

## Tupacumentary

Written by VIJAY SARMA ID645  
Monday, 03 January 2005 08:45 -

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### Tupac Shakur

Here's a hidden fact: you want to be like Tupac. Not like Mike. Not like Shaq. Like Tupac. Another hidden fact: Tupac was not like Kobe, who has defenders willing to kill for him and the press giving him the benefit of the doubt. Tupac was extremely honest about his image minus spin-doctors, never cheated on his pregnant wife, and never had sex with the girl he went to jail for raping on the night he was accused of raping her, as the utter lack of evidence proved. Tupac when compared to any other "rock star" didn't do anything wrong, and in his own very unique way was everything any of us would want to be, we just don't understand it. The image of Tupac was one you were taught to hate early, taught to fear, and yet these days hip-hop's influence has grown to where millions both black and white wear giant platinum crosses or other jewelry, flashy clothes, and joke like they're "playaz" and "gangstas", or by saying "whazzaaaaap" around the office. He was ahead of his time, influencing style and advocacy of socio-political equality and libertarian freedoms. He simply liked partying too, and we don't like our revolutionaries doing that, preferring Gandhi's fasting and vows of abstinence to essentially letting a "rock star" act like one. Most of us don't want to live a pious life, and if you were famous, you would like to express yourself freely without being judged a criminal for how you look, and thus never being truly free. A great actor, playing "America's nightmare" in movies like Juice and in videos had America scared without realizing what the original problem was, and he was the perfect object of hatred and paranoia who could potentially lead the neglected inner-cities to rise up against the suburbs. If you listen, you will learn that this is one of the smartest guys who ever lived, despite not usually wearing a Cosby-cardigan and glasses. Still, there were times he knew he had to, like on a Vibe Magazine cover for an important interview, just to make sure the mainstream took him seriously and read his defense against controversy. His messages were focused and brilliant, even though his diction was often not traceable back to the 19th century academic English standard we are afraid to deviate from to succeed in Western society. (I'm even afraid to do so in writing this, or you won't think I'm smart. Ya dig?) Besides, he wasn't talking to you, he simply invited you to listen. He was talking to his people, and advocating change and success in the ghetto, often a lost land in American culture discussed in terms of perpetual karma: ghettos are bad places with bad people, that's just the way it is. He reminded us we cannot be satisfied with civil rights progress in other areas, and that the ghetto situation is hellish and worth fighting for at least as much as Vietnam or Bosnia. "Brenda's Got A Baby" was a song about a 12-year old girl who got pregnant; "Dear Mama" was an ode to ghetto moms everywhere who raise their kids alone in poverty and crime and trying

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as hard as they could; and "Keep Ya Head Up" spoke to everyone in the ghetto, and if you listen, everyone in the world.

So, what's up with the "gangsta" stuff? Why would he soil his image like that and fail to sell much of the press and middle-America? Why didn't he tone it down so more people would listen? Two answers: he was representing what America had made in the ghetto, and saying hell with it, we're celebrating anyway (i.e. "Thug Life"); and he simply wanted to, as a vain handsome man who styled exactly the way he chose for various reasons, and whose fans loved him for it. In a free country, for the most part he lived a legally and morally sound life, only getting really angry towards the end of his five years in public life when his cries for change in the ghetto were largely ignored, his credibility was unfairly destroyed, and his justified fears about dying made him paranoid. He never attacked whites in anger like Ice Cube or Public Enemy did, and never sold drugs like 50 Cent did. He had balanced views of women the way Snoop Dogg never did, and he never had sex with minors like R. Kelly or Roman Polanski did. He had a reason to get famous and a responsibility to use it the way no rapper and few artists have ever had, including Eminem. He and Biggie Smalls are considered the greatest rappers ever, but B.I.G. (R.I.P. homie) never took nor was given the weight of the world, and never had the potential or inclination to change it the way Tupac had. This young man who lived a hellish youth and was looking to finally relax and enjoy life, initially had merely great ideas and a flair for inspiration, and those double-edged swords made him a leader of his people. At age 20 and given the same job as Malcolm X and Dr. King to save at-risk ghetto black youth, it's a wonder he didn't crack under the pressure. He could have chosen to make great party-music, instead he wondered: how can I represent my people? How can I be a gangsta and revolutionary intellectual? The film reveals some of his accomplishments, though he made it hard on himself by walking the line in his own way, consistently expressing himself with an often ironic honesty. So many people have missed the point, refuse to put his mistakes in context, and will continue to do so because of their ingrained prejudice against their image of him. Still, he deserves your respect: it's one thing to simply choose to fight for the revolution, it's entirely another when millions believe you may actually be able to win it. To the majority, and white liberals per se, the simplest analogy would be Marilyn Manson: you can see how stupid it is that conservatives can't see past his appearance and realize that he's simply an intelligent entertainer with another opinion and way of living (see: Bowling For Columbine) Eminem as well, who's had a chance to repair his public image as a crazy vile malcontent to now being considered a true artist. If any of this resonates, then you have to review your views of Tupac, as his views were even more mainstream (read: closer to yours) than Manson's or Eminem's. And if you're a conservative and against him on principle, better know thy enemy, because millions of people want to live in a world where racial and gender equality and opportunity are prevalent, and where no one's morality is dictated to them unless it's to prevent hurting someone else. I had recently had a nice discussion with a young lady, in her mid-20's and white, who re-confirmed her "strong" opinion that Tupac was nothing but a gangster, and that any message he may have had was ruined because of it, and, by logical extension, his immoral behavior. I then asked her how much information she had on him to form a "strong" opinion, and she said very little. I then asked her why she had a "strong" opinion about something she knew almost nothing about, and she didn't know. This was not meant to be insulting, but rather enlightening, showing how we

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have predisposed views to look at an image and form "strong" opinions that stereotype black males, and will quickly default to those in the absence of any real evidence. This young lady was not a racist, but she was sure trained to be, and conceded a white rock star would be easier to forgive knowing almost nothing about them. My own views were similarly realized in seeing the film, as I found the negative press footage I'd been sold had clouded my judgment. This is similar to any prejudice: i.e. women dressed sexy are sluts, black men in nice cars are probably thugs who stole them, Goths dressed in black are freaks, etc. The logical extension of desiring everyone be and act the same was taken to its conclusions by Hitler, Pol Pot, and others, and it wasn't pretty. You don't have to like Tupac or his music, but you have a responsibility not to hate him on principle or for racist reasons, recognizing and defeating your own prejudices to make a better world. Study the reviews of the movie, there are many that default to a negative view of the individual in lieu of discussing the content or style, and others that complain it's too sympathetic, as if he didn't deserve our sympathy after years of hatred. I dare you to find someone complaining about the same in a future documentary of say, Johnny Cash. Look at the bigger picture, because by making the struggle "theirs" as opposed to "ours", you are illustrating the exact problem Tupac gave his life trying to solve. So go and listen to his response in Tupac: Resurrection, and you'll see that despite what you think, at heart you and Tupac aren't that much different, and he wanted exactly what you wanted, to be free...

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