

Tupac Raps Biggest Brightest Star

Written by Westside ID155

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HOLLER IF YOU HEAR HIM... Tupac Shakur was rap's brightest star-he sold nearly twelve million CDs in just the first eight months of 1996. Partly it was the gangster image, expertly projected by a fine young actor. Partly it was his genius as a lyricist and partly it was his surpassing musical talent, which enabled him to create fierce rock & roll ("Holler If Ya Hear Me"), heart-breaking tenderness ("Dear Mama") and summer anthems ("California Love," "I Get Around").

But above all, Tupac was a star because he was right. And he was often right when nearly everybody else was wrong. Tupac was the first prominent cultural figure in America to defend women on welfare (1993's "Keep Ya Head Up"). It should have come as no surprise-Tupac's first public performance was at age 13 acting in Lorraine Hansbury's Raisin in the Sun, the first play by a black woman to achieve widespread success. Perhaps that experience inspired his evolving body of songs that defended women in the face of abandonment, beatings, rape, and government neglect ("Brenda's Got A Baby," "Part Time Mutha," "Papa"z Song," "Dear Mama").

Tupac was right when he called for unity with Latinos and his albums exploded in an environment in which all races suffer. All races (and ages) responded strongly to his music. Tupac spoke for all his fans when he and Snoop Dogg appeared at a Los Angeles press conference in August to oppose Proposition 209, which would dismantle affirmative action, and to denounce the "three strikes" law. "My record sales, we've got six million, Snoop's got four million...If we could represent that many votes, we've got to let these politicians be scared of us," he said.

Tupac was right on the money when he called for unity of the prisoners on the inside of the walls with the prisoners on the outside ("Much love to my brothers in the pen/See ya when I free ya/If not, when they shut me in"). Tupac's mom, Afeni Shakur, was one of the New York 21, a group of Black Panthers whose show trial was one of the ugliest sores to fester on the skin of the FBI's Cointelpro pogrom. She was acquitted but Geronimo Pratt, Tupac's godfather, is still in a California prison after being railroaded on murder charges more than 25 years ago. A heart-rending picture that appeared in the San Francisco Examiner shortly after Tupac died showed him at age seven on a prison visit with his sister, his mom, and Pratt.

Finally, Tupac was right when he rapped on 2Pacalypse Now's "Words of Wisdom": "Say no to drugs/But the government's kept it/Running through out community/Killing the unity." We now know that it was indeed our government, working with the CIA's own contra puppet army, that flooded crack cocaine and high-powered weapons into our cities. In other words, the gangsta lifestyle that rappers like Tupac are blamed for promoting is, in fact, government issue.

In the end, Tupac Shakur was rap's biggest star because his music was filled with love.

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Naturally, that included hatred for the enemies of his loved ones, whether it was the cops or the black bourgeoisie ("To the sellouts livin' it up/One way or another you'll be givin' it up").

It's important to set the record straight not simply for Tupac's sake, but so that when the next Tupac comes along, he (or will it be she?) will be treated differently. We cannot allow the next rap prophet to be so easily isolated and castigated.

Holler if you hear him.

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