

Black American Islam as Cultural Resistance and Transitory Pathway to Religion: From the Moorish Science Temple to Five Percenters and Muslim Hip Hop

Martin Abdel Matin Gansinger

Assistant Professor, American University in the Emirates, UAE

Abstract:

This paper explores the emergence of Black American Islam as a multifaceted phenomenon of cultural resistance, identity reconstruction, and transitory pathway towards religion. Situated at the crossroads of race, religion, and cultural expression, Black Islam represents a historical continuum from early twentieth-century proto-Islamic movements such as the Moorish Science Temple of America to the Nation of Islam and Five Percenters to the emergence of contemporary Sunni Muslim Hip Hop. Through historical-textual and cultural discourse analysis, this study examines how Islamic frameworks have been re-signified and mobilized as strategies of empowerment and identity recovery among Americans of African descent. Using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, Dick Hebdige's concept of subculture as resistance, and Su'ad Abdul Khabeer's model of "Muslim Cool," this paper situates the adoption of Islam not merely as a theological shift, but as a symbolic decolonization of identity and a form of socio-political agency. The findings demonstrate that Islam's cultural appropriation in the African American context—expressed through terminology, identity, music, and performance—served both as a counter-narrative to white Christian hegemony and as a transitional pathway toward orthodox Sunni Islam. The paper underlines the role of Black popular music as an important vehicle in this process—from jazz musicians in the 1940s and 1950s adopting Muslim names to imply North African descent and mitigate racial segregation and discrimination to Hip Hop globalizing these symbols of resistance and transforming localized acts of identity reclamation into a transnational discourse of religious and cultural belonging.

Keywords:

Black American Islam, Identity Reconstruction, Subculture and Resistance, Popular Culture, Hip Hop.