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## Anna Lowenthal '16 Investigates Masculine Identity in “Gangsta Rap”

Aug. 27, 2015

One night while she was watching a rap video, **English-writing** major Lowenthal (Petersburg, Ill.) noticed the rapper’s aggressive, “in your face” masculine identity. She wondered why he chose to perform in that manner, and she’d noticed the same type of aggression was commonly found in the so-called “gangsta rap” culture.

Was this hyper-masculine, violent persona a creation stemming from the oppression of slavery, she wondered? Lowenthal had taken Assistant Professor of English Molly Robey’s course “Slavery and the American Novel” which focused on representations of slavery in U.S. literature from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Lowenthal became interested in the black identity as represented by the enslaved African-American man.

“From popular books such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to the Academy Award-winning film *12 Years a Slave*, the key male characters were all portrayed as kind, mild and gentle,” said Lowenthal. “This was not at all the extremely powerful and potentially dangerous characters that are represented today in popular rap culture.”

Through her **Mellon research**, which has focused, in part, on theories of gender and race drawn from influential scholarship in African-American studies, Lowenthal is focusing on the masculine identity of the 1980s and 90s “gangsta rapper” in contrast to the identity of Grammy Award-winning hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar, whose most recent album carries messages of racial acceptance, unity and neutrality, Lowenthal said.

“With police brutality, discrimination and the #BlackLivesMatter campaign at the forefront of American discussion, now feels like the perfect time to explore the powerful influence of rap artists like Kendrick Lamar,” said Lowenthal, who is mentored by Robey. Lowenthal will continue research from her Mellon project through this year, culminating in a research honors project.

At Illinois Wesleyan she is editor-in-chief of *The Argus* student newspaper and has published her work in *Tributaries* literary journal. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta international English honor society, National Society for Leadership and Success and Alpha Lambda Delta honor society for first-year students. After graduation Lowenthal plans to apply to Oxford University to earn a master’s degree in English and American Studies.



Anna Lowenthal '16