

Spiritual Roots

GOD. and FEAR.

The album *DAMN.* is littered with biblical references that showcase Kendrick's religious background and his commitment in using to forward Black identity. Although not directly comparable to the references of African spiritual roots commonly found in the Black Arts Movement, a majority of African-American are religious and, of those, most are Christian which allows Kendrick's music to be more identifiable with his American audience ([Pew Research Center](#)). By using religion, he is able unite and guide Black people towards progress, similar to Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and also unite across racial boundaries with those that have similar religious experiences. Of all the songs in the album, one stands out for their use of religion: *GOD.*

At first in *GOD.*, Kendrick flaunts his success as an artist as being Godlike but then transitions in the second verse to how he is religiously Godlike. Throughout the this verse, he showcases different religious mentions of how God could destroy someone, and by extension how he can destroy his haters.

Fuck is you talkin' to?
Ayy, do you know who you talkin' to?
Slide on you like fallen drapes
God toss full of carnivals
I kill 'em with kindness
Or I kill 'em with diamonds
Or I put up like fifteen hundred
Get yo' ass killed by the finest

...

The lines "Slide on you like fallen drapes, God toss full of carnivals" are a direct reference to the Tearing of The Temple Curtain from Mathew 27, where upon Jesus death earthquakes occurred

and tore the curtain in the temple that separated humanity from God. With this, Kendrick is saying that he could kill his opponents with the might of his power which is shown again by the lines “Or I put up like fifteen hundred, Get yo' ass killed by the finest”, where he contemplates getting a hitman. He then advocates for death by kindness which is similar to Proverbs 25:21, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat”...”For you will heap burning coals on his head”, but also with his haters succumbing to their jealousy with the line “Or I kill 'em with diamonds”. But in the first two lines of the verse, “Fuck is you talkin' to? Ayy, do you know who you talkin' to?”, Kendrick creates a connection with the audience that this next verse is a universal perspective, with his performance at Coachella in 2017 where he first pointed at the audience and then back at himself ([Lyric Genius](#)). In doing so, Kendrick takes the ideas laid out in the second verse and applies them to his audience, that they too can be Godlike in this way if they step up to be leaders of their own. And in the process, his audience is lifted up in being able to share their own lived experiences. This is also found in the the first verse with,

Look, look... hol' up!

Don't judge me! My mama caught me with a strap

Don't judge me! I was young, fuckin' all the brats

Don't judge me! Aimin' at your head for a stack

Don't judge! Don't judge me! Now my home got a Valley peak

Don't judge me! If I press your line you a freak

Don't judge me! Won't you tell a friend? Y'all gon' see

The repetition of “Don't judge me” is a reference to the Tupac song “Only God Can Judge Me” where both songs highlight the religious idea that God is a constant witness in one's life and only He can attest to who one truly is. With this part of the verse, Kendrick asks his audience not to judge him for the choices he made in his past because they can't understand what he's been through but also encourages them to do the same for their own lives and stand up for their indi-

vidual lived experiences, instead of letting others define them with stereotypes or confining them to a statistic. By leading his audience with religious messaging, Kendrick is able to effectively advocate for the Black community and push them to take charge of their lives.