	16	7 (43.8%)	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	3 (18.8%)	1 (6.3%)	X
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	2003	Bush	18	11 (61%)	2 (11%)	4 (22%)	5 (28%)	X	X
	Third World	2008	Bush	16	9 (56.3%)	1 (6.3%)	X	7 (43.8%)	1 (6.3%)	X
	3 Albums			50	27 (54%)	5 (10%)	5 (10%)	15 (30%)	2 (4%)	0
Dead Prez	Revolutionary But Gangsta	2004	Bush	12	1 (8.3%)	0	X	X	1 (8.3%)	X
	Information Age	2012	Obama	12	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	X	1 (8.3%)	X	X
	2 Albums			24	3 (12.5%)	1 (4.2%)	0	1 (4.2%)	1 (4.2%)	0
Common	Electric Circus	2002	Bush	13	1 (7.7%)	0	X	1 (7.7%)	X	X
	Be	2005	Bush	11	1 (9.1%)	0	X	1 (9.1)	X	X
	Finding Forever	2007	Bush	12	1 (8.3%)	0	X	X	X	1 (8.3%)
	Universal Mind Control	2008	Bush	10	1 (10%)	0	X	X	X	1 (10%)
	The Dreamer, The Believer	2011	Obama	12	2 (16.7%)	0	X	X	X	2 (16.7%)
	5 Albums			58	6 (10.3%)	0	0	2 (3.4%)	0	4 (6.9%)
Lupe Fiasco	Food & Liquor	2006	Bush	16	2 (12.5%)	0	X	2 (12.5%)	X	X
	The Cool	2007	Bush	19	4 (21.1%)	1 (5.3%)	X	3 (15.8%)	X	X
	Lasers	2011	Obama	12	2 (16.7%)	1 (8.3%)	X	1 (8.3%)	X	X
	Food & Liquor 2	2012	Obama	16	4 (25%)	2 (12.5%)	X	1 (6.3%)	X	1 (6.3%)

	4 Albums			63	12 (19%)	4 (6.4%)	0	7 (11%)	0	1 (1.6%)
KRS-1	Sneak Attack	2001	Bush	19	3 (15.8%)	X	1 (5.3%)	2 (10.5%)	X	X
	Spiritual Minded	2002	Bush	20	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	X	X	X	X
	Krystyles	2003	Bush	17	3 (17.6%)	X	1 (5.9%)	2 (11.8%)	X	X
	Keep Right	2004	Bush	23	3 (13%)	1 (4.3%)	X	2 (8.7%)	X	X
	Life	2006	Bush	14	3 (29%)	1 (14.3%)	X	2 (14.3%)	X	X
	Adventures in MC'ing	2008	Bush	21	4 (19%)	1 (4.8%)	X	2 (9.5%)	1 (4.8%)	X
	Maximum Strength	2008	Bush	12	2 (16.7%)	X	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	X	X
	Back to the L.A.B.	2010	Obama	6	1 (16.7%)	X	X	1 (16.7%)	X	X
	The BDP Album	2012	Obama	14	1 (7.1%)	X	X	1 (7.1%)	X	X
	9 Albums			146	21 (14.4%)	4 (2.7%)	3 (2.1%)	13 (8.9%)	1 (0.1%)	0
Talib Kweli	Eardrum	2007	Bush	21	3 (14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	X	X	X	1 (4.8%) *offered support for Candidate Obama
	Quality	2002	Bush	15	1 (6.7%)	X	X	1 (6.7%)	X	X
	Beautiful Struggle	2004	Bush	13	2 (15.4%)	1 (7.7%)	X	1 (7.7%)	X	X
	Gutter Rainbow	2011	Obama	14	2 (14.3%)	0	X	2 (14.3%)	X	X
	Prisoners of Conscious	2013	Obama	15	4 (26.7%)	0	X	3 (20%)	X	1 (6.7%)
	5 Albums			78	12 (15.4%)	3 (3.8%)	0	7 (9%)	0	2 (2.6%)
The Coup	Party Music	2001	Bush	12	2 (16.7%)	X	X	2 (16.7%)	X	X
	Pick A Bigger Weapon	2006	Bush	17	5 (29.4%)	1 (5.9%)	X	4 (23.5%)	X	X
	Sorry to Bother You	2012	Obama	13	2 (15.4%)	1 (7.7%)	X	1 (7.7%)	X	X
	3 Albums			42	9 (21.4%)	2 (4.8%)	0	7 (16.7%)	0	0
Mos Def	The New Danger	2004	Bush	19	1 (5.3%)	X	X	1 (5.3%)	X	X

	True Magic	2006	Bush	14	2 (14.3%)	1 (7.1%)	X	1 (7.1%)	X	X
	The Estatic	2009	Obama	16	2 (12.5%)	1 (6.3%)	X	1 (6.3%)	X	X
	3 Albums			49	5 (10.2%)	2 (4.1%)	0	3 (6.1%)	0	0
Nas	God's Son	2002	Bush	14	0	X	X	X	X	X
	Stillmatic	2001	Bush	14	3 (21.4%)	1 (7%)	X	1 (7.1%)	1 (7.1%)	X
	Hip-Hop is Dead	2006	Bush	16	1 (6.3%)	X	X	1 (6.3%)	X	X
	Street Disciple	2004	Bush	26	2 (7.7%)	X	X	2 (7.7%)	X	X
	The Nigger Album	2008	Bush	15	5 (33.3%)	X	X	4 (26.7%)	X	*1 (6.7%)
	Life is Good	2012	Obama	14	2 (14.3%)	X	X	1 (7.1%)	X	1 (7.1%)
	6 Albums			99	13 (13.1%)	1 (1%)	0	9 (9.1%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
Pharoahe Monch	Desire	2007	Bush	13	3 (23.1%)	1 (7.7%)	X	2 (15.4%)	X	X
	W.A.R.	2011	Obama	13	4 (30.8%)	X	X	2 (15.4%)	X	2 (15.4%)
	2 Albums			26	7 (26.9%)	1 (3.8%)	0	4 (15.4%)	0	2 (7.7%)
TOTAL	43 Albums			635	115 (18.1%)	23 (3.6%)	8 (1.3%)	68 (10.7%)	5 (0.8%)	11 (1.7%)

Table 2 - Songs Coded For Policy Critique

Artist	Album	Song	Category	Year	President
Immortal Technique	Revolutionary Vol 1.	"Poverty of Philosophy"	Policy	2001	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 1	"Speak Your Mind"	Policy	2001	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Harlem Streets"	Policy	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Peruvian Cocaine"	Policy	2003	Bush
	Third World	"Reverse Pimpology"	Policy	2008	Bush
Lupe Fiasco	Lasers	"Words I Never Said"	Policy	2011	Obama
	Food & Liquor II	"Around My Way"	Policy	2012	Obama
	Food & Liquor II	"Ital"	Policy	2012	Obama
	The Cool	"Intruder Alert"	Policy	2007	Bush
Talib Kweli	Beautiful Struggle	"Work it Out"	Policy	2004	Bush
	Ear Drum	"More Or Less"	Policy	2007	Bush
	Ear Drum	"Hostile Gospel"	Policy	2007	Bush
KRS-One	Life	"Still Slippin"	Policy	2006	Bush
	Keep Right	"Illegal Business 2004"	Policy	2004	Bush
	Spiritual Minded	"Tears"	Policy	2002	Bush
	Adventures in EMCEEing	"Our Soldiers"	Policy	2008	Bush
Nas	Stillmatic	"Rule"	Policy	2001	Bush
Dead Prez	Information Age	"Global Hood News"	Policy	2012	Obama
The Coup	Pick A Bigger Weapon	"BabyLet'sHaveABabyBeforeB ushDoSomethin'Crazy"	Policy	2006	Bush
	Sorry to Bother You	"Your Parents Cocaine"	Policy	2012	Obama
Mos Def	The Estatic	"Auditorium"	Policy	2009	Obama
	True Magic	"Dollar Day"	Policy	2006	Bush
Pharoahe Monch	Desire	"Welcome to the Terror Dome"	Policy	2007	Bush

Table 3 - Songs Coded For Presidential Hypocrisy

Artist	Album	Song	Category	Year	President
Immortal Technique	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Cause of Death"	Hypocrisy	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Obnoxious"	Hypocrisy	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Industrial Revolution"	Hypocrisy	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"4 th Branch"	Hypocrisy	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 1	"Prophecy"	Hypocrisy	2001	Bush
KRS-One	Kristyles	"Surviving"	Hypocrisy	2003	Bush
	Maximum Strength	"Pick it Up"	Hypocrisy	2008	Bush
	Sneak Attack	"Why"	Hypocrisy	2001	Bush

Table 4 - Songs Coded for Presidential Violence

Artist	Album	Song	Category	Year	President
Immortal Technique	Third World	"Payback"	Violence	2008	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 1	"The Illest"	Violence	2001	Bush
KRS-One	Adventures in EMCeeing	"Don't Give It Up"	Violence	2008	Bush
Nas	Stillmatic	"What Goes Around"	Violence	2001	Bush
Dead Prez	Revolutionary But Gangsta	"W-4"	Violence	2004	Bush

Table 5 - Songs Coded for Presidential Support

Artist	Album	Song	Category	Year	President
Nas	The Nigger Album	"Black President"	Support	2008	Obama
	Life is Good	"Cherry Wine"	Support	2012	Obama
Talib Kweli	Eardrum	"Say Something"	Support	2007	Bush*

	Prisoners of Conscious	"Come Home"	Support	2013	Obama
Common	Universal Mind Control	"Changes"	Support	2008	Bush *
	Finding Forever	"The People"	Support	2007	Bush *
	The Dreamer/The Believer	"Blue Sky"	Support	2011	Obama
	The Dreamer/The Believer	"Sweet"	Support	2011	Obama
Lupe Fiasco	Food & Liquor II	"Hood Now"	Support	2012	Obama
Pharoahe Monch	W.A.R.	"Black Hand Side"	Support	2011	Obama
	W.A.R.	"Evolve"	Support	2011	Obama

Table 6 - Songs Coded for Presidential Alternative

Artist	Album	Song	Category	Year	President
Immortal Technique	Revolutionary Vol. 1	"No Mercy"	Alternative	2001	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 1	"Dance With the Devil"	Alternative	2001	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 1	"Dominant Species"	Alternative	2001	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Freedom of Speech"	Alternative	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"One"	Alternative	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Point of No Return"	Alternative	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Leaving the Past"	Alternative	2003	Bush
	Revolutionary Vol. 2	"Homeland and Hip-Hop"	Alternative	2003	Bush
	Third World	"Mistakes"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Third World	"Parole"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Third World	"Death March"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Third World	"Third World"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Third World	"Lick Shots"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Third World	"Hollywood Driveby"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Third World	"Open Your Eyes"	Alternative	2008	Bush
KRS-One	The Sneak Attack	"What Kind of World"	Alternative	2001	Bush

	The Sneak Attack	"Take it To God"	Alternative	2001	Bush
	Kristyles	"Underground"	Alternative	2003	Bush
	Kristyles	"It's All a Struggle"	Alternative	2003	Bush
	Keep Right	"My Mind is Racing"	Alternative	2004	Bush
	Keep Right	"A Call to Order"	Alternative	2004	Bush
	Maximum Strength	"Beware"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Life	"Mr. Percy"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	Life	"I'm on the Mic"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	Adventures in EMCeeing	"We Dem Teachas"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Adventures in EMCeeing	"Money"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Back to the L.A.B.	"Tek-Nology"	Alternative	2010	Obama
	The BDP Album	"The Solution"	Alternative	2012	Obama
Lupe Fiasco	Food & Liquor	"Daydreamin"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	Food & Liquor	"American Terrorist"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	The Cool	"Hello/Goodbye"	Alternative	2007	Bush
	The Cool	"Little Weapon"	Alternative	2007	Bush
	The Cool	"Put You on Game"	Alternative	2007	Bush
	Lasers	"State Run Radio"	Alternative	2011	Obama
	Food & Liquor II	"Strange Fruition"	Alternative	2012	Obama
Nas	Street's Disciple	"American Way"	Alternative	2004	Bush
	Street's Disciple	"Just A Moment"	Alternative	2004	Bush
	Stillmatic	"My Country"	Alternative	2001	Bush
	Hip-Hop is Dead	"Black Republican"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	The Nigger Album	"Sly Fox"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	The Nigger Album	"Queens Get The Money"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	The Nigger Album	"Breathe"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	The Nigger Album	"Testify"	Alternative	2008	Bush
	Life is Good	"Reach Out"	Alternative	2012	Obama
Talib Kweli	Quality	"The Proud"	Alternative	2002	Bush
	The Beautiful Struggle	"Around My Way"	Alternative	2004	Bush

	Gutter Rainbows	"So Low"	Alternative	2011	Obama
	Gutter Rainbows	"Tater Tot"	Alternative	2011	Obama
	Prisoner of Conscious	"Upper Echelon"	Alternative	2013	Obama
	Prisoner of Conscious	"It Only Gets Better"	Alternative	2013	Obama
	Prisoner of Conscious	"Push Thru"	Alternative	2013	Obama
Common	Electric Circus	"Soul Power"	Alternative	2002	Bush
	Be	"Be"	Alternative	2005	Bush
Dead Prez	Information Age	"Dirty White Girl"	Alternative	2012	Obama
Mos Def	The New Danger	"War"	Alternative	2004	Bush
	True Magic	"The Murder of a Teenage Life"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	The Estatic	"Twilite Speedball"	Alternative	2009	Obama
The Coup	Party Music	"Ride The Fence"	Alternative	2001	Bush
	Party Music	"Get Up"	Alternative	2001	Bush
	Pick A Bigger Weapon	"Head"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	Pick A Bigger Weapon	"Sho Yo Ass"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	Pick A Bigger Weapon	"Ijustwannalayaround..."	Alternative	2006	Bush
	Pick A Bigger Weapon	"Captain Sterling's Little Problem"	Alternative	2006	Bush
	Sorry to Bother You	"WAVIP"	Alternative	2012	Obama
Pharoahe Monch	Desire	"Agent Orange"	Alternative	2007	Bush
	Desire	"Push"	Alternative	2007	Bush
	W.A.R.	"Clap"	Alternative	2011	Obama
	W.A.R.	"The Grand Illusion"	Alternative	2011	Obama